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**RHETORICS OF REPRESENTATION:  
RACE, GENDER, AND INTERMARRIAGE IN THE FRONTIER FICTION  
OF ANN S. STEPHENS, 1838-1865**

**By**

**Teresa Trupiano Barry**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**American Studies Program**

**2001**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **RHETORICS OF REPRESENTATION: RACE, GENDER, AND INTERMARRIAGE IN THE FRONTIER FICTION OF ANN S. STEPHENS, 1838-1865**

by

**Teresa Trupiano Barry**

Intermarriage between whites and Indians in the frontier fiction of Ann S. Stephens is examined in this dissertation. Stephens was a popular and prolific American author of the mid-nineteenth century who wrote in many genres from magazine serials and social novels to poetry, essays, and literary criticism. Because she represents race, gender, and intermarriage differently than either authors of the male canon or recently recovered women writers, her inscriptions add to the picture literary scholars have of the variety of views held by nineteenth-century Americans on these controversial social issues. Stephens' frontier stories of intermarriage appeared as dime novels, and thus, her notions were promoted to larger audiences and were possibly more influential than those of canonical writers. As a leader in mainstream literature, as both editor and author during her fifty-two year career, she was also an arbiter of public opinion.

Ideologies of race, gender, and family, all of which underwent severe scrutiny in the mid-nineteenth century period of foment and change, inform Stephens' inscriptions. In six dime novels she portrays intermarriages – some successful, some not. Stephens provides examples of successful marriages between an Indian woman and a white man and between a white woman and an

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Indian man, indicating that she was undaunted by patriarchal assumptions about the threat of American Indians to the purity of white women.

Stephens was no protofeminist, but she was neither racist nor conservative on gender issues as recent critics have charged. Read in the historical contexts of the situation in which she wrote, Stephens ardently pleads for an end to racial prejudice and for a more active role for women in society. This study uses Kenneth Burke's rhetorical approaches to literature to unravel the complex and often conflicting inscriptions in her fiction arising from the exigencies of the social situation in which Stephens wrote. Stephens chose stereotypes to describe Indians, even as she attempted to break down the biases on which such beliefs rested because the discursive contexts of her writing situation required a sense of verisimilitude if her subversive purpose was to be achieved. Because Stephens' heroines are Indian rather than white, the intersections of race and gender are especially significant. Stephens frequently represents Indian behavior as masculine, further complicating her inscriptions.

She inverts many of the plot scenarios and characterizations typical of male-centered frontier fiction to create stories that befit female experience and posit a more active role for women. In these female myths of the frontier, Stephens creates larger-than-life Indian women characters and provides women readers with thrilling tales of female adventure. Her representations of race, gender, and intermarriage add to our understanding of nineteenth-century American literature, expanding the range of literary characterizations of the frontier and the Indian and whites who lived there.

Copyright by  
**TERESA TRUPIANO BARRY**  
2001

This work is d  
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## **DEDICATION**

**This work is dedicated to my parents. To my mother who taught me to love words and to my father who taught me the value of hard work.**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No work of this magnitude is ever the work of a single person. I was extremely fortunate to have the guidance and support of many people. I am especially grateful to Kathleen Geissler, my dissertation director, who gave graciously of her time and who always inspired me to probe ever deeper into Burke's theories and Stephens' inscriptions; her thoughtful questions strengthened my understanding of both. I received substantial thought-provoking assistance in the research and preparation of this manuscript from my interdisciplinary committee members. Jenifer Banks, nineteenth-century American women's literature, kept me abreast of recent scholarship in the field and pointed out topics for further investigation beyond the limits of the dissertation. Sheila Teahan, rhetoric and American literature, stretched my thinking about the social nature of rhetoric. Patrick LeBeau, Native American studies, not only introduced me to Native American studies, but helped me to think from different perspectives. Joyce Ladenson, women's studies, always had encouraging words and helped guide my feminist explorations of rhetoric. I am grateful to each for their guidance.

I also had the great fortune to belong to two perspicacious writing groups. Each member contributed in different ways, facilitating my goal for a truly interdisciplinary study. Rebecca Coogan pointed out feminist issues that could be further explored; Jennifer Dawson nudged my thinking about nineteenth-century women's sensibilities; Elizabeth Demers was the best editor anyone



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could ever hope for; and, Mary Ann Sherby, who saw the project through from the first draft of the proposal to the defense, not only encouraged me, but provided useful criticism in many areas, especially organization.

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support I received during the research and writing of this study. A Graduate Retention Fellowship from the College of Arts and Letters and American Studies Program at Michigan State University provided funds to travel to New York City to research the Ann S. Stephens Papers at the New York Public Library. I also thank the College of Arts and Letters and the Graduate School at Michigan State University for the Dissertation Completion Fellowship, which allowed me an entire semester to concentrate solely on the writing of this study.

Libraries and special collections fill significant gaps for the scholar of unrecovered authors of ephemeral literature. I am especially grateful to Anne Tracy, of the Special Collections at Michigan State University, who went beyond the call of duty to provide me with the necessary texts. I also received essential texts from the New York Public Library, the J.P. Morgan Library, the Connecticut Historical Society, and the Northern Illinois University Albert Johannsen Dime Novel Collection.

Last, but certainly not least, I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the emotional, financial, and domestic (laundry, cleaning, cooking) support of my husband and partner, David Barry.

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A. Standard A:

GM A Grammar

LASA Language

PLF Philosophy

RM A Rhetoric

RR The Rhetoric

B. Standard B:

AWW American

DLB Dictionary

NAR North America

NAW Notable

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

### **A. Standard Abbreviations of Kenneth Burke's Works**

**GM**    *A Grammar of Motives*

**LASA**   *Language as Symbolic Action*

**PLF**   *Philosophy of Literary Form*

**RM**    *A Rhetoric of Motives*

**RR**    *The Rhetoric of Religion*

### **B. Standard Abbreviations of Magazines, Journals, and Reference Works**

**AWW**   *American Women Writers*

**DLB**   *Dictionary of Literary Biography*

**NAR**   *North American Review*

**NAW**   *Notable American Women*

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## INTRODUCTION

American women writers of the nineteenth-century frequently wrote about life on the frontier, but their narratives differ from the typical male-authored western. Because their stories centered on women characters, they were generally omitted from the canon for their alleged lack of universality. Today, however, literary scholars recognize that the concept of universality is an illusion and that people's experiences of any given phenomenon differ according to race, gender, class, and a host of other variables. Consequently numerous recovery projects of women's writings have been undertaken to provide new perspectives on American Literature. This study joins the efforts of Annette Kolodny, Carolyn Karcher, Nina Baym, and other feminist scholars who have begun to examine women's inscriptions of the American frontier. It also adds an important name to the list of women authors who experimented with the concept of the frontier in their literature – Ann S. Stephens.

Stephens, a popular and prolific author, wrote at least eight novels set on the American frontier. All of them are female-centered. Seven of them feature intermarriages between whites and Indians. Stephens' frontier novels, which have hitherto received only scant scholarly attention, provide a more complete picture of how the dominant culture presented its ideas about Native Americans in fiction.<sup>1</sup> Stephens' representations of Indian characters and their intermarriages differ from those in the male canon and from those of recently recovered women writers. James Fenimore Cooper saw the blending of cultures and intermarriage as an anathema, whereas Catharine Sedgwick envisioned

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whites living in Indian culture and blissful intermarriages. But Stephens' inscriptions go beyond these conclusions and provide new perspectives. Stephens' fiction is unique because Indian women are consistently featured in prominent roles. Examination of Stephens' female-centered frontier fiction and her representations of Indian characters and their intermarriages will add to our understanding of nineteenth-century American literature by expanding the range of literary characterizations of the frontier and the Indians who lived there.

Both the figure of the Indian and the myth of the frontier, which suggests that vacant lands of the West offer settlers a place to begin anew, are significant components of American literature. However, because women's novels had long been ignored by critics, this myth has been historically presented in terms of men's experience. Literary critics focused on literature by and about men to establish the ways Indians were represented in American fiction and to analyze and interpret the myth of the frontier. Recently, however, feminist scholars have begun to question many of the conclusions of such criticism. Nina Baym, for example, demonstrates that male and female authors of Indian stories have different perspectives that affect their inscriptions of the issues as well as the outcomes. She demonstrates how, in *Hope Leslie* (1827), Sedgwick cleverly inverts many of the staple scenarios of frontier fiction as presented in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. Women wrote in ways that differed from, indeed sometimes directly opposed, male authors' conceptions of how the frontier and Indian characters should be constructed in American literature. Baym, Kolodny, Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, and other feminist scholars have demonstrated that male-authored fiction is typically androcentric, featuring male heroes and giving

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female characters only passive roles. On the other hand, women's fiction tends to be woman-centered, featuring active women protagonists. These critics have primarily examined the works of those women authors already recovered, particularly Sedgwick and Lydia Maria Child. Although Baym and Kolodny make brief mention of Stephens, no in-depth study of her frontier fiction exists.

Ideologies of race, gender, and family, all of which underwent severe scrutiny during this mid-nineteenth century period of foment and change, inform Stephens' inscriptions. In seven frontier novels she portrays both successful and unsuccessful intermarriages.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, Stephens provides examples of happy marriages between an Indian woman and a white man and between a white woman and an Indian man, indicating that she was undaunted by patriarchal assumptions that American Indians threatened the purity of white women. However, Stephens is no protofeminist, which may explain why her works remain unknown. Although Stephens clearly advocates expanded roles for women in society in her fiction, her public nonfictional pronouncements about "woman's appropriate sphere," when taken literally, suggest a more conservative stance ("Address" 1).<sup>3</sup> Baym contends that recovered women's writings tend to focus on themes of interest to modern feminists (*American* 4-5). Yet if we as feminist scholars investigate only those authors whose views resemble our own, we will have an incomplete picture of the ideologies that continue to influence current views on controversial topics such as interracial marriage and expanded roles for women. Stephens' views are significant because, as a leader in mainstream literature, as both editor and author during her fifty-two year career, she also became an arbiter of public opinion in the antebellum period.



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## **Definition and Use of Terms**

Because this study involves socially sensitive issues, certain terms indispensable to open discussion require further explanation. Some have negative connotations and/or are historically inappropriate. Others have been used loosely or inappropriately and need clarification.

The term "Indian," as Robert Berkhofer emphasizes in his seminal study, *The White Man's Indian*, is a "White invention" (4). Since I will be analyzing how white authors created images of the original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere, I will use the term "Indian" when referring to imaginary Indians created by whites, whether the discourses be fiction or non-fiction. The term "Native American" will be used to refer to real people, living or dead, who are descendants of the many nations of peoples living in the Western Hemisphere before the arrival of the Europeans. Wherever possible, I will also use tribal affiliations; however, these designations often become meaningless in the hands of nineteenth-century white authors who frequently disregard the historical record, placing tribes or nations in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"Savage" is another term whites applied to Native Americans. Roy Harvey Pearce believes that the term or idea of the "savage" cannot be contemplated nor understood without its opposing term, "civilized man." White settlers viewed indigenous peoples as being at a primitive stage of development in the process of civilization, a situation whites believed was exacerbated by natives' isolation from civilized (white) society. Although certain features of native life seemed "noble" to whites, in particular that Native Americans seemed "above and beyond the vices of civilized man" (169), Pearce asserts that whites never believed that

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savage heroism could or would overcome civilized heroism (201).<sup>4</sup> So many aspects of American Indian life seemed degraded and retrograde to whites that the idea of the ignoble savage developed as well. The noble savage was described as "friendly, courteous, and hospitable" toward whites (Berkhofer 28). He (for Native American women were either ignored in these early exploration accounts or variously portrayed as sexual sirens and/or beasts of burden) was often depicted as having a splendid physique, a stoic attitude, and an innocent spirit. He was honorable and honest. He was courageous in battle, but loving toward family, and he lived industriously, in harmony with nature. Conversely the "ignoble savage" or "bad" Indian was drawn as an approximate opposite of the noble savage. He was lazy, lecherous, and a poor specimen of manhood. He treated his women like slaves and was cruel and duplicitous. He was cowardly, highly superstitious, and constantly at war with other savages. Pearce emphasizes that "[t]he double image of the Indian, noble and ignoble, had by the end of the first quarter of the [nineteenth] century, ... been firmly resolved into one image, that of the savage whose life was to be comprehended by the idea of savagism," that is, the opposite of civilization (199). Thus, the word "savage," with its inherent negative connotations will be used only to emphasize when characters are being portrayed as "uncivilized."

Native American women were also stereotyped by Euroamerican explorers, primarily as "squaws". In *Women in American Indian Society*, Rayna Green points out that the term "squaw" was originally "the Algonquian word for a married or mature woman that later [in the hands of whites] became a demeaning term for all Indian women, Algonkian or not" (14). Because these

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explorers were usually male, "[t]heir texts tended to focus on Indian men in their public and formal roles – as chiefs warriors, medicine men, and diplomats" (14). This androcentric bias blinded them to the significance of women in both public and private roles "in the determination and survival of their people" (14). Instead they portrayed Indian women as they saw them, "only in relationship to men" (14).

Like African Americans, Native Americans have often been characterized according to the amount of blood of the "other" (i.e., lack of "white" blood) in their heritage. Several terms have generally been applied specifically to people with some native ancestry: half-breed, half-blood, and mixed blood. "Half-breed" and "half-blood" are derogatory terms that have been used to refer to people with one Native American parent and one white parent and have also been used loosely to refer to anyone of mixed native ancestry. The terms connote that only half one's blood or breeding is acceptable, with the native half being of no account at all, or, conversely that the negatives intrinsic to the native half completely obliterate any positives of the white half. Furthermore, the word "breed" itself as applied to humans has a "contemptuous" connotation (*OED*) and reduces humans to animals, such as a breed of horses or dogs. "Mixed blood," while it still highlights perceived differences between the bloods of different races, is the most acceptable term for referring to mixed ancestry because at least it does not connote a sense of hierarchy. I will use it, except when quotations from texts or references to those quotations require otherwise.

Terms referring to marriages between whites and Indians in the novels also require an explanation. I will primarily use the term "marriage" when

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referring to fictional unions between Indian and white characters. However, Stephens has definite ideas about what constitutes a “proper” marriage. Only marriages sanctified by the Christian religion, in which both parties honestly “pledge their troth,” constitute true or proper marriages for her. These marriages develop into true friendships and equal partnerships in which both parties work for the common good of the relationship within their particular sphere of influence. The definition of intermarriage provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* seems relatively innocuous: “Marriage between members of different families, castes, tribes, nations, or societies.” But, interestingly, the citation refers specifically to marriages between members of different races, a type of intermarriage not actually mentioned in the official definition. This citation emphasizes the contentious nature of racial relations: “ 1841 Barrow *Zincali* I, iii, ii, 274. It is ... by intermarriage alone that the two races will ever commingle” (*OED*). Thus, I will use “intermarriage” or “interracial marriage” only when emphasizing the racial implications of Stephens’ inscriptions.

Although some scholars have used the term “miscegenation” in reference to the intermarriages between whites and Indians in American fiction (Baym, *Woman’s; Person; Mitchell*), I choose not to do so for several reasons. First of all, the word was not coined until 1864, as Sidney Kaplan demonstrates and the *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms. This means that the word did not come into common parlance until after Stephens had written her last novel depicting marriages between whites and Indians; thus, any use of the term would be ahistorical. Second, the term is defined as “mixture of races; esp. the sexual union of whites with Negroes” (*OED*). Even Mitchell, who uses the term in her



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examination of intermarriage in three nineteenth-century American novels, cautions that "the temptation to superficially link the two groups [Native Americans and African Americans] is to be avoided" (fn. 4, 128). However, she then proceeds to use the word "miscegenation" to refer to alliances between white and Indian characters as "fantasies" of "forbidden attractions" (129), which disrupt "the stability of the white family" (130). This leads directly to my third reason for not using the term. "Miscegenation" has negative connotations arising from ideologies about the superiority of whites that imply a degradation of the white race through intermarriage with racial inferiors. And last, the term is based, as Mitchell notes, on nineteenth-century beliefs that regarded "race as a scientific concept" (128). Such ideas are no longer acceptable, especially since recent scientific studies have established that there is greater genetic diversity *within* so-called racial groups than *between* them (Omi and Winant 20, fn. 5).

Other crucial terms in the analysis of intermarriage and representations of Indian women, all of which are fairly recent neologisms, include "gender" (1963), "racism" (1936), and "sexism" (1968) (*OED*). In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner defines the term "gender" as "the cultural definition of behavior defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time" (238). However, Ann Stephens and other women of the nineteenth century had not the luxury of this term that distinguishes between biological sex and culturally constructed notions of appropriate behavior according to sex. When Stephens discusses what feminists today call "gender," she tends to use words like "womanly" and "womanliness." Nineteenth-century people also did not have access to the terms "racism" nor "sexism." They tended to talk about "racial

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prejudice" for the former and "women's sphere" or "subordination of women" for the latter. Consequently, this analysis of Stephens' nineteenth-century inscriptions of these concepts will primarily use the terms to which she had access. The twentieth-century terms "gender," "racism," and "sexism" will be resorted to only for clarification purposes.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1, "A Different Tradition: Nineteenth-Century Female-Centered Myths of the American Frontier," reviews the history of American frontier myth and how it was further developed in the white male literary tradition. Because of its importance to this study, the power of this myth in shaping reality is examined. Recent revisionists, including feminist literary critics, have begun to point out significant ways in which the myth diverges from reality. They posit that nineteenth-century women authors' responses to this myth substantially revise it to incorporate women into it in meaningful, active positions. Stephens' Indian fiction is examined to fit it within this recently discovered tradition of female-centered frontier fiction. The chapter concludes with an overview of intermarriage in fact and fiction to further contextualize Stephens' inscriptions.

Chapter 2, "Historical and Critical Contexts: Stephens, Indians in Popular Culture, Critical Assessments of Stephens, and Methodology," presents a brief biography of Ann S. Stephens to place her in the context of the literary history of the period because, even though she was extremely popular and well-known in her own time, few people today have heard of her. It also reviews the probable sources of her knowledge of Native Americans, not to excuse, but to contextualize her fictional representations of Indians. Because of increased

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interest in fiction interrogating the race/gender nexus, Stephens' frontier fiction has been featured in several recent dissertations. A brief review of this work demonstrates that scholars have a difficult time attempting to classify the racial views of writers of the past. Some critics consider Stephens as openly racist, others see her work as Indian-loving. The primary methodological approaches used to elucidate Stephens' representations of race, gender, and intermarriage are explained. A detailed explanation of Kenneth Burke's rhetorical approaches to analyzing literature clarifies how and why they are especially appropriate to this study.

Chapter 3, "Race, Gender, and Intermarriage in *Malaeska: Indian Wife of the White Hunter*," begins the analysis of Stephens' fictional representations of race, gender, and intermarriage. *Malaeska* features an Indian woman as the eponymous heroine and describes the devastating effects of racism on her and those she loves. Malaeska marries a wealthy white man and bears his child. The story is generally a sympathetic portrayal of Native Americans; however, it is also imbued with ethnocentric assimilationist ideas about the superiority of white culture. Although attitudes toward race form the predominant question in this novel, the issue of gender must also be considered, particularly as it intersects and overlaps race. Although *Malaeska* is best known as the first dime novel, it was first published in 1839 as a serial in a middle-class ladies magazine. This publishing history will be reviewed because certain changes in the text are related to the different social contexts in which they were written and published. Comparisons between the dime novel version (1860) and the serialized version

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Chapter 4, "Indianized White Women and Whiteness Indian Women in *Mary Derwent*," examines Stephens' fictionalized account of a real historical event, the Wyoming Valley Massacre of 1778. The original serial was published in *Ladies Companion* in 1838 and republished by popular demand in 1840. Although this story, like *Malaeska*, centers on the problems of intermarriage, its tone and attitude toward Native Americans is even more complex. The only Indian depicted favorably is actually three-quarters white. Two white women are featured as chiefs of the tribe. Like *Malaeska*, *Mary Derwent* was later expanded and published in book form (1858). The representations of Indians and the outcome of one of the three interracial marriages in this narrative were changed to be more in keeping with the new ideologies of mainstream America in regards to race. Even more interesting, in 1862 Beadle published a British sixpenny edition of the novel. It is virtually a reprint of the serial and allows the Indian heroine to be assimilated into white British culture.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter 5, "White or Red?: Comparison and Contrast in *Esther: A Story of the Oregon Trail* and the *Mahaska* Trilogy," analyzes narratives that were written expressly as dime novels between 1862 and 1864. They provide some interesting comparisons because Stephens uses one of her favorite devices, comparison and contrast, to develop paired characters - one white, one Indian. *Esther* features two young women – Esther, a white, middle-class pioneer heading west, and Waupee, a member of the Sioux nation. Although the marriage between Esther and Claude, the hero of mixed blood, does not occur



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until the end of the novel, issues of race are paramount as Esther tries to decide if Claude is white or red. The *Mahaska* trilogy begins with the problems wrought by intermarriage between whites and Native Americans and explores in more detail the effects of mixed parentage on children born to such unions. In this melodrama, Mahaska, or Katherine as she is called by whites, the child of the interracial marriage, is compared to her white step-sister. Much of the action centers on the internal war Mahaska suffers as her white tendencies battle with the "savage" influences. These comparisons and contrasts, especially the internal battles of Mahaska, are examined to gain a clearer understanding of the identifications Stephens was trying to evoke in her readers.

Chapter 6, "Conclusion: Placing Stephens' Indian Stories in the American Tradition of Frontier Fiction," summarizes Stephens' views on race, gender, and intermarriage to place her ideas in the spectrum of ideologies held by mainstream America as revealed in both fiction and nonfiction on the subject. It locates the works of this popular writer in context with other American authors and their views on the subject. To conclude the study, I assess how Ann Stephens' views on Indians and intermarriage contribute to our knowledge of nineteenth-century American ideologies about indigenous peoples.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Although the topic of intermarriage in fiction has recently begin to draw more scholarly attention, the focus has primarily been on marriages between African Americans or Hispanics and whites. Marriages between Indians and whites in American fiction have received less attention. However, because Stephens' novels that feature marriages between Indians and whites also encompass questions of gender, some of her works have recently been examined; however, most of the focus has been on *Malaeska*, the first dime novel.

<sup>2</sup> *Mary Derwent: A Tale of the Wyoming Valley in 1778* was first published as a magazine serial in 1838 and in book form in 1858, and as a Beadle sixpenny novel for British audiences in 1862. *Malaeska: Indian Wife of the White Hunter* also saw first light as a magazine serial in 1839 and then became the first dime novel in 1860. "King Phillip's Daughter" was published as a magazine serial in 1858, but because it was not published as a dime novel as were the other Indian stories in this study, it will not be analyzed here. Stephens' later dime novels include *Esther: A Story of the Oregon Trail* (1862) and a trilogy of dime novels: *Ahmo's Plot, or The Governor's Indian Child* (1863); *Mahaska, or, The Indian Princess* (1863); and, *The Indian Queen* (1864).

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2 for discussion of this particular article and other nonfiction by Stephens.

<sup>4</sup> Like most male scholars, his study depends primarily on works from the male tradition; perhaps he might have reached a different conclusion had he included the works of more women writers.

<sup>5</sup> The dime novel version of this story is, indeed, a rare book. My research has found only two extant copies in the United States. One is in the Yale University Beinecke Rare Books Collection. They were unwilling to do any photocopying. Fortunately the other copy was at Northern Illinois University (NIU) in the Albert Johanssen Dime Novel Collection. Although they were unable to photocopy the entire novel, they provided a copy of the last chapter, which matches, almost verbatim, the serialized version. On a subsequent visit to NIU, I verified that, indeed, the British Sixpenny novel is essentially a verbatim copy of the 1838 magazine serial. The changes were minor: new paragraphing and changes to British spelling.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **A DIFFERENT TRADITION: NINETEENTH-CENTURY FEMALE-CENTERED MYTHS OF THE AMERICAN FRONTIER**

From the earliest exploration narratives of the New World, America has been described as the land of opportunity, a wilderness pregnant with material wealth, a place free from the corrupting influence of the Old World, a frontier offering rebirth to all comers. These discovery narratives contain the seeds of what eventually developed into the myth of America (later known as the frontier myth); Europeans described the new land they called America as "Arcadia." The Puritans, who viewed their new home as a potential "city upon a hill," further developed this myth. It began to take root across the continent during the late eighteenth century when new discovery narratives described the trans-Appalachian regions west of the newly formed United States as "virgin land." And it reached full blossom during the early national period when Timothy Flint's mytho-biography of Daniel Boone provided Americans with the archetypal male hero of the wilderness lands. Although the frontier myth underwent several incarnations during these centuries, the basic plot remained the same: the vast lands of America, variously described as wilderness or virgin territory, offered the hardy soul who ventured forth regeneration as a new breed of man (referred to in the years after the Revolutionary War as the "American").

A major problem with this myth is that it has generally been presented in ways that ignore or deny the presence of Native American peoples. For example, in the 1950 seminal study, *Virgin Land*, which first explained the

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creation and impact of the myth of the frontier on the American psyche, Henry Nash Smith repeatedly refers to the lands inhabited by Native Americans as "vacant." He has recently acknowledged that he had been unduly influenced by "[Frederick Jackson] Turner's conception of the wilderness beyond the frontier as free land, [which resulted in] the tendency to assume that this area was in effect devoid of human inhabitants" ("Symbol and Idea" 28). At the same time, he is correct in stressing that the idea of "free" land in the West (regardless of the facts) helped define the American character and affected its consciousness to such a degree that this myth appeared in American political, literary, and social thought.

Another defect in the traditional myth is its androcentricity; women have no active role in these stories. The typical scenario of the male-inscribed myth in American literature, as explained by Smith, details the adventures of the trailblazer – the man who goes west seeking new lands. While the mythologized Daniel Boone provided the origins, Cooper's Leatherstocking became the fictional prototype of the Western hero. As early as 1825, soon after *The Pioneers* was published, a critic noted the similarities between Boone and Hawkeye. Parallels include: "both these heroes love the freedom of the forest, both take a passionate delight in hunting, and both dislike the ordinary pursuits of civilized men" (*Virgin* 60). Smith asserts that "the character of Leatherstocking is by far the most important symbol of the national experience of adventure across the continent" (61). He sees the plots of the Leatherstocking tales as "flimsy, . . . merely a framework to hold together a narrative focussed about an entirely different problem" (61-2) – the conflicts inherent in white settlement of the



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wilderness. In this typical flimsy plot, the hero, often accompanied by his "noble savage" Indian ally, saves a white woman from Indian captivity; uses knowledge gained from Indian allies about life in the wilderness to advantage; wrangles orally and/or physically with the villain (usually a white man who abuses the wilderness); fights his Indian enemies in battle and/or single combat; and, spouts pithy philosophical remarks about the way things ought to be in the lands west of civilization. Although the hero is generally illiterate and romantically unattached (i.e., has no real ties to civilization), he is the symbolic mediator between civilization and the vast lands west of the frontier because he can envision the potential the wilderness offers for a fresh start, a new life. As Smith points out, "the Western hunter and guide was praiseworthy not because of his intrinsic wildness or half-savage glamor, but because he blazed trails that hard-working farmers could follow" (53).

But wives and children accompanied those farmers. Feminist literary critics have begun to respond to these myopic visions which could clearly see the foregrounded male heroes, but fail to see the women who shared the hardships of pioneer life and who together with the men transformed the West into outposts of civilization. In *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*, Annette Kolodny explains that the history of westward expansion has been narrated in terms of male fantasy – a sort of "psychosexual" drama in which the land is portrayed as a virginal paradise simply waiting to be penetrated and possessed by men. Kolodny asserts that women had their own fantasies about the West. She believes that women developed the metaphor of gardening to describe their own aspirations for and experiences of the West. By

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making their homes comfortable and establishing home gardens, women created a space for themselves on the frontier. According to Kolodny, this was the West of women's imaginings. She points out that though these ideas might be mere fantasies, they still held powerful sway over events; indeed, she believes that they had an effect on the course of history in the United States because westering women acted on their fantasies, planting gardens, domesticating their homesteads, "civilizing" the West. Kolodny even suggests that if women's fantasies of domesticating the West had predominated instead of the male fantasy of the great White Hunter penetrating and possessing the land, the course of history might have been far different (11). But, as the 1984 date of Kolodny's ovular study indicates, masculine versions of the frontier myth have only recently been challenged.

The masculine myth, as explicated by Smith, not only failed to see women's rightful place in the story, it failed to acknowledge Native Americans' rightful ownership of the land that these white heroes were conquering. Richard Slotkin, one of the earliest and most influential revisionists of the myth of the frontier, not only recognizes the presence of Native Americans in the new lands, but also centers his thesis on the conflict that arose between whites and Indians. However, like Smith and other literary critics before him, Slotkin primarily examines masculine versions of the myth and makes his assertions based on these accounts. He argues that, although settlers saw America as a place for regeneration, "the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of American experience" (*Regeneration* 5). Slotkin believes that to

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create the myth of America and its "free" land, native populations had to be accounted for. Mythogenesis, the creation of myths, provided a means of explaining who native peoples were and what their place in the natural order of things should be.

Since the concept of America as a land of rebirth arrived on these shores with the earliest Euroamerican settlers, a major piece of the American myth already existed, but they needed to find a way to explain how indigenous peoples fit into their preconceived narrative. However, as Berkhofer establishes in his opening sentence of *The White Man's Indian*, whites' views of "the Indian" have nothing to do with how the "original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere" viewed themselves (3). Berkhofer traces the origins of the white man's idea of the Indian to Columbus, who first gave them the misleading sobriquet. From the very first accounts of Europeans in the New World, Native Americans are described solely in terms of white culture. For example, even though neither he nor his interpreter could understand the language of the indigenous inhabitants, Columbus made large generalizations about "Indians": they had no creed but possessed "acute intelligence"; they were generous and timorous (5). But his greatest distaste derives from how they differed from white culture – men "wearing their hair long like women," not covering their nakedness, working women like slaves (6).

Because in the early days of exploration publications about the New World were few, such discovery accounts had a disproportionately large impact on the ideas Europeans developed of Native Americans (Berkhofer 7-9). Descriptions by explorers put excessive emphasis on the sexual practices of the natives; their

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open attitudes toward sexuality appeared especially degraded to whites. Warfare between different groups of indigenous peoples was also described in terms that represented natives as "monstrous" in their lust for blood. It was only natural that myths were created to explain the existence of people who not only looked different from Europeans but whose cultural organization radically conflicted with Europeans' ways of being. The opposing images of the "noble savage" and the "ignoble savage" both originated in these early accounts. These two contrasting representations of Indians developed over the centuries into stereotypes and appear in early narratives of the myth. The first Thanksgiving story illustrates an early attempt to account for indigenous peoples as noble savages. The ignoble Indian figure was more ubiquitous; he appeared in captivity narratives and tales of Indian wars, as well as becoming the personification of the devil in many Puritan sermons.

The physical and psychological imperatives of the colonists living on the edge of the wilderness likewise shaped the national myth of the frontier. For whites, the land held both the promise of great fertility and the threat of death from nature or from the dark-skinned native inhabitants, who seemed mysterious and whose ways appeared primitive (Slotkin, *Regeneration* 18). The psychological effects of moving away from home, seemingly backwards in time to a place with none of the comforts of civilization, were telling. Not only did the wilderness seem fraught with danger, but contact with civilization was sporadic and could take months, making colonists feel like exiles. Each of these imperatives – the fear of the unknown, the dangers of the wilderness from both man and nature, the isolation from civilization, the psychological and physical



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discomforts of life on the frontier – generated narratives based on settlers' experience, beliefs, and anxieties. For example, sermons might be directed toward efforts to christianize/civilize the natives and assert the superiority of white culture and the Christian religion; histories of Indian wars might discuss the impossibility of civilizing Indians because of their murderous tendencies; and captivity narratives might emphasize the "miserable" conditions of "savage" life (Mary Rowlandson, in Woloch 1-14) or the brutality of tortures suffered (Father Isaac Jogues, cited in Namias 54). Although metaphors in these early accounts derive from Europe, gradually they began to "metamorphose" into genres reflecting the American experience with the land and her inhabitants (Slotkin, *Regeneration* 19).

Reiteration of both historical experience and the accounts people wrote of their adventures is a key component in the creation of any myth. Euroamerican settlers' experience of America resembles a recurring dream/nightmare: drawn west by the promise of a better life, most pioneers encountered years of hardship instead. Each time people moved west, they reenacted the experience of the first white settlers. They moved away from family and friends, away from "civilization," into a wilderness with no amenities except whatever possessions of a bygone life they managed to transport west. They had to provide all their own food and shelter, deal with native inhabitants whose ways seemed strange and foreign, and attempt to recreate the home they left behind. Pioneers' narratives of the Oregon Trail told essentially the same story as that of the earliest colonists' accounts – a tale of the struggle to overcome the dangers of the wilderness and to establish civilization in that wilderness. This story could be reinscribed in other

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genres as well; for instance, captivity narratives, describing the struggle to defeat savages and return to Christian civilization, could be employed within the sermons. Such repetition, of both narrative and experience, led to development of conventions which became "sort of . . . given[s] between writer and audience" (20). Slotkin argues that establishing these conventions meant that the stories began to have "some of the force of myth" (20-1).

In American mythogenesis the institution of these conventions coincided with the early national period when Americans were attempting to establish themselves as culturally, as well as politically, independent from England. Many American writers wanted to contribute to the establishment of an "American" literature. Therefore, it is not surprising that the myth of the frontier, featuring "American" history, places, and people, began to appear in the fiction of the new nation. Captivity narratives, Indian wars, and pioneer adventures all provided uniquely "American" anecdotes as fodder for an American fiction. Furthermore, the vast landscapes of the Western lands were as picturesque and awe-inspiring as the places and settings of British novels. As Charles Brockden Brown reasoned in his preface to *Edgar Huntley*, "incidents of Indian hostility and the perils of the western wilderness are far more suitable" than "Gothic castles" for an American literature which "should differ essentially from those [themes] that exist in Europe" (3).

However, it was not necessarily that simple. In *Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs*, Lucy Maddox suggests that dealing with native peoples was a compelling and perplexing problem for American writers in the early nineteenth century "when definitions [of

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American literature and history] were still being constructed and when the fate of Indians was still being decided" (6). To demonstrate the impact of "the Indian problem," as it was called, Maddox compares it to the intense emotions the Vietnam War had on the American psyche. She notes that during that period even fiction that was not directly about the war was affected by it (6). As was the Vietnam War during the 1960s, the Indian problem was considered by many Americans to be the most important moral issue of the antebellum period. Pearce contends that by the 1830s, "Americans were . . . of two minds about the Indian whom they were destroying. They pitied his state but saw it as inevitable; they hoped to bring him to civilization but saw that civilization would kill him" (66). Maddox asserts that the oppositional nature of the Indian problem led both fiction and nonfiction writers of the period to "conclude with the posing of either-or statements . . . the choice between civilization [or] extinction for the Indians" (8). She points out that the word "civilization" is paired with "nation"; whereas, "extinction" is paired with "race" or "tribe." Maddox's study "illustrates the difficulty white Americans had in conceiving of living Indian people as belonging to nations" (9). By representing Indians as tribal, whites demonstrated their belief that Native Americans were considered to be outside the possibility of nation/civilization. Maddox believes that

whether the American writer in this period wanted to address the question of the place of Indians in national culture or to avoid it, there were few subjects that she or he could write about without in some way engaging it; and . . . as a result of that engagement, the American writer was, whether intentionally or not, contributing to the process of constructing a new-nation ideology, a process that both necessitated the removal or supplanting of inappropriate forms of discourse and justified the physical removal and supplanting of the Indians (10-11).

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In other words, American writers were contributing new narratives to the American myth, and to do so, they had to decide how to deal with Indians. Most writers, both male and female, would rely on the trope of the "vanishing" Indian; many would also use the figure of the white male character who mediated between white and red cultures.

The ideology of the vanishing Indian was not just a development of American literature. As Pearce, Berkhofer, and more recently, Philip Deloria point out, the concept of the tragical disappearance of the Indian with the advance of the more "civilized" white settlers appeared in our history books, art, and drama, and it actually shaped official Indian policy. Even science promoted the ideology. In his study, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, Reginald Horsman demonstrates how racial theories developed to the point that "[t]he dominant scientific position by the 1840s was that the Indians were doomed because of innate inferiority, that they were succumbing to a superior race, and that this was for the good of America and the world" (191). However, such forthright sentiments did not befit the literary romanticism of the times. Berkhofer suggests that the Indian's intimate connection with nature not only connected him to romantic ideals but also imbued him with a certain nobility (79). As the last representatives of a dying people, noble savages could be portrayed with sympathy and became a staple in American frontier fiction. Although Cooper is the author most identified with this Romantic figure, many authors before and after him used the trope. The vanishing Indian became a symbol of all that whites were not. As Pearce so eloquently writes: "The Indian and his fate were intelligible only in their relationship to the white man and his future, as savagism



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was only intelligible in its relationship to civilization" (201). So nineteenth-century authors used vanishing Indians not to represent Indians, "but only in counterpoint to White values, as metaphors in the struggle between savagery and civilization" (Berkhofer 93).

The role of mediator is just as complex; although this figure mediated between savagery and civilization, he belonged in neither world. Daniel Boone became the first major mythic figure to occupy the role. Smith, Slotkin, and many other scholars assert that Boone is the figure around whom the archetypal American male hero developed. Although the role of mediator became an indispensable part of the frontier myth in both male- and female-authored works, many women writers did not envision the mediator as male. Using primarily male-authored literature, Slotkin asserts that the ideal American hero generally "bridge[s] the gap or mediate[s] between the European past and the Indian present" (Slotkin, *Regeneration* 190). However, in this male-authored literature, such mediation did not mean a merging of the races. Because most of the male authors he examines avoid intermarriage between Indians and whites, Slotkin claims that Americans found "the marriage metaphor unacceptable" (191), yet female authors of the nineteenth century employed intermarriage frequently in their frontier novels. Ironically, both Smith and Slotkin note the importance of families in male-inscribed frontier novels: "The family ties that bind the chief characters of the historical romance provide the metaphorical structure of the work. The division within the family reflects the social disorder of the nation" (*Regeneration* 472). But their recognition of the significance of women is only in relation to and as it reflects on men; women qua women are not considered.

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The three main elements of the male-inscribed frontier myth are the hero, the American wilderness in which he acts, and the narrative of the events. Slotkin leaves little doubt of the effect of this myth on the psyche of the American people, both male and female. However, his argument pivots on the male-centered myth that explains the male relationship to the American frontier and assigns men the principal role of hero-mediator. Women, when they appear at all, are relegated to minor, subordinate roles. The male-centered myth ignores how gender differences might affect women's relationship to the American wilderness.

### **Female-Centered Myths**

Nineteenth-century American women writers envisioned a different West and recorded female experiences of it. Their narratives both incorporate and invert parts of the male-defined myth. Women's responses to the masculine myth were ambivalent. On the one hand, the male-centered myth still resonated for women to a certain extent as part of their collective memory because, as Slotkin notes, these stories had been reiterated so often, in so many different genres, they had "the force of myth" (21). But, on the other, women did not see their "own features and experience" fully represented in the male-inscribed myth, partly because the women characters in male-authored fiction are ancillaries of men and subordinate to them. White women have no active role in this myth. They are passive victims, who, when threatened by the dangers of the wilderness or the red men who roam there, require the activity and bravery of the white male hero to save them from "a fate worse than death." Therefore it is not surprising that women's inscriptions of the frontier myth differ from men's.

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Slotkin contends that a myth "provides a scenario or prescription for action, defining and limiting the possibilities for human response to the universe" (7). He further notes that "a myth that ceases to evoke this religious response, this sense of total identification and collective participation, ceases to *function* as a myth" (8, his emphasis). The frontier myth he describes, however, "provides a scenario or prescription" for male action but could not evoke a "sense of total identification" for American women. Since the male-centered myth did not function as a myth for women, they were able to write new narratives or myths which provided a "scenario or prescription" for female action. Baym contends that some women wrote female-centered Indian fiction in direct response to male-authored stories which "depended for [their] morality on gender distinctions between its white characters, casting men as active defenders, [and] women as passive representations of that which was to be defended" ("Stories" 67). She asserts that in both male- and female-authored fiction, "[t]he topic of whites and Indians across cultures merged with the topic of male and female within white culture" (68). Both Child (*Hobomok* 1824) and Sedgwick (*Hope Leslie* 1827) provide their white heroines with much more active roles in their frontier fiction than do their male predecessors. In *Hope Leslie*, Hope shares the role of heroine-mediator with Magawisca, her Indian counterpart. In the process of creating such stories, women authors formulate their own female-centered myths of the frontier.

Other feminist literary critics have made similar observations. Using the frontier literature written by American women, Kolodny makes as convincing an argument as Slotkin in his analysis of male-authored literature. For example, in

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her explication of *A New Home, Who'll Follow?*, Kolodny points specifically to Caroline Kirkland's insistence that women, with no help from men, create the gardens that grace their homesteads (147). Kirkland contends that women do this because they "feel sensibly the deficiencies of the 'salvage' state, so they are the first to attempt the refining process" (247). This domestication or civilizing of the "salvage" state places women's fantasies of the West at the center of the story and demonstrates women's centrality to successful white settlement of the West.

More recently, Brigitte Georgi-Findlay has expanded and complicated the notion of a female frontier myth. In *The Frontiers of Women's Writing: Women's Narratives and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion*, she began to "search for the female voices that seemed to be missing from the story of westward expansion as told in the literature of frontier heroes" (ix). Using travel narratives, letters, diaries, and other accounts of real westering women, Georgi-Findlay argues that

Women's western texts . . . relate not so much to a masculinist frontier myth but to the discourses that have created the male subject of westward expansion and that have produced and consolidated knowledge about the American West, in the narratives of western discovery, exploration, travel, and adventure. (xi-xii)

She finds women complicit in the "legacy of violence and disenfranchisement" that followed westward expansion and suggests that we have to look at more than gender to understand relations between whites and Native Americans (x). Class, race, and culture are also important components of the Indian problem and the American frontier myth. Georgi-Findlay believes that although they were positioned differently than white men, nineteenth-century white women were



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agents and authors of territorial expansion. Like other feminist revisionists, she views the frontier myth "as a range of cultural discourses ordering the relations of race, class, and gender" (x-xi). Her study "explore[s] the various ways in which women as writers actively engaged with, contributed to, and at times rejected the development of a national narrative associated with the American West" (xi). Citing Caroline Kirkland's writings, especially *A New Home* and *Forest Life*, Georgi-Findlay sees women's writings "not only as female counter-visions to male fantasies of conquest and possession but also as complements to them: the ideal of domesticity, read in the context of expansionism, potentially functions as an instrument of cultural and social control and order imposed on western disorder" (xii). But it was the white woman's untenable position as the hero's passive "other" in the male myth – as the one who restrains him, who merely represents white civilization, but has no active role in that culture – that led women writers to carve out their own space on the frontier.<sup>1</sup>

Both Kolodny's and Georgi-Findlay's arguments are based on the experience, real or imaginary, of white women. They do not consider the place of Indian women in the female-inscribed myth, which requires a new myth or adaptation of other myths to explain new circumstances. Just as the male-inscribed myth provides no "scenario or prescription for action" for white women, neither does it provide any active role for Indian women, except as the Pocahontas stereotype – the Indian woman who risks her own life to save a white man from death at the hands of Indians. Thus, women authors such as Stephens and Sedgwick, who were willing to use Indian women figures and intermarriage in their stories, had to find new scenarios to supplement those

inimical to women's experiences and to develop narratives which reflected women's conceptions of the frontier. They accomplished this by inverting some of the staple narratives of the male myth, either racially and/or sexually. They sometimes rewrote the script to fit their own designs.

Frequently these inversions expand women's roles or create complex female characters as opposed to the flat one-dimensional female characters so common in men's frontier novels. For example, although Magawisca does reenact the Pocahontas rescue when her father condemns Everell to death, she has more important roles to fill. Her eloquent defense at her trial changes white people's feelings and behaviors toward Indians and is much more significant than the rescue, which does not change the attitudes of Indians toward whites. Furthermore, Magawisca is a fully-developed character: she is intelligent, virtuous, and kind, not the mindless Indian princess of some Pocahontas retellings. Another method of inverting/subverting the typical male-plotted myth of the frontier is to diminish the role of the hero. Although Everell is the white male protagonist in this tale, he can also be read as a male passive victim who must be rescued by Magawisca – a woman. Thus, he becomes a sexual inversion of the typical white female protagonist role in the traditional male-centered myth.

Child and Sedgwick both feature marriages between whites and Indians in their novels. In them certain conventions of the male-ordained myth of the frontier are inverted, and women are placed in the momentous role of mediator. Neither marriage nor mediation are unusual roles for women in fiction. Many women's novels, if not most, depend on the marriage plot, and women often act

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as mediators in these stories. As moral agents who lead people toward goodness, they are sometimes mediators between conflicting characters. They also often help bring the Byronic hero back to Christianity, as does Edna in *St. Elmo*.<sup>2</sup> What makes these Indian novels different is the interracial character of the marriages and the cross-cultural mediation. In *Hobomok*, Mary is undeniably the mediating hero, marrying Hobomok and bearing his child. As a white woman who maintains her womanly virtues, despite marrying an Indian, Mary is a sort of mediator between Indian and white culture; however, her mediation is not successful. When her white fiancé, whom she thought dead, reappears, her Indian husband nobly divorces her, and she returns to white civilization. In *Hope Leslie*, Hope is more the hero-mediator between the two cultures than Everell. But unlike white male hero-mediators who are often involved in fighting bad Indians, Hope attempts to negotiate for Indian characters who are viewed by whites as "bad," but are really only misunderstood. As Maddox points out, although it was fairly easy for Child and Sedgwick to rewrite the history of women given the changes in women's prospects since the Puritan era, "they could not reinstate the Indians in the trajectory of American history . . . all they could do was try to account for the Indians' decline" (97).

Despite the inescapable historical fact that Native American populations were indeed decreasing, Sedgwick still manages to create some racial inversions of the typical male narrative, creating larger, more fully developed roles for her Indian characters, humanizing them. Magawisca's time in the Fletcher's household bears some similarity to captivity narratives, with a simple inversion of the respective races of captive and captor; however, Magawisca's suffering is

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minimized, and she even comes to sympathize with her white "family." A more significant racial and sexual inversion is Magawisca's retelling of the Indian war narrative from the perspective of an Indian woman. The bravery of white men, so typical of the traditional male narrative, is replaced with their cruelty as they slaughter unarmed women and children. In this version white men are the savages.

In female-centered frontier stories, women writers take staples of the traditional male myth of the frontier and convert/subvert them into modes befitting female experience. Women's narratives of the frontier feature women characters in the central role, including the crucial role of mediator. As Baym observes, "a female-centered narrative about the progress of civilization [can] be perceived as a challenge to white male ownership of the Indian-white narrative, which is to say white male ownership of history itself " ("Stories" 71). Women's visions of how that history should/could be written and played out diverged sharply from men's visions. Not only are women's roles presented as more critical to white enterprises in the West than male narratives gave them credit for, men's roles are less significant. Since war with the Indians is not seen as inevitable in women's stories, men's roles as warriors and protectors of women diminish. When white women choose to marry Indians, such manly roles become moot. By writing female-centered stories of the frontier, women authors created a new more female-oriented myth that proffered peaceful solutions to ameliorate the Indian problem through the intercession of women.

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## **The Frontier Myth and Indian Women Characters in Stephens' Fiction**

Ann Stephens was apparently greatly influenced by Sedgwick's female-centered myth. In her review article, "Literary Ladies," her laudatory remarks about the "author of *Hope Leslie*," not only praise "the brilliancy of [Sedgwick's] mind," but emphasize that "amid all her fame, [she] remained womanly and modest" (97), a consideration of paramount importance to Stephens. Yet, unlike Child and Sedgwick, who each wrote only one novel depicting intermarriage, between 1838-1864 Ann S. Stephens wrote at least seven frontier novels featuring American Indian women characters in major roles. Each novel dramatizes one or more interracial marriages. Considering Stephens' expressed fears about appearing "unwomanly," such a preponderance of the intermarriage theme in her writing indicates that she must have determined that the topic bore no taint of impropriety. That these intermarriages appear in "popular" literature, that is, literature intended for the working masses, makes them even more significant because they reached larger and different audiences than other types of literature. Each fictional marriage is complex and multilayered and, in subsequent chapters, will be examined within the fictional as well as the historical context in which it was written.

In these stories, Stephens clearly inverts the male mythological narrative of the American frontier, but only in certain aspects, only in ways which are consonant with her visions of the West. For example, although she creates individual "noble savage" characters, Indians in general are never depicted as noble since this would not ring true for readers. Because the frontier myth had been reiterated in so many genres, the conventions that prevailed as "givens



between writer and audience" insisted that Indians, as a rule, were "ignoble savages." But such conventions made inversions fairly easy to create. And Stephens used her knowledge of the traditional myth to her advantage, revising the myth for her own purposes, creating woman-centered narratives that gave female characters active roles.

During the same literary period that Stephens developed her woman-centered frontier stories, other conventions regarding the white female protagonist emerged. The "true woman" was supposed to be pious, pure, domestic, passive, and submissive (Welter), characteristics that made it difficult to cast a white heroine as the active, mediating counterpart to the male hero of the frontier myth. That white women actually represented white civilization in male-authored texts, as Baym, Maddox, and other feminist critics demonstrate, made it even more difficult for white women characters to fit the role of mediator. Although Stephens does employ a white woman figure in this pivotal position in *Mary Derwent*, her earliest frontier novel, that character loses her womanly qualities and turns "savage." The eponymous character, Mary Derwent, also acts as a mediator, but, because of her physical disability, she too is disqualified from the role of a "true" woman. The failure of these characters to be both "true" women and mediators demonstrates the difficulty Stephens has in envisioning ideal white women in this crucial cross-cultural role.

To resolve the dilemma, Stephens, like Sedgwick, uses Indian or mixed-blood women characters in the role of mediator. Such figures were free from the cultural restrictions placed upon white women. They could be as active and independent as their male counterparts. To be properly understood as potential

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role models for white women, however, these Indian women also had to be pure and have proper womanly relationships with their families; that is, they had to be good wives and mothers. In other words, unlike male heroes of men's fiction who remain romantically unattached, these women must follow the gender imperatives of nineteenth-century, white, middle-class women to marry and bear children. But other than these gender restraints, these Indian women characters have many of the traits of the typical male western hero, as well as certain attributes of the noble savage. They are well versed in weapon use and excellent hunters, but they hunt only out of necessity. They view Nature as the word of God, are at one with nature themselves, and enjoy the freedom the wilderness provides. As Indians who marry whites or as mixed-blood children of those marriages, these women characters embody mediation and reconciliation between whites and Indians. Literally straddling the two cultures, they represent much more strongly than Cooper's Hawkeye, "the man without a cross" who will never intermarry nor sully himself with the taint of Indian blood, the possibility of peaceful coexistence between the cultures.

Stephens not only inverts the sexual and racial identity of the mediating character, she also modifies some of the common plot scenarios of the male-inscribed myth. For instance, the captivity narrative is invoked in all of her frontier tales, but the racial and/or sexual identity of captor and captive is often reversed from the traditional model. Narratives of war between whites and Indians are also utilized, as Stephens takes readers into the thick of various battles. Although her descriptions are similar to such scenes in male-authored fiction, especially her depictions of Indian warriors as demonic, blood-thirsty

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savages, her stories present war as evil and morally wrong, never as glorious or righteous. Like her male predecessors, Stephens uses the vast American landscape as a major symbol in her stories, representing it as a place for a new start. But the regeneration she envisions is not only for whites; it is for Indians and mixed-bloods as well. For instance, in *Mary Derwent*, her hardy leader of a band of Indians who trek west in search of a new start (echoing the Daniel Boone tales) is a woman, not a man. Thus, Stephens rewrites the male myth to make it more amenable to active, independent women protagonists, but to accomplish this feat she has to change the race of the leading character, as well as racially or sexually invert many of the typical tropes and plot scenarios of the male narrative.

Leading Indian woman characters in Ann Stephens' frontier fiction are based on a paradigm that ordains specific behavior and temperament. In general, these characters have certain predictable traits.

1. They reenact the sacrifice of Pocahontas.
2. They learn, through intimate contact with white society, that they are not welcome there.
3. They die or disappear at the end of the story.
4. They have a fatal flaw – an overly passionate nature.

Interestingly, some of these characteristics resemble those that Slotkin describes in *The Fatal Environment* as the "Cooperian Code" – characters in the Leatherstocking tales stereotyped according to race, sex, and class. The most obvious parallel is Stephens' use of the Pocahontas theme. In the original American Pocahontas story of 1624, John Smith reports how Pocahontas

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"hazarded the beating out of her owne braines to save mine" (qtd. in Tilton xv). Stephens' use may not necessarily be in response to Cooper as much as it is the utilization of a character uniquely recognized as "American," with a long American history. While none of the Pocahontas-type rescue scenes in Stephens' fiction are as dramatic as Magawisca's arm being lopped off during her rescue of Everell in *Hope Leslie*, the ways in which Stephens invokes this legend demonstrate her innovative skill. For, example, in *Esther: A Story of the Oregon Trail*, Waupee, the Indian woman mediator character, attempts to rescue Esther, a white woman, a sexual inversion of the victim of the traditional Pocahontas tale. In *Mary Derwent*, the Indian woman character, Tahmeroo, rescues her white lover from the hands of other white men, a racial inversion of the captor role.

Like Cooper's Natty Bumppo, Stephens' Indian women learn from their immersion into the culture of the racial "other." But, whereas the white male hero gains knowledge that helps him live and act in the wilderness (the world of Indians), Stephens' Indian women learn that they are not welcome in civilization (the world of white Americans). Most of them gain "that refinement which civilization brings" through their interaction with whites. But despite this refinement, they cannot overcome the obstacle that makes them unfit for white society – the racial prejudice of whites, particularly that of white men.

Even if Stephens' fictional Indian woman happily intermarries, she must die or disappear. Like Chingachgook and Uncas, the noblest of savages in Cooper's stories, even though these Indian women also represent the noblest of their race, they cannot survive in the world of whites. A noble savage is still a

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savage; as the antithesis of civilized, he/she cannot exist within civilization. Most of those involved in successful marriages move beyond or near the borders of the United States, others die or disappear. In other words, like male authors before her, as well as her literary foremothers, Stephens cannot envision any possible future for Native Americans other than "vanishing." They either disappear into the wilderness or into white culture where their race is unknown.

The most intriguing characteristic of Stephens' fictional Indian women is their fatal flaw. Each is too passionate and loves too deeply, leading her to death or destruction. On the one hand, such scenarios emphasize how the inability to control one's temperament can lead to disaster as a warning for white women readers to employ reason as well as emotion in affairs of the heart. On the other hand, they operate as shorthand for inscribing Indians as emotional and unthinking, a common literary stereotype of Indian women (Sundquist 21).

Ideal Indian women characters in Stephens' novels, like ideal white women in men's fiction, represent the best of their civilization. These Indian women demonstrate ways in which women can be active participants in society without losing their womanly virtues. Womanliness is an important issue for Stephens – only those women characters who maintain perfect womanliness can be role models. Stephens chooses Indian rather than white women characters, not only because of the difficulties of using figures who represent white civilization as mediators between the cultures, but because using the Indian figure allows Stephens to demonstrate that women can be active participants in their society and remain womanly. In other words, she depicts the restrictions on women's potential in Indian society as less stringent than those on

white women in "civilization." Although Stephens does investigate racial hatred, particularly in *Malaeska* and *Mahaska*, racial concerns are generally secondary to gender issues in her Indian stories. Stephens' ideal Indian women are women first, and only secondarily Indians. Her exemplary Indian women characters do not represent white women, but rather they are portents of possibility for them. Ideal Indian women characters allow Stephens to envision expanded roles for white women without upsetting the status quo, without having her own womanliness called into question.

Other female characters in Stephens' frontier novels, "bad" Indian women and "fallen" white women, represent warnings of the dangers of crossing sexual/racial boundaries. The line between that which is acceptable "womanly" behavior and that which "unsexes" is thin. Stephens repeatedly uses her ideal Indian women to demonstrate the location of that line. Crossing racial boundaries is also fraught with danger for white women, as most of Stephens' frontier stories demonstrate. Because she sees Indian traits as essentially masculine, crossing racial lines means crossing sexual boundaries as well.

As might be expected, ideal white women also play a large role in Stephens' woman-centered myths. In some stories the white heroine is a pathetic passive creature – a caricature of the supposed ideal white woman as she appears in the male-centered myth – suggesting that Stephens does not accept all restrictions the nineteenth-century places on white women. In *Mary Derwent*, the idealized, disabled, white woman character actively participates in the world without losing her femininity, effectively deconstructing the ideology of "True Womanhood." Although white women characters play key roles in several

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stories, Stephens' use of Indian women as ideal figures and the preponderance of intermarriages in her narratives makes her frontier fiction unique.

### **Intermarriage in Fact and Fiction**

Recent demographic statistics indicating that "one in seven whites, one in three blacks, four in five Asians, and more than 19 in 20 American Indians are closely related to someone of a different racial group" (Goldstein) testify that intermarriage has long been a common cultural practice among Native peoples. Long before white people settled on the Eastern seaboard, the taking of captives from enemy tribes was a widespread practice among Native Americans of the Northeast and Southwest (Namias 3). These captives, like later European captives, were frequently adopted into a family of their captors. They were no longer considered enemies. Often they were accepted as replacements for those who had died or had been captured by other tribes. Once adopted, they became full-fledged members of the community. Many interracial marriages occurred as a result of captivity. But, as June Namias points out, native peoples did not consider such unions as intermarriage; for them the purpose of adoption of captives was "the full integration of those adoptees" into the cultural life of the people (87). Marriage was simply one part of that integration. In other words, Native Americans accepted whites into their culture much more readily than the reverse.

Europeans, particularly the English, took a much different view, one which they represented in so-called "fact" as well as fiction. In her study of *White Captives*, Namias poignantly demonstrates how captivity narratives were frequently fictionalized to fit the ideologies of the times. Based on an extensive

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study of captivity narratives, she categorized white women captives into three types: the Survivor, the Amazon, and the Frail Flower. Each type corresponds to certain traits deemed desirable for women during the period it was predominant. The Survivor of the seventeenth century bore up under duress because she, as a good Puritan, relied on God. The Amazon, dominant in the Revolutionary and Early National periods, protected her family against all odds, in keeping with the ideology of the Republican mother. And the Frail Flower of the mid-nineteenth-century fit stereotypes about women's delicacy and dependence on men; these women were helpless, hopeless victims. Although these types overlap in time, and although the ideologies defining women's behavior may have had some effect on captured women's actual behavior, literary license and the commodification of captivity narratives also appears to be a factor in how the stories were written. Namias discusses, for example, how a short factual account of 5 paragraphs in 1792 expanded to 66 pages of sentimental description in 1825, emphasizing the sufferings and feelings of Massy Harbison, the captured woman. In fact, later editions included even more elements of the Frail Flower. Namias points out that the story was published just one year after the highly successful *Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, the tale of a white woman who, after capture, married and chose to remain with her Indian family. Namias suggests that Harbison's story, which like Jemison's was an "as-told-to" narrative, may have been sentimentally enhanced to increase sales (41).

One of the more interesting findings of Namias' study is that few Frail Flower captives actually wrote their narratives themselves.<sup>3</sup> As Kolodny observes in her discussion of Jemison's story, in situations where the text is



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written by someone other than the actual captive, "the very circumstances of its composition militate against the narrative's fidelity" (71-2). Reasons for the publication, both monetary and political, often dictate louder than the storyteller. In the case of Massy Harbison's story, for example, although the original, five paragraph captivity deposition was given in 1792, the year of Harbison's release, by the time it was published for public consumption, in 1825, female captives were no longer supposed to be strong Amazons, but Frail Flowers. Consequently, although Harbison, who was seven months pregnant at the time of her capture, safely delivered her child in captivity, this event was no longer considered evidence of her strength; rather, it became another reason to pity the poor, helpless mother.

Although Namias believes that the sentimental conventions of fiction affected the inscriptions of captivity narratives, I suggest that the Frail Flower image of the white woman captive influenced fictional accounts as well. Although it is impossible to determine which came first, a certain reciprocity appears evident. The Frail Flower character of the captivity narrative seems to correspond with certain male-authored representations of fictional women in the traditional frontier myth. Over and over again, white women are captured by hostile "savages" in the fiction of nineteenth-century male writers. For example, in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Alice, the fair-haired beauty and unquestioned heroine, relies totally on the ability of white men to save her from the Hurons; whereas Cora, whose taint of black blood disqualifies her as a "true" woman, is more self-reliant (if just as ineffectual). In *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*, the only novel in which Cooper allows intermarriage to occur, young Ruth is captured by

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Indians at the tender age of seven, considered by her parents "a babe," an "innocent victim," truly a Frail Flower (175). However, the frailness of the heroine reaches its apex in one of the most virulent of the Indian-hating novels, *Nick of the Woods* (1835), by Robert Montgomery Bird. When the heroine Edith is captured by the Shawnee, she sinks "helpless on the couch at her feet. . . . sitting in a stupor of despair, her head sunk upon her breast, her hands clasped, her ashy lips quivering, but uttering no articulate sound" (284). So frail is she, not a sound can she make. But, of course, a major purpose of helpless women characters in these novels, as Leland Person emphasizes, is to justify violence against the Indians by the male heroes (671). The Frail Flower – the white woman captive – also appears in women's novels, but rarely to excuse violence. In women's frontier fiction, the Frail Flower is often the object of pity or even ridicule; sometimes this character is used to decimate the entire notion of passive womanhood.

But if men and women approached the topic of female captivity differently, their approaches to intermarriage bear scant resemblance at all. In "The American Eve: Miscegenation and a Feminist Frontier Fiction," Leland Person posits that male authors avoided the intermarriage plot because it stripped away the need for white male heroics because it did not fit "male fantasies" of the frontier in which white men occupy the central role (677). When the subject of intermarriage between a white woman and an Indian arises in these masculine fantasies, it is often presented as if it were an actual, or at least threatened, sexual assault, preserving crucial roles for the white hero – defender of white womanhood, vanquisher of evil, exterminator of the Indian. Even so, the woman,

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regardless of how passive she may be, temporarily takes center stage. In *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*, Cooper handles this problem by not presenting Ruth during her captivity at all. Readers do not see her taken, nor in the Indian villages; the first time she re-emerges is when she returns to the home of her white family. Bird employs a similar tactic in *Nick of the Woods*; readers do not see the captive Edith from the time of her capture until the hero arrives on the scene.

However, the sanction of white male violence against Indians is not the only reason that white women, as symbols of white civilization as well as purity, must suffer the lustful gaze of red men. The stereotype of the lecherous, sexually depraved Indian man, though rare in nineteenth-century fiction by women, appears repetitively in male-authored fiction. While historians and literary scholars acknowledge that rape of female captives by Indian nations east of the Mississippi "was rare or nonexistent" (Heard 98), male authors used this scenario repeatedly. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, when Magua expresses his desire to marry Cora, "her eyes sank with shame under the impression that, for the first time, they had encountered an expression which no chaste female might endure" (104). Her honor is besmirched at the mere suggestion of intermarriage. The response of Duncan Heyward, the white male hero, typifies the white male perspective toward such a possibility: "Name not the horrid alternative again; the thought itself is worse than a thousand deaths" (109). And why is the mere thought so hideous? Because it threatens white society itself. As representatives of white civilization, white women must reproduce white children; however, if they marry red men, their children will be red also, in effect, killing off

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white society. And last, but perhaps not least, as Namias, Person, and other critics note, white male authors' obsession with the possibility of sexual relations between white women and Indian men may signify a deep-seated fear that "young women would prefer the noble bearing and indeed sexual and physical superiority of Indian men to their white counterparts" (Namias 107).

Whatever their reasons for depicting white women as potential victims of sexual assault by Indians, male authors rarely present white men as sexually attracted to Indian women. Louise Barnett asserts that the primary reason is that "most authors were fixated [on] color" (114). Interestingly, one of the few stories by a nineteenth-century male author featuring a marriage between a white man and an Indian woman, *Logan* (1822), was written by John Neal, whose considerable influence on Ann Stephens will be discussed in Chapter 2. In *Logan*, the Indianized white husband, although he fights against whites alongside his wife's people, suffers guilt and self-recrimination, which is compounded even further by his attraction to a married white woman. In other words, whites are seen as more sexually attractive than Indians. Barnett suggests that this is simply another aspect of assumptions about white superiority that pervades nineteenth-century fiction about Indians.

Strangely, female authors, who, by virtue of wishing to preserve their womanly reputations, might have avoided the subject, seemed to have few qualms about creating stories of white-Indian marriages. Marriages between white women and Indian men predominate in women's frontier novels. The most obvious reason for this is that white women's novels tend to focus on white women characters. But another more subversive explanation, readily apparent in



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*Hobomok*, may be that such marriages emphasize a woman's right to choose her own husband, a certain defiance against patriarchy. Besides, if such a union is to be a major event in a story, the woman character must freely choose. Otherwise it could be interpreted as the type of "forced marriage" so often reported in the press. White women authors had to contend with several difficulties if they wished to represent an ideal white woman as a willing partner in marriage to an American Indian, as Lydia Maria Child discovered. Although she published *Hobomok* (1824) anonymously, reviewers vilified the author who dared to write on so "unnatural" a subject, "revolting . . . to every feeling of delicacy in man or woman" (NAR cited in Karcher, "Introduction" xxxiv). Consequently, women authors like Stephens who wished to be perceived as "true" women, whose reputations were at risk simply for publishing their stories in the early-mid-nineteenth-century, were doubly jeopardized if they broached such a political and sexual topic as intermarriage.

Yet broach it, even flaunt it, they did. While nineteenth-century male writers tended to avoid the possibility of intermarriage in their frontier novels, female authors placed it squarely in the forefront. In *Hobomok*, the protagonist, Mary Conant, marries the Indian Hobomok for several reasons: because she wants to defy her patriarchal father; because she believes that Charles, her true love (whom her father has forbidden her to marry) is dead; and, because in Hobomok she finds a sympathetic friend. Child was spared some vilification in reviews by representing Mary as "not altogether [her]self" (120), as "mad" (124). "Stupified" by her grief at the supposed death of her lover, she offers herself to Hobomok, "the only being in the wide world who was left to love her" (121).

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Despite such inauspicious beginnings, the marriage seems successful as Mary bears Hobomok's son and her love for her "noble-hearted" husband grows. But when Charles reappears, the noble Hobomok divorces Mary, whose "heart . . . is not with the Indian" (139). His generous act allows Mary to "sing the marriage song in the wigwam of the Englishman" she loves (139), and Hobomok, like so many other fictional Indians, disappears and is seen no more. But, as Caroline Karcher notes in her introduction to *Hobomok*, "it is not . . . racial issues, but . . . rebellion against patriarchy" which informs Child's story (xx).

In *Hope Leslie* (1827), Sedgwick's treatment of intermarriage is at once more yet less radical than Child's. It is more radical in that the marriage remains unbroken and Hope's sister, Faith, remains with and true to her Indian husband, Oneco. But it is less radical because it involves a minor character as opposed to the main character. Furthermore, Faith's marriage resembles Mary's union with Hobomok because Faith is represented as simple and childlike (unable to make adult decisions). Unlike Mary who remains thoroughly white, Faith is completely Indianized; she forgets how to speak English, forgets the Christian God.

But as Karcher insists, it is Sedgwick's creation of Magawisca, the noble Indian woman character, as opposed to the noble Indian warriors invented by male writers, that makes *Hope Leslie* "a more progressive novel than *Hobomok*" (xxxv). Sedgwick even hints that Magawisca is a suitable bride for Everell, the white hero, who admits "I might have loved – might have forgotten that nature had put barriers between us" (214). But this is not to be. Even more significant than the potential intermarriage – Magawisca shares the crucial role of mediator with Hope. Through words and reconciliation, these two young heroines attempt

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to understand each other's culture and to make the men of their respective cultures realize the futility of fighting and warlike behavior. Despite valiant attempts and eloquent speeches, their efforts are to no avail. Like the noble Indian characters of both male and female authors before and after the 1827 publication of *Hope Leslie*, Magawisca "disappeared for ever" (334).

But the noble Indian woman character reappears in many of Stephens' novels. And most of them do indeed marry white men. Stephens also creates ignoble savage women – both white and red. Because of the complex gender, race, and sex issues involved in creating these characters, not to mention the histrionics of the melodramatic plots in which they find themselves, Stephens' Indian woman creations defy easy classification. Each Indian woman character and all intermarriages presented in Stephens' frontier fiction will be analyzed in subsequent chapters.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Caroline Karcher's and Mary Kelley's Introductions to *Hobomok* (xix) and *Hope Leslie* (xxii), respectively. Also see Joyce Warren, "Introduction: Canons and Canon Fodder" in *The (Other) American Traditions*.

<sup>2</sup> *St. Elmo* (1866) by Augusta Evans "sold 1 million copies within the first four months of its publication" (Harris 60). It has the typical plot that Baym outlines in her ovular study, *Woman's Fiction*, of the young girl left alone in the world to make her own way. In *St. Elmo*, young Edna Earl gains higher education and refuses to consider St. Elmo as a suitor until he finds "Jesus [who] alone can purify and save" (279). Naturally, he does just that, but not before Edna has learned Greek and Latin and has become a published author.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix, *White Captives*, pp. 275-280, for statistical analysis of the captivity narratives that Namias reviews.



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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL CONTEXTS: STEPHENS, INDIANS IN POPULAR CULTURE, CRITICAL ASSESSMENTS OF STEPHENS, AND METHODOLOGY**

Analyzing fiction is fraught with difficulties for the critic. When the texts to be examined are removed in time or culture, or if they deal with controversial or socially sensitive issues, the problems are magnified. Today the critic has a wide array of analytical tools to guide her, and she knows that her own ideologies will affect her analysis. However, even critics aware of this ideological dilemma may forget that that people in the past were equally affected by their own sets of ideologies. Too often critics today judge writers of the past according to contemporary ideologies, particularly when dealing with socially sensitive issues such as race, gender, class, or other differences by which people have been segregated into distinct groups. Thus has Ann Stephens been judged as "racist" and as a "conservative" on gender issues. However, a contextual analysis of Stephens and the situation in which she wrote will help clarify her representations and revise such criticism.

Questions of race and gender were as pervasive in the nineteenth century as they are in our own day. A primary difference between then and now is that social and literary critics have developed new theories and tools to facilitate investigation of these controversial issues. Feminist and post-colonial critical studies, for example, have provided us with lenses to allow us to view gender and race from perspectives that were unavailable in the nineteenth century. To

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understand how nineteenth-century authors came to represent Indians in certain ways, we need to examine other discourses on race from that period to gauge their influence on authors' ideologies. Jane Tompkins asserts in her introduction to the influential *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of Fiction, 1790-1860*, that works of literature can and should be seen "as attempts to redefine the social order" (xi). To understand how fiction endeavors "to win the belief and influence the behavior of the widest possible audience," Tompkins insists that critics need to know "the cultural realities that made those novels meaningful" (xi, xii). Thus, as she rightly points out, historical context is not merely a "backdrop" against which an author wrote. Her position is similar to that of Fredric Jameson, who insists that the local issues surrounding texts "can recover their original urgency only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story," which involves the political struggles of the time (19). Because contemporary ideologies affect literary texts, these works need to be analyzed in terms of the "religious beliefs, social practices, and economic and political circumstances that produced them" (Tompkins xiii). In addition, if we are to understand an author's writings, we must also know something of her circumstances and ideologies.

Women's supposed confinement in domesticity, coupled with the equation of domesticity with the status quo, resulted in a literary tradition which suggested that women were unable to step outside their culture to get the requisite distance from which to critique it (Romero 1-2). However, feminist literary critics<sup>1</sup> have demonstrated that nineteenth-century women's writings could be just as subversive as those of canonical men. But as Lora Romero emphasizes in *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States*, society

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is not a monolithic whole which an author writes for or against (5). Rather, particular issues within a society serve as impetus for writing. Writers might be conservative on one facet of an issue and liberal on another. Stephens' stance on women's place in society, for example, has often been labeled "conservative" because her writings have been interpreted as articulating stringent support for the doctrine of separate spheres; however, at the same time, through strong women protagonists in her fiction, Stephens argued that women should be allowed to develop and use their God-given talents for the benefit of humanity, even when it meant stepping beyond their assigned sphere.<sup>2</sup>

While Stephens was undoubtedly fearful of being accused of being "unwomanly," her concerns may have had more to do with her position in literary society than anxiety about gender, per se. Much of the criticism that seeks to establish Stephens as a conservative on gender issues is based on a misreading by Herbert Ross Brown<sup>3</sup> and interpretations of some of her earliest nonfiction in which she attempts to explain the anomalous position of women writers. For example, in her first nonfictional "address" to the public as editor of a new literary magazine, Stephens writes,

The editor earnestly deprecates the unfair criticisms and ill will of the sterner reapers in the literary field. Let them go on in the strength of giant intellects, measuring pens in political strife. Their's it is to dig the bosom of the earth, to scour the mountains, to draw the lightening from the clouds, and pore with a keen eye over the starry heavens, in their search for philosophical knowledge. Earth, ocean, air, and sky, we willingly yield to them. The privilege of deep research is man's right; with it we have no wish to interfere. All we ask is permission to use the knowledge he has scattered over the enlightened world. But poetry, fiction, and the lighter branches of the sciences are woman's appropriate sphere, as much as the flower-garden, the drawing-room, and the nursery; and the use of these cannot be denied with any show of reason, so long as woman is singled

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Although this passage has been interpreted as reflecting Stephens' acceptance of the doctrine of separate spheres, I believe that closer examination reveals that Stephens has a more complex understanding of the situation in which she writes. She first equates philosophy and politics with men's realm and assures her readers she has no intention of trying to invade this territory. Then she makes an ostensibly similar comparison, through simile, that "poetry, fiction, and the lighter branches of the sciences are woman's appropriate sphere." This clever move puts her in the position of seeking no more than women already have. Since men have the whole outside world, it seems like so little to ask.

But ask she does. For Stephens does not assert her rights, she requests "permission." This, too, is an astute strategy. She does not demand her rights, which, of course, would be met with severe disapprobation and defeat her purpose. Rather, through clever use of rhetorical methods, hyperbole, simile, and contrast and comparison, she becomes a conservative seeking to preserve the status quo. She obsequiously acknowledges male authority and requests "permission to use the knowledge he has scattered over the enlightened world." Such obeisance is integral to ladylike behavior, for true ladies were to submit to male authority. This is important, for Ann Stephens is simultaneously establishing her credentials as a "true" woman and invoking community mores, both of which establish her ethos as a rhetor. But her irony is more visible here, for the manifest deference to men obviates the need for close reading by males, yet the word "scattered" implies waste. Without careful scrutiny, such



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implications might be overlooked. She is not asking for a higher education, which, in 1834, was still unilaterally male, but seeking the opportunity to use knowledge that might otherwise wither and die like the parable of the seed scattered upon rocky ground because "it had not much earth" to nourish it (Mark 4: 6). Whether or not Stephens' irony was intended, nineteenth-century middle-class women, many of whom read the Bible daily, would be more likely to notice the allusion and recognize its possible connotation.

"Because ideology is always embodied in particular semantics, issues, contexts, and institutions," such as religion, Romero explains, no one "experience[s] it as a whole abstract entity" to be rejected or embraced (6). People can stand neither totally outside the ideologies of their culture nor totally inside them because individuals are influenced by competing and conflicting beliefs that can shore up or tear down the boundaries of any given ideology. The example of Stephens' first public address exemplifies this notion. Financial circumstances (her husband's business had just failed) make the success of this literary magazine essential. To be a successful editor, she must present herself as shrewd, knowledgeable, in control – adjectives that would generally be seen as inimical to "true women." On the other hand she must present herself as a true woman in order to achieve credibility with her intended audience. It is a delicate balance that all writing women in the nineteenth-century faced. Competing ideologies, of both the writer and her audience, constantly hover about the fringes of the social act of writing. This chapter recreates the contexts in which Stephens lived and wrote and delineates some of the ideologies that affected her representations of Indians in her frontier fiction. It also presents

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critical assessments of Stephens' writings and explains the methodologies used to analyze her frontier fiction.

### **Ann S. Stephens - A "Literary Lady"**

Ann Stephens was a woman of her times. Born in the early nineteenth century when opportunities for women's education and literary careers were expanding rapidly, Stephens took full advantage of both. Her literary fame brought her into the circles of some of the most distinguished, powerful, and prosperous people, yet she never forgot her more humble beginnings, nor people less fortunate than she. By the 1850s, she was celebrated both in the United States and abroad as the "gifted one! America's daughter!"<sup>4</sup> She took in all that society and her wealth and fame proffered – attending cultural events from theater to horse races to balls at the White House. She befriended many from the upper echelons, including the Vanderbilts, Henry Clay, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, and every President from Van Buren to Hayes. As Madeleine Stern notes, "[t]hrough the years, both abroad and at home, Mrs. Stephens had been collecting not only literary, but political notables" (*We* 41). Her lively wit and quick repartee made her a popular guest at literary salons, parties, and balls. By the 1870s and 80s, she was holding her own Saturday evening receptions for the literati and celebrities of the day (Stern *Purple* 111). She was a member of Sorosis, one of the first women's clubs in America, as well as the Nineteenth-Century Club. After her husband died, she spent her winters in Washington, D.C., and in her later years she summered at Newport, Rhode Island.

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But, despite wealth and fame, she had a genuine concern for many social issues, and she used her friendship with the powerful to advocate for people in dire circumstances. For example, through a personal visit, Stephens successfully interceded with Governor Seward of New York to get "a poor wretched mother pardoned from the gallows" (Stephens, "To Mrs. Sigourney," 27 April 1843). And this was not an isolated incident. A short biography of Stephens that appeared in *The American Literary Magazine* as early as 1848 declares:

Orphans and penitentiaries, she often visits to console those who need consolation. In more than one instance she has averted impending doom from the head of the guiltless, by exerting herself in a most disinterested manner, in behalf of the prisoner. (June 1848, 343)

Many of Stephens' obituaries, which appeared in newspapers across the continent, mention her kindnesses to "the weak" or "less fortunate." She also used her pen to bring attention to social ills, principally women's issues. Many of her novels feature the plight of working women, including the hardships and penurious straits of those who were outworkers in the needle trades.<sup>5</sup> Other social problems she addressed in her fiction include prison conditions, particularly the predicament of women prisoners with children; the shocking conditions of orphans sent to the alms house; the dire straits of married women, with no rights to their own property, when their husbands were gamblers, profligates, and/or deserters; and, the dilemmas faced by "fallen" women. Stephens, explaining that the "domestic arrangements" of moving have prevented her from timely completion of the story that Lydia Sigourney had apparently requested, comments on the moral responsibility of authorship:

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Because her most of her personal papers were burnt<sup>6</sup>, little is known about Stephens' early life. She was born on March 30, 1810 in Humphreysville (renamed Seymour), Connecticut, the second child of John and Ann Wrigley Winterbotham. The couple had emigrated from England in 1806 because John had been offered a position as superintendent in the woolen mills of Col. David Humphreys, for whom the village was named. Thus, Ann and her siblings grew up in relatively comfortable surroundings. Her early education, typical of middle-class girls of the period, began at a local dame school and continued at several other primary schools as her parents moved from place to place. Ann also attended a ladies' seminary until the age of 16 (Harper 123), but the name, and thus her possible course of study, remain unknown.

Perhaps Ann's voracious reading habits were first sparked there, maybe from her father's nightly oral readings to the family, or possibly in Col. Humphreys' library where she was allowed to browse (Orcutt and Beardsley 457).<sup>7</sup> Stephens herself remarks:

I have no idea how my literary tastes originated. My father was very intelligent and a great reader, but he took no pains to influence me, and long before I knew what authorship was, I made up my mind to write stories and make books. (Leslie's 16 August, 1865, 158)

She was also very proud of her domestic skill and claimed that "there was no household duty" which she did not know by age sixteen (158). "My whole life," she goes on to say, "was intensely occupied in learning something which might



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possibly be of future use" (158). And these three – learning, literary tastes, and ladies' "sphere" – would shape her life and career.

In 1831 Ann married Edward Stephens, a merchant and printer, of Plymouth, Massachusetts. By all accounts this 31-year marriage was a "tranquil [and] happy" alliance (Orcutt and Beardsley 650). The newlyweds moved to Portland, Maine, where Edward engaged in the mercantile trade, "rendering the domestic duties of his lady comparatively light," allowing her to take advantage of Portland's "large" circulating library, which she did with an irrepressible thirst for knowledge (*ALM*, June 1848: 335). According to one account, "the records of the librarian attest that nearly the whole number of books it contained had been charged to her" and that she read an average of two books per day for four years (*ALM* June 1848: 336).

Similar to financial crises that precipitated other women writers' entry into the literary marketplace, when her husband's business failed, Stephens began to write for the public. The couple "held a council" and gathered "all available funds" to establish a ladies' periodical, *Portland Magazine*, which Edward would publish and Ann would edit. Before embarking on the venture, Ann decided to investigate the feasibility of the project. As she explains, in a short autobiography which appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

Early in the morning I commenced a story, the *Tradesman's Boast*, and took it to John Neal, with whom I was slightly acquainted, and desired him to tell me if there was talent enough to warrant our undertaking. He read the story, criticized its faults honestly, and with generous warmth commended its excellence. He told me to go on – that all I wanted was experience and time. He sat down and kindly impressed on me the great moral responsibility of authorship. . . . He not only gave us advice, but help, read my proofs before I was able to read them myself, wrote for our work, and helped us in every way that independent, and to a certain

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extent, self-reliant persons could accept. We prospered. I wrote at first with great trepidation and labor, but the public were very kind and so I gained courage. Mr. S. worked as hard as I did. . . . There was nothing calculated to insure success which he did not do, and which I did not help him in. (158)<sup>6</sup>

Stephens' mention of her husband's contribution is interesting because, by the time the autobiographical sketch appeared, she had been the primary breadwinner of the family for almost two decades. But apparently, she and Edward were partners in life, love, and business. He would publish many of the journals she would edit over the course of her long literary career, and until his death in 1862, he held the copyright to all her published works.

This account of her initiation into the literary world reappears in one of her novels as a kind of fictive autobiography – a device used by many women authors of the period. In *The Wife's Secret* (1864), the self-sufficient female role model rises to upper-middle-class status through the use of her pen. She becomes an author because she needs a decent, but secret, income to support the child her sister bore out of wedlock. The chapter entitled "Authorship" is basically the same story Stephens told in the August 16, 1856 issue of *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. However, the fictional account embellishes, displaying all the turbulent emotions a young woman of the 1830s might experience when first exposing her writing to an outside male critic: self-critical "disappointment" (456); "anxiety" that it would prove unacceptable (457); "embarrassment" at exhibiting ambition (458); gratefulness and teary-eyed emotional turmoil at his "kind" yet "severe" criticism (458); "bewilderment" at such printing conventions as proofs (460); and, "strange feelings of mingled exultation and humility" at receiving pay for her work (461). These emotions help to identify Stephens as a quintessential

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candidate for Mary Kelley's famous study of nineteenth-century women conflicted about their careers as authors in light of societal restrictions on women's activities in the public sphere. Stephens was a woman of her time, keenly aware of the prohibitions against entering the public arena, but as Linda Kerber points out, "notions of women's sphere permeated the language; [women] in turn used the metaphor in their own descriptions" ("Separate" 10-11) and often to their own ends. Thus Stephens sought to establish herself as womanly as she simultaneously ventured beyond the private sphere.

Stephens worked hard on the *Portland Magazine*, writing the first issues almost completely by herself. Despite her inexperience as a writer for public consumption, from the very beginning she demonstrates an astute understanding of her ambiguous position as woman, author, and editor as well as a keen sense of audience. In her inaugural "Address" to the public, her use of trope and her appeals to nineteenth-century commonplaces all seem to indicate a rhetor of skill. Stephens' first public sentence, indeed, first public word, is a Biblical reference. This is not accidental. No educated woman in the mid-nineteenth century could be unaware of societal restrictions upon women. By beginning her first public statement with an unmistakable reference to the Bible, Stephens is acknowledging the piety of her readers as well as establishing her own ethos as a pious woman. Her first words also indicate appropriate female modesty:

Noah, when sending out the dove upon the waste of waters could not have felt more anxiety for its safe return with the green leaf of promise in its bill, than is experienced for the success of the specimen number of the *Portland Magazine*, which we now offer to the Ladies of Maine. (*Portland Magazine*, Oct. 1834: 1)

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to be published under her own name is probably a gross understatement. As she admits a few sentences later, "[the editor] knows that days and nights of application and anxiety will be but a part of the task she has imposed on herself" (1). How much more was the anxiety she suffered as she wrote the address? And her anxiety was not unwarranted, for the success of the magazine was a financial imperative for the young couple. With this address and publication of writings under her own name begins Ann Stephens' 52-year battle to find peace between her public and her private roles.<sup>9</sup> Constricted by societal pressures to remain within the realm of domesticity, yet impelled by external and internal forces to step beyond it, Ann Stephens seems never to have found the reconciliation she sought. Some of her most anxious moments came when she was accused of being "unwomanly," yet once launched on her career, she never withdrew. Her public persona was primarily that of a "true" woman, while in her private life she took a much more active role in society than the precepts of true womanhood allowed.<sup>10</sup> To counterbalance her conflicting roles, she signed all work published under her own name as "Mrs. Ann S. Stephens," as if her title as a married woman could somehow shield her from accusations of unwomanliness.

Stephens edited the *Portland Magazine* for two years. During that time she managed to garner the works of several authors of renown, a feat which speaks well for her business and editorial acumen. One of the earliest, Lydia Sigourney, submitted a poem, "The Muffled Knocker," and encouraged Stephens to continue her endeavors (Stephens, "Sigourney" 260). Thus began a life-long friendship. Other contributors included Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Neal,



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Seba Smith, and Nathaniel Parker Willis (*DLB* 73: 302). These same authors also contributed to the *Portland Sketchbook* (1836), which Stephens edited. *Portland Magazine* prospered, but Ann's delicate health gave way. The doctor advised the Stephenses to move to a milder climate. Fortunately, William Snowden, of New York City, having heard of Ann's success as an editor, offered her editorship of his publication, *Ladies Companion*, so *Portland Magazine* was sold, and the Stephenses moved to New York (Orcutt and Beardsley 649).

Before they settled in New York City, soon to become the literary capital of the United States, the couple traveled extensively in the West. Whether or not Ann kept a journal on the trip is not definitely known, but she did keep a journal during other trips, so it seems likely. Using her keen sense of observation, she gathered the images that she was later to depict with such clarity and authenticity for her readers. Under her auspices, circulation of *Ladies Companion* increased from 3,000 to 17,000 (Stern, "Stephens and the Dime Novel " 3267). Here it was that Ann Stephens first established her name among the "Literati" and gathered a coterie of well-placed friends, including Anne Lynch Botta, known for her literary salons. Here, too, Stephens wrote and published her first stories centering on the lives of American Indians.

During her years as editor of *Ladies Companion*, the prolific Stephens published poems, articles, stories, and serials in many other magazines and story papers, including *Ladies Wreath*, *Olive Branch*, *Columbian Magazine*, *Flag of Our Union*, and *Brother Jonathan* (*DLB* 73: 302). She also wrote a series of letters entitled "Jonathan Slick in New York," which were published in the *New York Daily Express* in 1839-40. These humorous sketches, letters of a

downeaster farm boy visiting the big city to his "Par" back home, were gathered together and published in book form in 1843 as *High Life in New York* by her husband under the pseudonym Jonathan Slick. According to Linda Morris, Stephens was "the first American woman to write in the vernacular humor mode" (50), which may explain why she chose a male pseudonym and persona for the task. Although the book achieved great popularity, running through several editions, it was Stephens' only major attempt at humor (25-6). Thus Stephens' first published volume was neither published under her own name nor in a genre typical of her later publications.

Ann's success and that of *Ladies Companion* did not go unnoticed; soon she was getting "tempting offers" from other periodicals (*Cyclopedia* 10:20). In 1841, George R. Graham, known for his liberal payments to contributors, managed to lure her away from Snowden by offering "more money and less work" as a contributing editor, with Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Peterson as co-editors (Stephens, "To Mrs. Sigourney" 27 April 1843). However, Poe did not remain with the magazine very long, and Stephens did not get along with his replacement, Rufus W. Griswold, who held women writers in low esteem, and whom she considered a liar and a "sycophant" (Stephens, "To Sigourney" 27 April 1843). In fact, both she and her friend, Elizabeth Ellet, testified against him when his wife sued to have their divorce annulled ("Griswold").

Perhaps because of her conflicts with Griswold, Stephens found greener pastures elsewhere. Charles Peterson offered her a position as co-editor of his new magazine, *Lady's World* (later renamed *Peterson's Magazine*).<sup>11</sup> She retained a position at *Peterson's* for the remainder of her life. Despite Peterson's

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claims that her "stories could be had nowhere else," the indefatigable Stephens continued to make contributions to other periodicals. Indeed, she even edited other journals during her tenure at *Peterson's* including *Frank Leslie's Lady's Gazette of Fashion and Fancy Needlework* (1854-56) and her own magazine, *Mrs. Stephen's New Monthly* (1856-58). Although Poe insisted in the "Literati" that she was editor in name only at *Graham's* (*Godey's* 33:15), and editors at *Peterson's* disavowed her editorial work soon after her death, evidence does not corroborate such testimony. This repudiation seems likely to have been motivated by wounded male egos in the face of enormous success by a female in a public sphere.

In the early years, the fledgling *Peterson's* needed the expertise of a proven, experienced editor, and Stephens provided such leadership. From her editor's chair, she did much to advance the prestige of women's writings. The January 1844 issue of *Peterson's* was penned entirely by female authors. As Stephens remarks from the "Editor's Table": "We believe no number of any other magazine was ever before issued, whose contributions were all from ladies" (5:37). Ann herself supplied much of the material in the early years. She also provided *Peterson's* with the works of many noted contemporaries through her friendships and connections, including Lydia Sigourney, Elizabeth Ellet, Caroline Kirkland, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, Park Benjamin, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Due to Stephens' able pen and keen sense of what the public wanted to read, *Peterson's Magazine* became immensely popular and by the Civil War outstripped *Godey's Lady's Book* in circulation (Mott, *History* 2: 309).

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In 1848, Stephens began contributing year-long serials to *Peterson's*, which also attracted subscribers, for to read the entire novel one had to buy the magazine for the whole year. From January 1848, when the first installment of "Lost and Found" appeared, until 1887, the year after her death, a new serial by Stephens appeared in *Peterson's* every year, beginning in January and ending in December. After 1859, these serials were published in book form by Peterson's brother, Thomas, as soon as the December issue hit the streets.

Stephens' continuing popularity as an author can be traced in part to the same qualities that made her a good editor, particularly her innate ability to anticipate the literary tastes of her audience. Master of diverse fictional genres, Stephens managed to pen historical romances, American frontier adventures, domestic novels, and tales of country versus city life when each was the height of fashion. Her astute knowledge of literary tastes is revealed in a letter to a "Mr. Harper," nephew of the owners of Harper Publishing Company, in which she requests a loan and offers copyrights of four historical novels that had never been published in book form as security. She notes that "they are worth so much more than the amount I want" (\$2000) and that "this is a sort of security few business men – not publishers – would understand" (6 March 1868). She lists the titles and continues:

I hold these books more valuable just now than domestic novels, but if you prefer, I can exchange for that class. They have of course run through *Peterson's Magazine* exactly as *Fashion and Famine* and *The Old Homestead* and all my other books have done, but some of them were published twelve years ago and none of them has been published in the last two years. I have kept this class of books back, intending to use them when historical works came to be the favorite as they are now.

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This appeal also shows her sagacious business acumen, as she lists her two best-selling novels as examples of the potential financial returns on serials previously published in *Peterson's Magazine*.

Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's Book* and one of the most influential writers of her day, considered Stephens "one of the most successful Magazine writers of the day" (797). In fact her skillful pen "seems to have been the mainstay of the family," enabling her to far out-earn her less-than-successful husband (NAW 361). When her husband died in 1862, Stephens forged ahead, supporting herself and her two children, both still at home. She was one of the best-paid authors of her time, receiving well above the standard \$2.00 per page for magazine contributions in the 1840s (Stern, *We* 39). In a letter to Frances Osgood in 1844, Peterson declared that as far as payment for contributions were concerned, she and Stephens were "above all rule" (Eastman 43).

Ann Stephens was a highly acclaimed and prolific author who triumphed in many genres - serials, social novels<sup>12</sup>, dime novels, nonfiction, and poetry. Although only *Malaeska* holds any resonance for modern readers, in his classic study of best-sellers in America, *Golden Multitudes*, Frank Luther Mott classifies two of her novels, *Fashion and Famine* and *The Old Homestead*, as "better sellers." While all of her novels are woman-centered, some are historical fiction, such as *The Rejected Wife*, a fictionalized biography of Benedict Arnold's wife, and *The Lady Mary*, a tragic tale of a lady-in-waiting of Anne Boleyn. Others critique the artifice and foppiness of the "fashionable life" of her own day, such as *The Reigning Belle* and *The Curse of Gold*. Another genre, which she was among the first women authors to exploit, is stories that pitted the sinful city

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against the purity of country life; *Fashion and Famine* and *The Old Homestead* are both novels of this type. Two collections of her works were published, a 14 volume set in 1869 and a 23 volume set in 1886 (NAW 3:361).

During her later years Stephens was prevented, by her contract with *Peterson's*, from writing for any other monthly magazines, but for not the weekly story papers. Thus, in the 1860s, she began to make extensive contributions to them (Eastman 40). Many of the writers of dime novels contributed to weekly story papers. Perhaps it was this connection which led Erastus Beadle to approach the grand dame of American fiction for the publication rights to her old serial, *Malaeska*. Or perhaps he discussed his ideas for marketing dime novels with her when he negotiated the right to reprint, as a pamphlet, Victor Hugo's letter on John Brown and her reply, both of which had been printed in the *New York Express*.<sup>13</sup> Whatever influenced him, his instincts were right. *Malaeska* sold over 300,000 copies, 30,000 within weeks of the initial issue (Stern and Rose 1139). Quickly capitalizing on this financial bonanza, Beadle published *Myra, The Child of Adoption* by Stephens as Dime Novel # 3. Altogether Stephens wrote eight dime novels – all featuring women in leading roles, and all but two with Indian women characters and intermarriage plots.

### **Stephens' Knowledge of American Indians**

Exactly what sparked Stephens' interest in Native Americans is not known. No existing records indicate she ever had any personal contact with them, either on her trips West or in her early life. Among her papers at the New York Public Library is a list of Indian words with their English translations in her own handwriting. Before writing "Mary Derwent," she spent time living on the island

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where most of the action takes place (Harper 125). According to Eastman, she also interviewed some of the descendants of those who escaped the 1778 massacre to get her facts about the battle which took place there (57). Because she was so well read, it is likely that Stephens had read one or more of the ethnohistorical accounts of various Native American tribes published in the antebellum period. Even if she did not read Schoolcraft, Catlin, or Heckewelder, it is likely that she read excerpts of their books in the reviews that appeared in the *North American Review* or in other literary magazines of the day. Most likely, she read the stories and articles published in those magazines which listed her as editor, whether or not she actually had editorial duties.<sup>14</sup> During the antebellum period, most issues of popular American magazines featured at least one story, poem, or article about Indians (Clemmons 41), so Stephens had a wide array of opportunities to study how Indians were represented in both fiction and nonfiction. Furthermore, the newspapers were replete with articles on Indians, especially their violent clashes with whites.

However, to be well read about Indians in the nineteenth century was not necessarily to be well informed about Native Americans. As Gould, Pearce, Berkhofer, and many other twentieth-century scholars have demonstrated, even purportedly factual accounts about Native Americans from this period were imbued with racial prejudices, and conclusions were generally based on the ethnocentric biases of the writers. Berkhofer ponders whether scholars today can accurately distinguish between ethnocentrism and racism of writers in the nineteenth-century, a time when science viewed biology and culture as linked (55). Although early in the century, many felt that the Indians were culturally

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deprived and could improve with education and contact with white civilization, gradually, "race" became the operative word, not just in informal articles for lay audiences, but in scientific reports as well. Even writers who viewed Indians as noble and supported their causes saw them as "savage" in comparison to white civilization and repeated many of the negative stereotypes in their works. At this distance, it is difficult for us to comprehend the pervasiveness of such bigoted representations, but a proper historical perspective can help clarify how white authors such as Stephens came to represent Indians in fiction.

### Race and Scientific Discourse

Most accounts of Native American life during mid-century were not written by professional anthropologists, but by Indian agents, missionaries, and explorers. Professional anthropology was not established in this country until the later decades of the century. Even the earlier Bureau of Ethnology, a division of the Smithsonian Institution, was not established until 1879, although the American Ethnological Society was formed in 1842 (Carr 151,154). Many of those who worked for the Bureau were not trained as anthropologists, nor did they have the perspective of the "Boasian emphasis on subjectivity" (Carr 148).<sup>15</sup> So most of those who went out among native tribes to write of their lives and cultures had no professional guidelines. Their only models were the writings of other amateurs who preceded them. As Pearce reminds us, we need to be aware of "how hard it is for us to find a place in our world for societies which achieve their ends in ways which seem to deny the fundamental moral, social, and political hypotheses of our society" (105). Thus, in his discussion of early anthropological studies of the Indian, Pearce concludes that "in a nineteenth-

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century milieu the savage, as known in stern fact, could and did prove, savagism, progress, and the manifest destiny of American civilization" (105-6). In other words, those who studied Indians and their cultures were blind to the effects of their own ideologies on the conclusions they reached in their reports.

The career of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (1793-1864), whose numerous books and articles on American Indians were, from first publication, virtually never out of print during the antebellum period, exemplifies this attitude.<sup>16</sup> He attended college where he was trained as a natural scientist and geologist. By 1820, when he accompanied Lewis Cass as a geologist on an expedition to explore the Lake Superior region of the Northwest Territory, he had already become interested in the lives and cultures of Native Americans. He was appointed Indian agent of the Upper Midwest in 1822, a position he held until 1836. In 1832 he led the expedition that located the sources of the Mississippi River, and from 1836 to 1841 he served as superintendent of Indian affairs for Michigan. During this period, he used his office and travels to study natives' lives, concentrating on their oral literature – myths and traditions – and what he called the "savage mentality" (Pearce 120). He began publishing his findings in 1826 in *The Muzziniegian or Literary Voyager*, a journal he founded, and, in 1839, he compiled these materials into a two-volume publication, *Algic Researches, Comprising Inquiries Respecting the Mental Characteristics of the North American Indians* (Clements 53). Even though this work did not gain a wide audience on first publication, literary notices and reviews helped publicize his work; moreover, he developed a series of lectures based on his findings on the grammar of Indian languages, for which the French Institute awarded him a gold

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medal (McAleer 18). He also began to publish his findings as shorter articles in magazines such as the *Southern Literary Messenger* and *Knickerbocker*. He soon gained enough recognition to be commissioned by the State of New York to research and report on Indian antiquities of that area.

Although he was not trained as an ethnologist nor anthropologist, because of his scientific background, Schoolcraft attempted to approach his topic systematically. After he had established his credentials as a serious scholar of Indians, he was commissioned by the federal government to complete an ambitious survey of all Native American tribes in the United States. This was published in six volumes as *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (1851-57). Schoolcraft undoubtedly considered himself sympathetic to Native Americans. However, despite his marriage in 1823 to an Ojibway woman, Jane Johnston, or Obahbahmwawagezhegoqua (meaning "the sound which stars make rushing through the sky") (Bellfy 294), he could not rise above his belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race.<sup>17</sup> His comments in the preface to his six-volume history demonstrate both his ethnocentric biases and his ambivalence toward Native Americans:

Mistaken in his belief in a system of gods of the elements – misconceiving the whole plan of industrial prosperity and happiness – wrong in his conceptions of the social duties of life, and doubly wrong in his notions of death and eternity, he yet approves himself to the best sensibilities of the human heart, by the strong exhibition of those ties which bind a father to his children, and link whole forest communities in the indissoluble bonds of brotherhood. (1:ix-x)

By the time Schoolcraft published this first volume, his name as an Indian expert was well established, and consequently his findings were considered fact. To

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organize this massive research project, Schoolcraft created an extensive questionnaire with 348 main topics, which he sent to both professionals and nonprofessionals (missionaries, Indian agents, and even travelers) who might have experience with or knowledge of American Indians. But as Pearce points out, the very premise of the survey is slanted by the questionnaire Schoolcraft developed, which assumed *a priori*, that the Indians were savages and their culture, primitive (124). Schoolcraft wanted his surveyors

to find out *how* the Indians whom they knew hunted and warred; *how* loosely their society was organized; *how* brave, simple, cruel, incapable of systematic thinking they were; *how much* they clung to the immediacies of life about them; *how little* sense of progress they had. (Pearce's emphases 124-5)

Consequently, although Schoolcraft strove for accuracy in his interpretations and translations of Indian customs, beliefs, and culture, his work is marred by his own ideologies and those of his culture.

His most influential work on American literature, *Algic Researches* (1839), describes the myths and legends of Native Americans. When Longfellow published *Song of Hiawatha* in 1855, he acknowledged, both publicly and privately, that he drew heavily on Schoolcraft's work on oral legends and myths of the Indians. To increase sales, Schoolcraft subsequently revised this book to more closely resemble Longfellow's poem and republished it in 1856 as *The Myth of Hiawatha, and Other Oral Legends, Mythological and Allegoric, of the North American Indians* (Carr 139). Although Schoolcraft was deeply concerned about historical accuracy and had railed against authors who romanticized Indians in fiction, he was also a realist who recognized that Longfellow had "given prominence to [the myth]" and had used it as "one of the true sources of

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our literary independence" from Europe (Schoolcraft, cited in McAleer 13). This revised edition became a sourcebook for many American authors, providing romantic images of disappearing noble Indians and their myths such as is recorded in Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha" (13). In an 1845 review of Schoolcraft's work, American author William Gilmore Simms, who is known for his use of the frontier and Indian characters in his own fiction, urged American writers to employ Indians and their myths into their writings to help create a national literature (Scheckel 16). Ann Stephens also seems to have been familiar with Schoolcraft's work. And if she did not employ the myths Schoolcraft provided, she did use some of the Indian names that appear in his tales for her own Indian fictional characters, including Chileli and Osse'o.

While Schoolcraft was one of the most prolific ethnographers of Indians, he was by no means the only person publishing studies of Native Americans. By the antebellum period, most Americans believed the Indian was doomed to disappear because he could not adjust to an agrarian lifestyle, a point that Schoolcraft frequently bemoaned. People from many walks of life felt a sense of urgency to record the lives of the Indians before they totally disappeared. During this period Lewis Cass and Thomas McKenney (government agents), George Catlin and Karl Bodmer (artists), and many others published accounts and painted portraits of Indian life to preserve the memory of what they perceived to be a dying culture. Although the cultural customs of tribes they visited differed, their conclusions, like Schoolcraft's, matched their preconceived notions: Indians are savages, cannot withstand the coming of the white man, and are doomed to disappear to make way for a superior civilization.

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During the antebellum period, science itself was in a state of flux. It was attempting to become more professional through the establishment of professional organizations and societies and more reliable through the use of quantification and repeatable experiments. As science changed, so, too, did theories about Indians. At this point in time, when Ethnology was in its infancy and Anthropology was not yet born, one of the most prominent questions facing scientists was to explain how the Indians came to be at all. Since science was governed by Christian doctrine to a great extent at that time, the Biblical story of Adam and Eve formed the basis of monogenesis, the theory that all humankind descended from them. Native Americans were thought to be one of the lost tribes of Israel. Up to the 1830s, the theory that Native Americans' cultural inferiority could be attributed to their environment was widely accepted. Most educated people believed that with education and exposure to the superior civilization of whites, natives would eventually become "equal" to whites. However, by the 1830s, when repeated attempts to Christianize and/or civilize Native Americans failed, a new theory developed. Some scholars, such as Lewis Cass, began to suggest that Indians were inherently inferior and perhaps even a separate species (Horsman, "Scientific" 155). Although Cass was an acknowledged expert on Indians of the Old Northwest, his remarks on Native American genesis were merely speculative.

Soon, however, others began to put these ideas into a more cohesive "scientific" analysis. One of the earliest proponents of polygenesis, the idea that different races of humans have separate origins, was Dr. Charles Caldwell, a physician and, according to Horsman, "the first important phrenologist" (155). He

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contended that four separate species of humans existed, and he ranked them from highest to lowest: Caucasian, Mongolian, Indian, and African. He believed that the only way that those lower on the scale could be improved was through interbreeding. Although his ideas were in the minority when he published them in 1830, his connections to phrenology may have brought them to the attention of a man who would make them the leading theory of the 1850s.

In 1839 Samuel George Morton published *Cranium Americana*, a "scientific" study of the relative sizes of over 600 skulls to determine the brain size of American aborigines in comparison to Caucasians, Ethiopians, and Mongolians. Not surprisingly, his findings indicated that whites had the largest skull capacity, followed by Mongolians, American Indians (or "Americans" as he called them), and Ethiopians (which he considered Africans).<sup>18</sup> Morton's work was highly influential and "regarded as basic to an understanding of human racial origins until Darwin" published *Origin of Species* in 1859 (156). But for nearly 20 years, his ideas held sway. They were popularized, simplified, and expanded by later adherents. For instance, Dr. Josiah Nott, who used Morton's theories to support slavery, extended Morton's ideas to state that the smaller brains of the inferior races were especially deficient "in those parts of the brain which have been assigned to the moral and intellectual faculties" (159). As Reginald Horsman points out, what interested the popular press was that "theories of innate racial differences could be used to defend existing American circumstances and policies. The ideas of scientists on racial variety were simplified into popular justifications for [white] America's progress" (162) at the expense of Native Americans and their cultures.

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## Indians in Popular Culture

A survey of some of the nineteenth-century articles on Indians in popular magazines to which Stephens, by virtue of her position as magazine editor and author and as resident of New York City, would have had access supports this conclusion. For example, while Stephens was still a contributing editor to *Graham's Magazine*, it began a series of articles on "North American Indians," "to gather the traditions, to picture the dress, to preserve the manners of the few tribes that remain . . . before the red man has passed away forever" (26 (Feb. 1845): 92). In the first article, on Blackfeet Indians, a nostalgic tone hints at a certain sympathy for Indians. While *Graham's* accounts are much less sensational than some other magazine articles of the period, words like "savages" creep into the discussion, and sensational events, such as the killing of over 80 trapper agents in one year by the Blackfeet, are duly reported. Remarks such as "[d]uels occur often among these savages and, like the ancient Highlanders, they regard revenge as a sacred duty" (*Grahams* 26 (Mar. 1845): 136) tend to conflate all Indians into one monolithic savage figure. And lengthy negative descriptions of the scalp dance and warrior behavior in battle overshadow general physical descriptions and peacetime activities, as if to emphasize Indians' warlike behavior and their obvious differences from and inferiority to the civilized readers of *Graham's*.

More typical of magazine articles, perhaps, is a dreadful bit of ennui entitled "The Poor Indians," which appeared in *Ladies Garland and Family Wreath* in 1843 (Harris 97-8). The author praises the Indians of ancient times, comparing them to the ancient Greeks and Egyptians; he even calls them "god-

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like men." He then announces, with apparent surprise, that they were able to create their civilizations without the help of Europeans or even God, "but by the mighty workings of their own grand and intellectual souls" (97). Although whites are squarely blamed for the decline of Indians, their extinction is inevitable. "But though the last red man may sleep with his fathers, their remembrance will never die. The beautiful streams, lakes, and mountains of our land will still bear their names" (98). Although such sentimentality marks much of the fiction and poetry about Indians, it had a prominent position in non-fiction as well, particularly, as in this case, when the discussion centered on dead Indians – those who could no longer threaten the safety of whites.

On the other hand, newspaper accounts primarily described "Indian attacks" on white people. Any sentimentality in these reports directed readers' sympathies toward the white victims of Indian atrocities. For example, an article in the *New York Times* (30 Nov. 1857) reports that a group of 130 emigrants from Missouri and Arkansas were "massacred by the Indians." Outnumbered and outmaneuvered, they "sent out a flag of truce, borne by a little girl," but when they gave themselves up to the savages," they were "immediately . . . slaughtered, with the exception of 15 infant children." Reports of Indian attacks in the *New York Times* outnumber any other type of story concerning Native Americans between 1830-1860.<sup>19</sup>

Another news story in the *New York Times* (27 July 1850) rehashes a previous account of an Indian attack in 1847 on a small settlement in Oregon and adds new information. It claims that the young women who had been taken prisoner in that attack had been "compelled to become the wives of some of the

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chiefs." Such sensational news stories defined those Indians who were still living not only as different from whites but as dangerous to them. In *Race at Bay: New York Times Editorials on "the Indian Problem," 1860-1900*, Robert Hays suggests that "editorials offered a more reliable account of frontier news than did the columns of the *Times* and other newspapers in the East" because news correspondents were often prejudiced or based their reports on ill-informed locals (xxv). He notes that often the *Times* had to issue retractions of such sensational reports, but retractions rarely get the notice that an original news story does (xxv). The resulting picture that Stephens and most New Yorkers and other urban dwellers obtained from the *New York Times* was that surviving Indians constituted a threat to white settlement of the West.

In "The Newspaper Indian," John Coward posits that such representations cannot be attributed to racial prejudice alone (28). He explains how "routine newsmaking practices" of the nineteenth-century contributed to the emphasis placed on negative stereotypes of Indians in the press. First of all, "news," by definition, includes extraordinary events such as "massacres" but excludes ordinary, everyday life so that cultural practices of Native Americans were rarely explained, perpetuating whites' misinterpretations and distorted images of native life (18-19). Second, in order to be successful at meaning-making, journalism must reduce "social reality . . . to a limited number of meaningful categories" (16). Experiences beyond the ken of readers are "framed" in ways to make them intelligible. This means "organiz[ing] reality in ways which do not question the fundamental assumptions of society" (16). Thus Indians are portrayed according to the stereotypes whites had developed over the centuries. Third, since "news

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tends to follow the patterns preferred by the predominant forces in a given society," the negative stereotype of the evil Indian prevails because it better serves the interests of whites (14). As Coward points out, newspapers "do more than simply reflect their culture, they order society and produce (and reinforce) meanings which are consonant with the prevailing attitudes within the culture" (15). Thus, while avowing a commitment to objective and truthful reporting, the news media both create and are created by the ideology of their culture, making their lofty ideals fruitless.

Perhaps even more damaging than the negative news reports about Indians is what the press failed to report. The mutilation of whites killed by Indians, frequently described in graphic detail, was offered as evidence of their savagery. No attempts were made to explain this practice "in terms of Native American beliefs about the afterlife" (21) so that readers might begin to understand why natives behaved in this manner. Acts of desperation, such as the Indian mother who poisoned her children rather than let them become captives of whites, were used to exemplify Indians' subhuman capacities. Yet similar acts by whites "were frequently provided a disclaimer by the press" (39). While the sufferings of whites at the hands of Indians received wide coverage, the suffering of Indians often went unreported. For example, the death of 100,000 Indians from smallpox was reported in an 1838 issue of *Western Weekly Review*, with no additional comment or explanation. Not only does this type of reporting neglect the human suffering involved, Coward contends that it lent "credence to the belief in the biological inferiority of Indians" (49). Another report on a smallpox outbreak among Indians bemoaned the "utterly ruined" trade of

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whites in the fur business. Reports of "massacres" of whites by Indians were often exaggerated and sometimes just plain erroneous. Similar attacks by whites on Indians were rarely defined as massacres, and often went unreported or were filled with rhetoric inveighing against the stereotypical evil Indian. In other words, Indians were rarely portrayed as real people with feelings and hopes and dreams, but as one-dimensional creatures - enemies of civilization and progress.

Since many of the "facts" reported by scientists and newspapers alike blurred reality, the lines between fact and fiction also blurred. For example, in an 1847 review of a book on North American Indians, the confused critic of *Literary World* suggests that Cooper has done as much to describe the woodland Indians as Schoolcraft has done for the Indians of the lakes or Catlin has done for the Plains Indians ("Recent" 91). Cooper's fictional portrayals of Uncas and Chingachgook are equated with ethnographic studies of real Native Americans. Like newspaper reports, many of the short stories appearing in magazines featured Indian attacks on whites, again blurring reality by relying on stereotypes that reduce Indians to one-dimensional characters and by preying on unrealistic fears about the red man's threat to white women's purity. For example, a story, "The Hour of Peril," that appeared in the very first issue of *Peterson's Magazine*, and therefore may have been selected by Ann Stephens herself, concerns the fate of two young white ladies, alone in their cabin in the woods, who are attacked by "savages." The hyperbole describing one of the Indians as he is about to strike a mortal blow is worth quoting:

The Indian . . . unsheathing his tomahawk, . . . raised it aloft and whirled it in rapid, uncertain circles about his head, as if momentarily to strike his prey, yet delaying the blow, from instant to instant, to enjoy the

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agonies of his victims – and in his triumphant smile, his exulting smile, and the expression of savage pleasure imprinted on his features might be read the gratification which he felt in subjecting his victims to this fiendish torment. (Selton 20)

Such reductive stereotyping serves white interests in usurping land from the Indians, by portraying Indians as savage, less than human, unable to utilize the resources the land provides.

But of course, such reductive accounts are not the whole story. Few of these tales of frontier life bother to mention that the white pioneer characters might be trespassing on Indian lands, or that the advancement of whites was the very cause of the "vanishing" Indian, or that whites attacked Indian villages also killing innocent women and children. Because these stories were based on white ideologies, they do not just blur reality; they mask the ugly reality that the onslaught of white settlers wrought on the lives of Native Americans. Whites chopped down their forests, plowed up their prairies, and shot the game on which their lives depended, purely for sport. Helen Hunt Jackson would later tell this tale, both in fiction and nonfiction, but in the antebellum period the prevailing story reduced Native Americans to one-dimensional characters. Although readers could feel a certain sympathy for the "noble savage" – also a reductive stereotype – he was usually presented as long dead, his tale from the annals of the American past. However, the vicious ignoble savage, who was still very much alive and therefore a threat to real white people living on the frontier, was the predominant image in antebellum fiction, news, and even science. Most of the information available to white authors, especially those like Stephens who seems to have had no personal knowledge of Native Americans, created a

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reductive image that was difficult to refute because the institutions of white culture – from art and science to news and fiction – all supported that image. Such widespread endorsement of the Indian as ignoble savage resulted in a reification of that image so that if an author wished to present frontier life in verisimilitude, she was almost compelled to employ it.

## **Literature Review**

### **Nineteenth-century Assessments of Stephens' Work**

Both nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics have tried to condemn Stephens as part of the "scribbling mob of women writers" that Hawthorne damned. And in a sense she was. Stephens was prolific and successful, both of which Hawthorne apparently resented because it affected his own sales. But Stephens was not a careless writer. A review of her papers at New York Public Library reveals her careful revision of poetry and prose. For example, several drafts of her carefully crafted response to Victor Hugo's letter on John Brown testify to the gravity with which she approached this particular project. Because it was indeed a political situation and because she cared so ardently about her womanly reputation, she may have put extra effort into refining this crucial piece in which she admits "womanly intervention." But she also worked hard on other projects. John Neal reports that in a letter dated 23 July 1843, Stephens wrote him, "There is one paragraph which you found fault with, which I wrote over thirty two times" (her emphasis, *Portland* 70). Edgar Allan Poe's assessment of her writing ability in the "Literati," while not wholly complimentary, recognizes her strengths:

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She is fond of the bold, striking, trenchant – in a word, of the melodramatic, she has a quick appreciation of the picturesque, and is not unskillful in delineations of character. . . . Her style is what critics usually term "powerful," but lacks real power through its verbosity and floridity. It is generally turgid – even bombastic – involved, needlessly parenthetical, and superabundant in epithets, although these latter are usually well-chosen. . . . Her faults, nevertheless, in both manner and matter, belong to the effervescence of high talent, if not exactly of genius. . . . She seizes adroitly upon salient incidents and presents them with a vividness to the eye. (*Godey's* 33: 15).

Read in context, these comments illustrate that Stephens was, in part, being criticized for writing "like a woman." For as Baym, Harris, Kelley and many other critics have demonstrated, women writers in the mid-nineteenth-century were limited both in subject and style to that which was defined as feminine. Such restrictions resulted in women writers engaging in circumlocutions and circumventions which carried double-coded messages: an overt message ostensibly supporting the status quo, and a more radical implied message, which advocated expanding the boundaries or even eliminating altogether the idea of so-called "woman's sphere" which limited women's options. Ironically, Stephens' work has also been praised as "more masculine and condensed" than most "female writers" (*Cyclopaedia* 10: 20). No critical overview of Stephens' works has yet been attempted. Her work has been subjected to misreadings that have been repeated by later critics, and her prodigious output in so many genres over a 52 year career make general assessment difficult.

Contradictory assessments which plague Ann Stephens' literary reputation today began in her own day. In her lifetime, Stephens was primarily known for her "bold pen,"<sup>20</sup> her "powers of description,"<sup>21</sup> and her ability to "bring out, in a proper manner, the *light* and *shade* of human nature."<sup>22</sup> She was frequently

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equated with Sir Walter Scott, both for her descriptive talent and her preference for historical romances. Most critics of her time also noted the moral tone of her works, one even suggested that readers "rise from the perusal of her writings with new aspirations to do good" (*ALM* June 1848: 342). However, many critics attempted to duplicate Poe's assessment by reproducing his language – particularly the adjectives "bold," "florid," and "verbose" – lifting words out of context, thereby negating the substance of his overall assessment. Stephens was also criticized, as were many other women writers, "for improbabilities attached either to a character of some event selected from the rest of the book as too extravagant for belief" (Stephens, "Preface" *The Curse of Gold*). Ironically, other reviewers, echoing the words used to defend fiction reading in the early nineteenth-century, reported that many of her stories "are founded in fact" (Peterson 235).

### Twentieth-Century Criticism

Stephens' biography appears in several biographical dictionaries published in the early twentieth century, a distinction not accorded most women writers of the nineteenth-century. However, as American Literature began to be established as a serious discipline and textbooks and literary dictionaries began to be published, her name was nowhere to be found. Nor did her woman-centered stories fit the various themes that American literary critics developed to define what constituted American "literature." In her Introduction to *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers* (1993), Joyce W. Warren eloquently explains this phenomenon:

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the belief that the individual man was an end in himself underlay nineteenth-century American thought. . . . And since American individualism applied only to the white male, the individual that forms the center of American literature has been universalized as white and male. (3)

She notes that women's fiction tends to focus on "others" rather than the "male individualist" (3), countering a sacred myth of American culture. She continues:

more than any other single factor, it is [women authors'] rejection of the hierarchies and exclusions of the dominant culture and their consequent focus upon and portrayal of the perspective of people that the dominant culture had defined as "other" that has kept these works out of the canon. (3-4)

She charges that Richard Chase in his still critically influential book, *The American Novel and Its Traditions* (1957), "had to ignore the American women novelists of the nineteenth century in order to derive his definition" of "the dominant tradition of the American novel" (fn. 13, 22).

In his 1940 survey, *The Sentimental Novel in America*, Herbert Ross Brown makes several citations of Stephens' work. Of course, his intent is to support current definitions of sentimental, including how "[m]any of the titles [he examines] . . . deserve to appear on any list of the world's worst fiction" (vii). Thus a citation here was no honor. But with the rise of feminist literary theory, new ways of seeing sentimental literature developed. Warren explains that the term "sentimental" had been transformed into a derogatory term and was often simply equated with "women's writing." She asserts, "[s]entimentality requires an awareness of other people, a mental dialogue or displacement" (11). It requires a sympathy, a reaching out toward others, the exact opposite of individualism. Thus, sentimental writing, and by extension all women's writing, had been dismissed.

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Stephens' literary resurrection got its first serious consideration when feminist critic Nina Baym devoted one-third of a chapter in her 1978 ovular work, *Woman's Fiction*, to a discussion of Stephens' novels. Because of the significance of Baym's book on changes in the canon of American Literature, and particularly on the recovery of women writers, other critics began to review Stephens' writings. However, in the early days of the feminist revolution in literary criticism, no rubrics for evaluating women's fiction existed, yet it was impossible to describe women's writings using current literary practices which privileged male-centered themes. Consequently, during the early days of recovery, feminist literary critics tended to focus on writers such as Fanny Fern, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman who developed strong feminist themes in their fiction. Previous assessments of less radical proponents of expanded options for nineteenth-century women often went unchallenged in the rush to recover literary foremothers whose politics more closely matched those of twentieth-century feminists. Thus, even Baym, who recognizes some radical tendencies in Stephens, noting, for example, that she "had no qualms about miscegenation" (181), criticizes her lack of commitment to women's causes:

Stephens stressed the sensational effects, the suspense and excitement generated by action, rather than any theoretical implications of her action for woman's status. . . . Unfortunately for the reader with an interest in the depiction of women, Stephens does not pursue the implications of this scheme [of portraying "true women" as "vapid"] once she has set it up. Her provocative formulations are lost in the elaboration of a gratuitous fantasy about secret identities, lost parents, separated spouses carelessly imposed on the story. (181-2)

Because Baym's work was so influential in the early days of recovery work, such

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an appraisal of Stephens' work may have led critics to accept other negative reviews of Stephens' writing. For example, in *American Women Writers* (1982), the first major reassessment of American women writers since the second women's movement, critic Juliann Fleenor, using the few sources then available, contends that the women in Stephens' fiction "are acted upon by others; or they wait for some lover to arrive" (163). Fleenor concludes that "[Stephens'] work can no longer find acceptance" (164). A similar deprecating evaluation of Stephens appeared in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* in 1988.

Madeleine Stern, who had been writing extensively on Stephens since the early 1960s, drew a different portrait, although she tended to concentrate on Stephens' claim to glory as the author of the first dime novel. In *We the Women: Career Firsts of Nineteenth-Century America*, Stern sets straight many of the inaccuracies in Stephens' biography. Stern was also the first critic to note the feminist tendencies in Stephens' work. As early as 1979, she was pointing out the feminist implications of Stephens' eponymous character, Malaeska, in the first dime novel. As Stern points out, Malaeska's strength, courage, and independence combine with her selfless submission to white male patriarchy to provide "an intriguing combination of 19th-century self-abnegation and 19th-century feminist power" ("Stephens and the Dime Novel" 3274). Stern is also the first to suggest that at least some of Stephens' writings "still ha[ve] relevance" today (3274).

A "Legacy Profile" of Stephens finally appeared in 1995, an important step in the recovery process. In this profile, Paola Gemme stresses the ambivalence Stephens' writings reveal concerning women's place in nineteenth-century

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society. Gemme observes that "Stephens' very conservative statements may be intended to pacify the qualms of hostile readers rather than being a sincere expression of her mind" (50). Although she finds Stephens' writings to be "classist and racist," Gemme believes that

the documentary value of her work renders her a valuable subject of investigation for the contemporary scholar, who will find in her novels both the conservative ideology of the bourgeoisie and the dreams of power of its discontented women. (53)

### Recent Work on Stephens' Indian Stories

Because women's novels of the nineteenth century are still in the process of being recovered, we lack adequate knowledge of female versions of the myth of the frontier. Lately, however, because her works are at the nexus of increased interest in popular culture studies and discourses on race and gender, Stephens' frontier novels have been featured in several recent dissertations, as well as a critical article by Gemme. The concept of female myths or fantasies of the frontier is not directly addressed by any of these works; however, several allude to its existence. All discuss the intertwining topics of gender and race in the fiction of Stephens and other authors. Significantly, only one of these works considers the last two books of Stephens' trilogy – the most overtly racially prejudiced of Stephens' Indian stories.

In "Constructive Narratives of American Culture and Identity: Beadles Dime Novels, 1860-1870," Carol Ruth Carney examines Stephens' dime novels in context with other women's dime novels. She argues that this popular genre was not intended just for males but that those written by women have themes and tropes specifically for women readers. Carney contends that these dime

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novels "acted as an information network, and should be viewed as constructive narratives intended to inform, educate, and empower a vast contemporary reading audience" (Abstract). She also sets out to correct other misconceived notions about women characters in dime novels. For example, Henry Nash Smith, in his still influential *Virgin Land*, asserts that the first "aggressive female" character is a male creation (Aneola in *The Forest Princess*, 1871), but he ignores creations by women authors which preceded Aneola by a decade, including Mahaska, one of Stephens' major characters. Carney maintains that dime novels are written in accessible language to "deliver information to their contemporary readers about race and gender relations, about women's roles in the home and in society, about what women could expect in settling the frontier, about the uniqueness of being an American" (9). Carney's insistence that woman-authored dime novels were addressed to women readers is crucial to understanding Stephens' narratives.

June Johnson Bube's dissertation comes closest to suggesting a female-centered myth of the frontier. She devotes a chapter to Stephens' dime novels in "'No True Woman': Conflicted Female Subjectivities in Women's Popular 19th-Century Western Adventure Tales," examining how women-authored texts imply that "[t]he extreme conditions of western settlement afford opportunity for . . . disruptive female behavior that repudiates the subjectivity and social roles prescribed for women by the Cult of True Womanhood" (Abstract). Bube argues "that the conjunction of adventure story, domestic novel, and sensational tale in women's border tales makes them a complex vehicle for nineteenth-century women's frustration and anger over gender roles and women's social position"

(6). She asserts that "at their deepest structural levels, women's border tales enact a curious dynamic; they invoke the ideal of true womanhood and then critique it, undermine it, and evacuate it" (7). Bube is especially intrigued by Stephens' "appropriation of masculine agency" by her female characters. She argues that "Stephens uses the frontier as a distancing mechanism – a removal in time and place" to "safely" discuss and challenge current gender prescriptions that hamper women's opportunities to fully develop and use their talents and abilities (30). Bube's analysis of the complexities involved in women's border tales helps explicate ostensible discrepancies in Stephens' tales of Indian women, particularly Bube's recognition that while certain characters may inhabit the role of "true womanhood," the overall story negates the desirability of such a position in society.

In "The Indian in the Mirror: White Women Writers and the Native American Other," Caroline Woidat makes a similar point, but reaches a different conclusion. She examines the works of canonical authors, as well as Stephens and other popular writers, to investigate how female Indian characters in fiction may represent "a projection of the white author's own identity" (Abstract). Woidat contends that white women authors used American Indians "as a means of redefining their [own] gender" (6), demonstrating how their writings "engage in debate over the racial politics of Indian-white relations from a dual perspective of power (connected with the privileges of their race and class) and powerlessness (arising from their marginalization as women)" (7). For Woidat, the mixture of gender and race in women's Indian literature differs from men's because of their differing circumstances. She believes that the image of the Indian princess



stirred women's imaginations, blending both the refinement and virtues of civilization with the freedom and power of life with nature, or a "more 'natural' life" (8). Native American women were portrayed as alternatives for white women who were reduced to overly delicate creatures in civilization. Woidat contends that the simple dichotomy of "racist" or "sympathetic" is too simplistic to represent white authors' perspectives on Native Americans. According to Woidat, white "women authors' perceptions of American Indians have been filtered through a consciousness of their own marginalization, inextricably linking racial and sexual politics" (16). Using primarily *Mary Derwent* and *Esther*, she reads Ann Stephens' American Indian tales as a defense of "a more conservative domestic ideology," warning against "radical changes in gender relations" (133). While I disagree with her conclusions about Stephens, Woidat's contention that a simple dichotomy of "racist" or "sympathetic" is too simplistic to discuss white women's inscriptions of Indians guides my analysis of the complexities and contexts of Stephens' frontier novels.

Theresa Strouth Gaul takes a different approach. Her dissertation, "A Native Tradition: Relocating the Indian in American Literature, 1820-40" examines the changing attitudes toward the "potential offered by the subject of American Indians for American writers" between 1820-40 (1). Gaul suggests that the authors she examines, including Ann Stephens, used anthropological discourses to find answers to discuss the Indian problem. She believes that anthropology allowed them to view Indians "through a series of binaries: self/other, us/them, civilized/savage, observer/participant" (4). Gaul contends that Stephens emphasized the "us" side of the binary, "considering the costs of racial

divisiveness for 'us' and especially for white women" (5). Using *Malaeska* and *Mary Derwent* as examples, Gaul argues that "Stephens uses the genres of the woman's novel and the sentimental novel to explore the gendered implications of anthropological models of race relations" (6). Gaul insists that "Stephens critiques the trends toward identifying white women as the anchor of 'civilization' and enlisting women as the agents of civilizing efforts" (6). Although I disagree with this claim, Gaul's analysis of anthropological discourses on race in the nineteenth century helps clarify Stephens' use of them.

The differences between male- and female-authored works on Indian-white relationships are examined by Patricia Matteson in her dissertation, "A Stain on the Blood": 'Indian Loving' and Nineteenth-Century Women's Literary Strategies." She views women's fiction as more "Indian-loving" than men's. Indian-loving narratives create a different vision of Indian-white relations, moving away from the "killer hero" toward a "more feminized, kinder love fantasy" (3). The main gendered difference is sexual union and family-making between white and Indian. According to Matteson, males avoid this issue, whereas female authors rely on it to such an extent that it becomes a trope (7). Matteson contends that women authors considered the disruption of family to be a more serious moral offense than crossing racial boundaries and suggests that this emphasis on family "undermine[s] stereotypic images of bloodthirsty savages" (8). She defines an "Indian-loving" story as one that "works to reproduce and perpetuate the value of 'Indianness' by establishing respectful familial relations between Anglo and Native, and does not eliminate or erase the integrity of Native culture and ethnicity" (110). Matteson acknowledges that women's perspectives

on intermarriage are ambivalent and that even those who register high on the Indian-loving scale may be essentialist in their approach to race, but she wiggles out of this problem by suggesting that "the desire for the ideal" might be heightened "by the pain of its removal" (11). Because intermarriage is so rare in Indian stories, Matteson asserts such portrayals are "iconoclastic," yet she places Stephens' novels in the murky category of "Indian-romancing," somewhere between Indian-hating and Indian-loving. Predictably, although she discusses *Ahmo*, the first novel of the *Mahaska* trilogy, she avoids any mention of the last two books in the series because they would undermine her theory about Stephens' place on the Indian-loving scale. Matteson's principal contribution to my work is pointing out the primacy of the family in stories of intermarriage; this idea helps demonstrate the complexity of Stephens' portrayals and explicates how she appealed to her women readers.

In "Rewriting the Indian Tale: Science, Politics, and the Evolution of Ann Stephens's Indian Romances," Paola Gemme contends that certain changes in the narrative closures of Stephens' novels depicting Native Americans in the 1830s and the 1850s are directly related to the changes in scientific theories regarding the possibility of their assimilation into white "civilization." She particularly focuses on *Mary Derwent* and *Malaeska* because both were originally published in the 1830s and republished in expanded and revised versions in the late 1850s or early 60s. The earlier versions tend toward a more sympathetic portrayal of Native Americans. *Mary Derwent* suggests that assimilation is possible, while *Malaeska* suggests it is not. But Gemme explains this apparent contradiction by demonstrating that the earlier theory (that environment was the

primary difference between the races) and the later ethnographic theory (that the races were distinct and that the white race was superior to all others) were both current during the late 1830s. She further contends that "Stephens's Indian novels . . . not only echoed but circulated the racial theories by which they were informed" (378). In other words she sees Stephens' work as a conduit of contemporary beliefs about Native Americans. Although I disagree with her ultimate conclusion that Stephens' Indian novels are "a legitimization of contemporary Indian policy, which pursued the segregation rather than the integration of Native Americans" (384), Gemme's article is useful in elucidating how different cultural contexts affect Stephens' representations of Indians.

Although Stephens was the subject of a 1950 Master's Thesis, that work was completed in the days when the word "sentimental" was used as an invective to discredit women's writing. Stephens has never been the primary topic of any dissertation or book. Thus her work has not been fully explored.

### **Methodology**

Because of the complicated circumstances surrounding the creation of literary texts, a variety of methods are needed to help reveal the social contexts in which women wrote and the inscriptions of those social situations into texts. As a white middle-class woman writer in nineteenth-century America, Ann Stephens both affected, and was affected by, the ideologies of gender that pervaded the culture. Since there are no indications that she had personal experience with real Native Americans, her ideas about them were necessarily shaped by the political, scientific, and popular discourses circulating at the time. To understand how these ideologies got translated in her Indian stories, feminist

theory, particularly that which deals with the intersections of race and gender, and post-colonial theory, which helps reveal how members of the dominant culture view those outside it as "other," provide useful analytical tools for how race and gender are represented in her texts. But this study will primarily draw on rhetorical criticism, which specifically studies how writers use rhetoric to present their views on matters of significance to their society, providing readers, as Burke tells us, with "equipment for living" in such social situations (*PLF* 61). Such an approach can facilitate our understandings of the purposes for which Stephens creates these fictional worlds in which whites and Indians intermarry.

#### Burkean Rhetorical Criticism

Long before feminist literary critics such as Carolyn Karcher, Jane Tompkins, and Lora Romero argued that women's literature is a response to the social and cultural concerns of its time, Kenneth Burke (1941) asserted that "critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose" (*PLF* 1). Burke's dramatism, developed over many years in a series of theoretical works, is "a technique of analysis of language and of thought as basically modes of action rather than a means of conveying information" (my emphasis, *LASA* 54). It is a philosophy of language in which language is not merely a means of defining or naming, but of action – action that is directly concerned with people's lived situation, in keeping with Burke's belief that creative works are strategies for dealing with life's conundrums, providing readers with ways of "encompassing . . . situations" (*PLF* 1).

Dramatism is a "grammar," an analytical tool for critics, to examine the motives behind purposeful (i.e., motivated) human action, including language, in

terms of drama. Dramatism can be applied to action in real lived situations or in fictional worlds. The dramatistic pentad of terms developed by Burke for analyzing human action consists of *act*, *scene*, *agent*, *agency*, and *purpose*. Burke's pentad starts with the act because dramatism is, at its core, a philosophy of human action and because without an act, there is nothing to be analyzed. In this pentad, the *act* is what takes place, the *scene* is the background of the act, the *agent* is who performs the act, the *agency* is the means by which the act is performed, and the *purpose* is the reason for the act. Although this system may appear to replicate the journalistic questions of who, what, where, when, how, and why, Burke's method is much more complex.

As Burke explains, the terms cannot be reduced to just one, because one is not enough to explain the motivations for a given act (*GM* xxi); however, the other terms may be deduced from one term because of their consubstantial nature as parts of the whole. Like the fingers on a hand the five terms are united, yet separate. An act cannot happen without a scene in which it occurs, an agent who commits it, and so forth. Burke uses the term "ratio" to describe the relationships between the five elements of the pentad. For example, in the scene-act ratio, the scene contains the act, and therefore the act should be consistent with the scene (3). In Burke's own words, "the scene is a fit 'container' for the act, expressing in fixed properties the same quality that the action expresses in terms of development" (3). In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, Legree's plantation, deep in the wilderness, far from civilization, is a fit container for his vicious (uncivilized) acts against his slaves because the isolation of the place creates a sense of hopelessness on the part of the slaves; Legree,

who is later revealed to be a coward, can inflict punishment without fear of reprisal. The scene reinforces the act. Ratios apply to the other pairs of terms as well (scene-agent, scene-agency, scene-purpose, act agent, act-agency, and so forth), but only the scene acts as a container.

How the critic envisions the scene is crucial to the interpretation of motives. Scene can be as general as "society" or as specific as "3:30 PM, Tuesday, May 9, 2000." Neither is more correct, but how scene is designated "affects the scope of the critic's interpretation of motive" (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 185). As Burke explains: "In the selection of terms for describing a scene, one automatically prescribes the range of acts that will seem reasonable, implicit, or necessary in that situation" ("Dramatism" 450). In Stephens' novel, *Malaeska*, for example, scenes in which the Indian heroine, dressed in her native garments, appears in the city or the white settlements, her very presence is considered out of place by white inhabitants who see her. Adding to the usefulness and versatility of the pentad, all of the terms, while distinct, also merge into one another, reflecting the ambiguity of any human action. Burke offers the example of the judge whose actions are modified by donning judicial robes. The robes can be interpreted scenically as influencing action. Does the office make the man or the man make the office? Burke considers such ambiguities in the pentadic terms as potential sites of transformation. In the agent-act ratio, for example, if an agent performs an act that appears inconsistent with his/her character, either the act has resulted in some transformation of character of the agent or the agent is more fully revealed through this act. Thus, dramatism provides critics with tools to help reveal the complexities and ambiguities of acts

being analyzed, and such uncertainties indicate a possible transformation has occurred.

Using the dramatistic grammar to examine all the possible ratios in a given text helps the critic discover which term the author stresses most, which in turn leads toward the term most implicated as motivation for the act. In Stephens' frontier fiction this term is "agent." Dramatistic analysis of these works demonstrates that the scene remains unchanged in her novels – Indians still vanish and gender relations remain static. Stephens does not see how this situation/scene can change. However, she does believe that people can change their attitudes, thus her emphasis on agent/character. Stephens' Indian tales question contemporary concepts of race and gender as too limited in scope, grounded in stereotypes such as "savage" and "true woman," which reduce the human potential of Indians and women. Because she wants people to change their "idea" of what an Indian is and what a woman should be, she creates Indian women characters whose nature and actions refute such stereotypes. Thus, the locus of Stephens' motive is in the agent who can help "encompass the situation" of race and gender relations in nineteenth-century America, thereby helping to transform it.

Transformation and consubstantiality are key concepts in Burke's system. He sees rhetoric as "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (*RM* 43). Thus, the transformation that Stephens seeks, in the Burkean scheme, becomes a kind of identification (consubstantiality) between the reader and the writer based on shared beliefs about race and gender. This Burkean analysis suggests that



Stephens writes Indian tales to question certain nineteenth-century cultural beliefs about race and gender that narrow the scope of potentiality for both Indians and women in the hope that some of her readers will identify with her perspectives, which envision wider acceptance of Indians and increased spheres of action for women. However, the latter goal is primary for Stephens; while she is concerned about the plight of Indians, she is more directly affected by ideologies of gender which limit women's potential.

Contemporary ideologies and stereotypes by which Indians and women were measured preserved patriarchal power, confining both Indians and women to circumscribed areas of action. These limitations influence the writing circumstances and create an anomalous situation for a woman writer in the nineteenth-century America. To deal with this dilemma and in keeping with her position as a "proper" lady (and therefore suitable moral guide), Stephens does not interfere in the masculine sphere of politics by trying to change laws, nor does she attempt to meddle in government policies. Instead, adopting a stance already espoused by such respected women writers as Sarah Hale and Catharine Beecher, Stephens uses her fiction to suggest that women can help change attitudes about race and gender through moral suasion. Using the language of domesticity, a language with which print media intended for middle-class women in America was saturated, Stephens connects with her women readers on this issue. She tries to identify her views with those of her readers, using a language that underlies their consubstantial position in society. As Burke points out, "[y]ou persuade a man (sic) only insofar as you talk his language, by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with

his" (Burke's emphasis, *RM* 55). In other words, Burke believes that identification is sometimes more descriptive of the rhetorical situation than is persuasion (*RM* xiv).

This conception of rhetoric is much more in keeping with feminist rhetorical principles because it is less agonistic. And it is also a more accurate description of the rhetorical situation of nineteenth-century white middle-class women writers whose position in society could be tarnished if they engaged in debates over public policy. Stephens herself expressed her anxiety on this account in a letter to George Graham in 1842: "I know I may be feeling this subject too sensitively but . . . no one knows how keenly I feel anything calculated to represent me as unwomanly" (Stephens' emphasis, " qtd. in Eastman 70). Instead of risking the censure of their contemporaries, many women authors like Ann Stephens devised stories which presented their views on important issues in the hope of "conveying images of truth and beauty from the heart of the writer to the heart of the reader" (Stephens, "Genius" 89).

Burke's theories are especially useful in analyzing how Stephens presents her concerns about the social situations she tries to "encompass" in her writing. In "Literature as Equipment for Living," he explains that all literature provides strategies for dealing with life's situations. In fact Burke declares that literature is the "strategic naming of a situation" – recurrent problems in a society that need naming (*PLF* 300). To be able to provide readers with "equipment for living," authors must be able to present these situations realistically. Burke insists that an author "cannot accurately know how things *will be*, what is promising and what is menacing, unless [she] knows how things *are*" (*PLF* 298). Stephens

employs her knowledge of relations between whites and Native Americans to depict the likely problems that will occur when people from different cultures meet and marry.

Burke's dramatism helps critics decipher these situations. As Barry Brummett explains,

Burke picks drama as the central metaphor for his method because of his insistence that any method should represent rather than reduce its subject matter. To *represent* something is to sum up its essence; and the dramatic aspects of what people do and say are the *essence* of human action. (480)

For Burke the plot, because it reveals motivated action, represents the essence of a discourse. Therefore "one key Burkean method stemming from his dramatic metaphor is his insight that the content or 'terminology' of whole discourses or groups of discourses will imply, or will seem to be based upon a *representative anecdote*" (Brummett 480). Burke develops the concept of the representative anecdote to facilitate critics' ability to discern the situation being named within the discourse.

Identification of the representative anecdote underlying a discourse allows the critic "sum up the essence of a culture's values, concerns, and interests in regard to some real-life issues or problems" (482). Brummett explains that "the representative anecdote is . . . a method that taps what a culture *most* deeply fears and hopes, and how that culture confronts those concerns symbolically" (483). Thus, a representative anecdote will appear in many different types of discourses because it represents a method of discussing certain real life problems with which a society is struggling.

The ensuing analysis will delineate some of the strategies that Stephens employs as she represents Indians and their intermarriages with whites and illustrate how these strategies are designed to help readers see these issues from her point of view. Through domestic scenes and images of cultural values, such as motherhood and religion, with which they can identify and through agents who embody those identifications, Stephens suggests that readers can transform the situation of women and Native Americans. They can do so, she infers, by changing their own attitudes (and the attitudes of those they know) about race and gender.

### Feminist Criticism

The ways in which "gender identity is inextricably linked to and even determined by racial identity" (254) are clearly demonstrated by Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham in her ovular article, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race." She notes the difficulties of past definitions of race; science, law, and literature have all failed at defining it because race is actually a social construction through which groups are distinguished from and positioned in relation to one another (253). Using contemporary perceptions of blacks as an example, Higgenbotham illustrates that "the metaphoric and metonymic identification of social welfare with the black population by the American public has resulted in tremendous generalization about the supposed unwillingness of blacks to work" (254). Such combinations of ideas prove that "race serves as a . . . 'metalanguage' since it speaks about and lends meaning to a host of terms and expressions . . . that would otherwise fall outside the referential domain of race" (255). In other words, "race not only tends to subsume other sets of social

relations, namely, gender and class, but it blurs and disguises, suppresses and negates its own complex interplay with the very social relations it envelops" (255). Given the rigid discourses on race in mid-nineteenth-century America, particularly as it pertains to Native Americans, Higgenbotham's observations seem especially apropos. In Stephens' representations of Indians, racial traits or "Indianly" behavior are generally manifested as masculine attributes. For instance, the mixed-blood character Mahaska, who chooses Indian life when she is rejected by whites, becomes aggressive, war-like, and vengeful – all characteristics associated with the male ignoble savage. This understanding of race as a metalanguage will facilitate analysis of Stephens' inscriptions of race in her fictional characters.

But Stephens also creates noble Indian characters, both female and male. And for these characters, a different set of circumstances applies. Because these noble Indian women model techniques for white women to expand their realm of possibility while remaining "womanly," gender takes precedence over race. In these cases, therefore, gender tends to operate as a metalanguage, subsuming race. But race is a factor. Stephens uses race to discuss gender. The Indian woman models behavior to expand white women's horizons; if she is too Indianly, her conduct is no longer an acceptable example for white women. Stephens' few noble Indian men tend to be feminized, as though nobility were quintessentially linked to women and femininity. Rather than being actual character traits, this feminization may be more connected to female fantasies of possibility afforded by the frontier. To accomplish the goal of achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict between white and red cultures, men must join

with women in the project and process of amalgamation. They must also refuse to resort to violence as a solution. Part of what makes the noble savage noble is that he is no threat to whites. Softening him, feminizing him, makes him more worthy of emulation, makes peaceful resolutions more likely.

Feminist understandings of nineteenth-century ideologies regarding women's place and purpose in society are also crucial to this study. Although the "true womanhood ideal" as explicated by Barbara Welter is so well known as to obviate the need for further explanation, the "real womanhood ideal" as delineated by Frances B. Cogan in *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* is less well known. Using both fiction and conduct literature as her guide, Cogan demonstrates that the true womanhood ideal had many opponents, not just proto-feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but doctors and health reformers, conservative women like Catharine Beecher and Sarah J. Hale, and many authors, all of whom advocated a more active, healthy, realistic life-style for women. Cogan suggests that this real womanhood ideal developed in the 1840s in opposition to the pale, passive, pathetic true womanhood ideal as a "middle-of-the-road path" between the radical changes advocated by the leaders of the woman's movement and the restricted life offered by true womanhood. The real womanhood ideal stressed self-reliance and self-support. Real women were healthy, strong, active, physically fit, and educated enough to be self-sufficient. They had common sense and knew how to "balance between demands of home, family, intellect, heart, and soul" (82). Rather than being considered detrimental to their reproductive health, liberal arts education was regarded an attribute that "gave a

woman breadth of vision and helped develop character" (96). As if to demonstrate Cogan's insistence that the ideals of true womanhood and real womanhood coexisted, Stephens represents both ideals in her writing, but she favors a more active womanhood closely resembling the real womanhood ideal that Cogan describes.

### Post-Colonial Theory

As a controversial topic in the nineteenth century, discussions of interracial marriage require more than an acknowledgment of race. Stephens represents differences between the races in some detail; in fact, she often uses race as the "agency" by which acts are performed. In characters of mixed blood, whiteness is generally presented as a mitigating factor struggling to overcome barbarous tendencies inherited from the native parent. Even the "noble savage" is still a savage; in other words, under Stephens' pen Native Americans are viewed as "other." Post-colonial theory provides a method for examining how the dominant culture has represented the colonized, how it views and treats the colonized as "others." And no people were more thoroughly colonized than Native Americans. As S. Elizabeth Bird points out, "[h]owever they are pictured, Indians are the quintessential Other, whose role is to be the object of the White/colonialist gaze" (7). Stephens cannot escape her position as an educated, fairly wealthy white woman when she picks up her pen to write about Indians. Dana Nelson demonstrates in "Sympathy as Strategy in *Hope Leslie*" that even in sympathetic portrayals of native life, American authors, as members of the colonizing race or group, were unable to completely rid themselves of the ideologies that contribute to the conflict of cultures.

Post-colonial theory, particularly the work of Edward Said, will strengthen my rhetorical analysis by providing lenses to understand representations of otherness. Using Foucault's ideas about the connections between knowledge/power and discourses/institutions, Said developed the concept of "Orientalism" – the idea that the West (as a powerful institution) constructed a discourse (which created knowledge) of the East (Orient) as "other." Similar to Pearce's findings in his study of *Savagism and Civilization*, Said posits that this construction of the East as "Orient" allows the West to concomitantly present itself as the positive standard against the negative alien other it creates. For Said, representation of others is a troublesome issue because it implies that the people being represented cannot represent themselves. Representation is supposedly related to truth, but, because such representation is always a substitution, Said views it as a deformation.

No easy answers to the dilemma of representation exist, as Linda Alcoff points out in "The Problem of Speaking for Others." However, awareness of the factors that affect representation can facilitate a more complete analysis of Stephens' inscriptions of Indians as "other." The writer's position not only affects her representations but, as Alcoff insists, her location is "epistemically salient" because it affects how she understands the world (7). In other words, an author's representations of "others" are mediated through her ideologies, based on her position within the society from which and to which she is writing. Thus, Stephens' position as a woman in a patriarchal society is just as salient as her position as a white person in a racist society or as an upper middle-class person in a capitalist society. Yet each position affects her representations in differing,



sometimes conflicting, ways. Moreover, since the writer can never know the "true selves" of those she represents – a significant point given Stephens' limited knowledge of Native Americans – her representation of them becomes problematic. She is "conferring information about them" and "participating in the construction of their subject-positions" to/for her readers (9).

Discursive context is another issue affecting representation. Because literature is one way that people come to understand their world, fiction functions as an important venue for learning about people and places beyond personal knowledge and experience. Therefore, fictional representations of peoples beyond the ken of readers take on added import. Using Foucault's concept of "rituals of speaking," Alcoff points out that these rituals are "constitutive of meaning, the meaning of the words spoken [or written] as well as of the event" (12). Thus both author and reader participate in deriving meaning. As a result:

meaning must be understood as plural and shifting, since a single text can engender diverse meanings given diverse contexts. Not only what is emphasized, noticed, and how it is understood will be affected by the location of both speaker and hearer, but the truth-value or epistemic status will be affected. (12-13)

Alcoff stresses that when critics evaluate authors' representations of others, "we need to analyze the probable or actual effects of the words on the discursive and material context" (26). Thus, post-colonial theory helps complicate representation of others by bringing together the factors impinging upon its inscription and reception. Stephens' representations of Indians do not occur in a vacuum; not only were there other fictional accounts of Indians, but representations of Indians were central to political, religious, scientific, and journalistic discourses. These discourses are part of the scene in which

Stephens, as agent, acts (writes), creating stories (agency) in which she presents her views on the Indian question and the woman question (purpose). Stephens' multiple positions within the culture, as well as those of her readers, and the culture itself "bear on" the effects of her inscriptions of Indians.

These methods – rhetorical, feminist, and post-colonial criticism – all insist on cultural contextualization. All approach texts in multifaceted ways, providing a variety of perspectives so that simplistic answers to complex questions can be avoided. However, each also provides special lenses with which to view particular issues. In combination with post-colonial theory and feminist criticism, Burke's rhetorical criticism provides a flexible interdisciplinary approach to the salient issues in Ann Stephens' fictional representations of Indians and their intermarriages with whites. Taken together, these analytical methods provide a versatile means to explicate the intricacies of Stephens' inscriptions as well as the complexities of the situation in which she wrote.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*; Susan K. Harris, *19th-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies*; Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*; Carolyn Karcher, "Reconceiving Nineteenth-Century American Literature: The Challenge of Women Writers."

<sup>2</sup> For example, in Stephens' best-selling novel, *Fashion and Famine* (1854), a story of Christian redemption, the female protagonist is a fallen woman who is saved by her father's love and sacrifice. Unlike many of the novels of the period, at the end of the story, she does not marry. Instead, 35 years before Hull-House, she opens her mansion to the "educated poor" – mistress of her mansion and mistress of herself. Although her new vocation takes place within her home, "she . . . literally go[es] out by the wayside and hedges, forcing the poor to come in and partake of her hospitality" (422). In other words, she moves in circles beyond her sphere, yet is offered by Stephens as an exemplary woman.

<sup>3</sup> In particular, Herbert Ross Brown's misreading of Stephens' *The Old Homestead* has been cited to paint Stephens as a conservative who believed that women are innately dependent upon men. Brown quotes a few lines from the novel: "Women were born to look upward with their hearts and cling to others for their support - men were made to give this support. You cannot change places and be happy!" to support his claim. Aunt Hannah issues this caveat to the young heroine, Mary, when she suggests that, to enable them to marry, she can support Joseph, her fiancé. Taking this admonition verbatim not only means missing the irony, it involves misreading the stated facts. Just prior to this exchange Aunt Hannah explains: "You are a nice girl, Mary, . . . and mean right, I know. But Joseph will never be content to let you support him if you had the strength [which the entire novel has shown she does]. He is very manly and proud with all his softness" (413). Thus, the "you" who "cannot change places and be happy" is not woman, but man and his false pride. When Mary suggests that Joseph will not object because she is "like his sister," Aunt Hannah, who does almost all the work around the old homestead with little help from her brother, Uncle Nat, replies, "But sisters do not support brothers, and men do not like to take favors where they ought to give them" (413). Such overt irony seems difficult to overlook, and,

when taken into account, changes the entire nature of Stephens' "clinging women." Yet, even though many of Brown's assessments have been refuted by later feminist critics, his interpretation of Stephens has never been challenged; in fact, as recently as 1988, it was being cited to bolster claims that she was a conservative on women's issues. See *DLB*, vol. 73: 299-305 and *AWW*, vol. 4: 163-64.

<sup>4</sup> From a poem dedicated to Stephens on her embarkation on a grand tour of Europe, cited in Stern, *We, The Women* 40.

<sup>5</sup> Outworkers were provided the raw materials to produce goods at a piece rate, usually very low, in their own homes or in sub-contractors' shops. According to historian Jeanne Boydston, "[i]n 1850, almost half of New York City craft workers fell into this category" (*Home and Work* 59).

<sup>6</sup> According to a letter from Stephens' nephew in the Stephens' manuscript collection at the New York Public Library, Stephens' daughter was overwhelmed by her mother's collection of papers. Apparently Stephens kept "everything." When she died her daughter and Mrs. Charles Peterson, a personal friend of Stephens, went through the papers and destroyed most of them. The nephew claimed that had he known what she intended, he would have prevented it.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Humphreys wrote the first published version of the Indian captivity of Mrs. Jemima Howe. Apparently she had met Israel Putnam after her release and related her story to him. Humphreys, who has a long list of published writings including narrative histories as well as poetry, included her story in his *The Life and Heroic Exploits of Israel Putnam* (1788), who was a Major-General in the Continental Army. Humphreys himself was a Colonel and served as an aid-de-camp to George Washington.

<sup>8</sup> It is ironic that Stephens gives Neal so much public credit for her success because he is one of the people responsible for some of the misinformation about Stephens' career, which helped to deprecate her accomplishments. While he clearly credits her as a "woman of great original genius," he also wrongly notes that *Portland Magazine* only lasted for one volume, and he mentions that *Ladies Companion* eventually failed but does not indicate that these failures took place after Stephens left the companies. See *Portland Illustrated* (69-70) for more detail.

<sup>9</sup> Stephens wrote several articles defending women's literary careers. These pieces reveal her ambivalence about her conflicting roles. See especially "Literary Ladies" and "Women of Genius."

<sup>10</sup> Because Stephens was so consumed with her public reputation as a true woman, this study uses that concept, as explicated by Welter, in analyzing how Stephens portrays the "womanliness" of her female characters. Yet Stephens, like so many other women writers of the time, felt that submission to male authority prevented women from utilizing their God-given talents to the best effect, and thus advocated a more active womanhood, similar to the Real Womanhood ideal that Cogan develops.

<sup>11</sup> During the early years of the magazine, it changed titles frequently. Peterson often tried to capitalize on the success of *Godey's Lady's Book*, by such designations as *The Lady's World* and to appeal to the public's growing nationalism by including "National" in their titles, such as *Ladies National Magazine* and *Peterson's National Ladies Magazine*. However, to avoid confusion, it will simply be referred to as *Peterson's Magazine*, regardless of the name on the title page for that particular issue. For a more complete account of *Peterson's Magazine*, see Mott, *A History of American Magazines* 2: 306-311.

<sup>12</sup> I have adopted the nomenclature of Carolyn Karcher who recommends using the term "social novels" to refer to women's fiction of the nineteenth century. She believes that they interrogate how social ills affected people's daily lives. Furthermore, she stresses how these novels directly criticize society, attacking patriarchal privilege and depicting the resources women have to survive in such repressive environments. See "Reconceiving Nineteenth-Century American Literature" for more detail.

<sup>13</sup> In 1859 Victor Hugo wrote a letter, published in the *New York Express*, condemning America for sentencing John Brown to death for his attack on Harper's Ferry. Ann Stephens wrote a response, which was also published in the *Express*. Although she prefaces her remarks with an apologia for "womanly interference," she nonetheless strongly refutes Hugo's arguments.

<sup>14</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, magazines frequently paid well known authors simply for the privilege of listing their name as members of the editorial staff. This appears to be the case at

*Graham's Magazine*, see Mott, *History of American Magazines* 1: 544-549. However, Stephens did edit *Portland Magazine*, *Ladies Companion*, *Mrs. Stephens' Monthly Magazine*, and *Peterson's Magazine*, especially during its early years.

<sup>15</sup> Franz Boas, an influential anthropologist in the early twentieth century as President of the American Anthropological Association, was opposed to the hierarchical classification of races and cultures of early ethnologists who set out to understand the savage or primitive mind, which puts the ethnologist in a position of superiority over his/her subjects. Instead he felt that "there is a tendency [on the part of scientists] to give biological reality to classifications arrived at quite irrationally" (*Primitive* 36). He believed that no race is inherently superior to another, and "the idea of race, as applied to human types, is vague" (254). He concluded that no pure races exist in humans (254).

<sup>16</sup> Despite the ethnocentric ideologies that fill his government reports, they remain important sources of nineteenth-century Native American life and culture.

<sup>17</sup> Carr suggests that Schoolcraft's conversion to fundamentalist Presbyterianism and his first wife's drug addiction "darkened his view of the Indian character" (121). Johnston died in 1842, and Schoolcraft married Mary Howard from South Carolina in 1847. Howard, in 1860, wrote *The Black Gauntlet*, a novel defending slavery and exposing what she considered to be the problems of intermarriage and racial mixing. Scheik conjectures that the fictional Mr. Walsingloss, who marries an Indian, may be "a surrogate for Schoolcraft" (21). Howard's racist beliefs may have influenced Schoolcraft's thinking.

<sup>18</sup> In 1977, Stephen Jay Gould repeated his experiments. Although he could "find no evidence of conscious fraud," he regards Morton's data as misleading because they were "finagled" (102). For example, Morton failed to take cranium differences within the American groups into consideration, and "his sample is strongly biased by an overrepresentation of an extreme group – the small-brained Peruvians" (105). Consequently, these results lower the total numbers for the American group, when each subgroup should have been averaged and then the average of all subgroups should have been considered the mean number for the American groups. Similar finagling occurred in the Caucasian group. Gould's recalculated figures of 83.79

cubic inches for Americans and 84.45 for Caucasians results in no appreciable difference in brain size.

<sup>19</sup> This assertion is based on articles listed in the *New York Times Historical Index*.

Coward, in his survey of 31 nineteenth-century American newspapers, demonstrates that Indian attacks form the bulk of most newspaper articles about Indians.

<sup>20</sup> Caroline May, *The American Female Poets with Biographical and Critical Notices*, p. 316.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Peterson, "Our Contributors," *Graham's Magazine*, p. 234.

<sup>22</sup> "Mrs. Ann S. Stephens," *American Literary Magazine*, unsigned critical biography, although the author is probably Charles Peterson, as he uses the phrase "light and shade" in other critical assessments of Stephens.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RACE, GENDER, AND INTERMARRIAGE IN *MALAESKA: INDIAN WIFE OF THE WHITE HUNTER***

*Malaeska*, in part because of its status as the first dime novel, has received more critical attention than any other work by Stephens. Its overt plea against racial prejudice fits the sensibilities of today's readers, which may explain its recovery and republication in 1997, while most of Stephens' other works remain unknown.<sup>1</sup> Because racial prejudice continues to plague our society, the story of interracial marriage and its attendant problems remains compelling. However, today's readers are often disconcerted by the abrupt and apparently racist ending which states that Malaeska died "the broken-hearted victim of an unnatural marriage" (163).

In this chapter I focus on Malaeska's marriage to William Danforth and provide reasons that have little to do with race as to why Stephens might consider it unnatural. I examine the tale as a female-centered myth, provide a synopsis of the plot, and then begin a dramatistic analysis which demonstrates the complexities of the issues involved and elucidates Stephens' multifaceted representations of race and gender. Specifically, I use dramatism to investigate Stephens' representations of race, gender, and intermarriage to reveal her Burkean motivations, that is how she would "encompass and confront" the situation of racial and gender prejudice, how her novel provides readers with "equipment for living."



## ***Malaeska* as a Female-Centered Myth**

*Malaeska* shares many similarities with the sentimental novel and the historical melodrama, but Stephens appears to emphasize its mythical qualities. The narrative is introduced as an "Indian legend," told to the female narrator by an "old gentleman," a "staunch old republican farmer of the last century" (61).<sup>2</sup> To counter British criticism that American culture was inferior, American authors of the early National period often used the framed story, which tends to historicize a narrative by providing it with a lineage, as a device to substantiate the existence of an American historical literary tradition. However, by filtering it from the male authority through the woman narrator, Stephens genders the tale (Carney 70). While she ostensibly gets her author/ity from a traditional patriarch, she acknowledges that the narrative she tells may not be "exactly as he told it" (*Malaeska* 61). She is going to tell the tale from a woman's point of view. Because women and Native Americans shared a marginal status in nineteenth-century American society (Burke would consider this common marginality a form of consubstantiality), these hints that the story is told from a woman's perspective might lead readers of her day to expect the narrator to exhibit a certain sympathy/empathy between women and Indians, such as that seen in the novels of Child and Sedgwick (Baym "Stories"). In fact, in Stephens' rendition of the legend, white male patriarchy, the very source of her authority, is denounced for racial bigotry and for usurping woman's authority in the home.

By twice referring to the story as a "legend," Stephens authorizes her narrative as part of the American historical and literary tradition while she simultaneously documents it as myth. Placing the story in the pre-Revolutionary

period, she creates a distance in time and space that helps set it apart from reality, giving it a mystical, mythical quality. Further defining the story as myth, Stephens exploits typical plot scenarios from traditional frontier myths, inverting/subverting them to tell a very different story. For example, Malaeska's long years in the Danforth Manhattan home are described in terms similar to captivity narratives. Echoing the words of white captives such as Mary Rowlandson, Stephens describes Malaeska as being "caged" in "strange lands," surrounded by "enemies," and thinking "of her own people incessantly" (94).

Long after details of the story have faded from memory, readers remember the powerful character of Malaeska. Like nearly all mythological heroes, the resilient Malaeska is larger than life. She is stronger than any other woman, and she endures more than most could bear. Because she embodies the best of civilized life as well as the freedom of the wilderness, Malaeska represents an ideal for Stephens' white women readers. As Stephens explains, "[t]he Indian woman . . . in herself combined all that was strong, picturesque, and imaginative in savage life, with the delicacy, sweetness, and refinement which follows in the train of civilization" (124). Woidat suggests that white women authors' imaginations were stirred by the image of the Indian princess who "blend[ed] both the refinement and virtues of civilization with the freedom and power of life with nature, or a more 'natural' life" (8). Such characters offered an attractive alternative to the overly delicate creature of the "true" womanhood ideology. Their race allowed them freedoms and strengths deemed inappropriate for white "ladies"; thus, the combination of race and gender transforms gender and creates a new model of womanhood. Malaeska has all

the qualities of the "true" woman – piety, purity, domesticity, and even submissiveness to male authority – but her physical strength, freedom of movement, and independence transform the "true" woman into a new "real" woman who has the potential for greater control over her life. This female myth offers a new definition of womanhood. What makes Malaeska larger than life is this embryonic promise of a new, more active womanhood ideal, which developed in the decade after "Malaeska" was first published (Cogan 23).

Although the role of womanhood is conspicuous in this female myth, Malaeska does have traits in common with her male counterparts. Like the male heroes in the traditional frontier myth, she mediates between the worlds of "civilization" and "savagery," but she belongs in neither world. As male heroes typically do, she wrangles, albeit unsuccessfully, with the villain. But, because Malaeska is a woman, she also differs dramatically from these heroes. White male mediators generally have no ties to civilization, as evidenced by such traits as their illiteracy and a lack of romantic alliances (Slotkin, *Fatal* 105). Malaeska is both literate and romantically attached. While these characteristics tie her to white civilization, her race marks her as "other" in the world of whites. Thus, both gender and race affect the role of heroine.

In this female-centered myth of the frontier, women occupy all the major roles, but, with the exception of one minor character, none of the male characters is admirable. The women, even those in minor roles, are primarily depicted as mediators and peace-makers. On the other hand, the men are principally portrayed as aggressors who disrupt social bonds. Although the women characters' field of action is often limited to the domestic realm, the implications

of their acts, particularly those of Malaeska and Sarah, extend far beyond the home into the larger world. Ironically, their rhetoric, their words, remains symbolic (unacted) action: their intercession is never completely successful because men fail to heed their words. For example, when Malaeska takes her son to Manhattan to her husband's family, the boy's grandfather threatens to keep him and to send Malaeska "back to her tribe." But his wife intervenes pleading, "Do not separate mother and child!" (93). Although he ostensibly acquiesces, in actuality, he separates mother and child, even though both remain under his roof, by deliberately preventing Malaeska from "mothering" her child. Through women's words and their attempts to ameliorate the annihilating effects of racial and gender hierarchy, Stephens criticizes patriarchal ways of being and thinking as divisive and posits that other ways of being and thinking can and do exist. Even though most male characters in the story act on the presumption that race and gender are immutable realities, Stephens creates a fictional world in which the boundaries of race and gender are not stable, but ever-shifting.

### **Plot Summary**

In 1860 Beadle paid Stephens \$250 for the right to publish a revised and expanded version of *Malaeska* as the first dime novel. It had originally been published as a three-part serial in the 1839 volume of *Ladies Companion*, the magazine she edited upon her arrival in New York. The dime novel version is not simply a reprint of the original serial as some sources erroneously report (Johannsen 31; Berkhofer 99). It has six new chapters that not only add new narratives to the novel but radically change its tone. Whether the dime novel publishers recommended the plot changes or whether they simply indicated they

wanted a story of about 125 pages is unknown. They may have had a hand in the changes because, as the publishing industry grew in America, publishers became arbiters of popular taste (Stem, "Role" 5). Yet Stephens' own knowledge of popular tastes could have been a factor as well. Regardless of their origins, the revisions of the dime novel version make Malaeska more Indianly and less competent; she is also displaced as the only heroine, sharing that role with Sarah, a young white woman.

In the original serial, "Malaeska," most of the action centers on the eponymous protagonist. It is the tale of a beautiful Indian maiden who marries William Danforth, a wealthy white hunter, and bears his son. Danforth and his companions from the white settlement go off on a hunt. One of the hunters, Arthur Jones, becomes separated from the others. When a "half-naked savage" shoots at him, narrowly missing his head, Jones shoots back, killing the Indian instantly. Because Danforth had been seen in the vicinity of the dead Indian, Malaeska's tribe accuses him of the murder. Thus begin hostilities between the Indians and settlers. Danforth is fatally wounded in the ensuing battle, and, while in his death throes, extracts a promise from Malaeska that she will go to his parents to "learn to love the white man's God" so that she may join him in "another world" (83). After burying both him and her father, also killed in the battle, the resilient Malaeska sets out for Manhattan in a canoe with her infant son, also named William. During the trip, which took "many days," she manages to "occasionally kill a bird, which her true arrow seldom failed to bring down" (87-8) and to otherwise provide for their needs.

Once she arrives at her destination, her self-reliance dissolves into self-effacement as Danforth's bigoted father accepts the boy but not his mother. Malaeska is reduced to the status of a servant and forbidden to reveal her true relationship to the boy. The boy's grandmother tries to ease Malaeska's pain through small kindnesses and secret access to the boy. Malaeska remains in the Danforth household where she learns "the beautiful and simple truths of the Gospel" from the old lady (*Ladies Companion* 10 (1839): 244), but meanwhile her son is taught to hate the Indians. At this point the dime novel version adds a significant incident not included in the original 1839 serial: Malaeska tries, unsuccessfully, to kidnap her son to take him back to a life in the wilderness with the Indians. Later, when young Danforth is sent to Europe to complete his education, Malaeska returns to the woods alone. In the dime novel version, it is at this point that she learns of the white man's God from a missionary.

Meanwhile, Danforth's hunting companion, Arthur Jones, has married his sweetheart, Martha Fellows. They have several children and live in the same settlement, which has now become a small village. Sarah, their oldest girl, befriends Malaeska, who lives in a wigwam nearby. From Malaeska, Sarah learns the true meaning of Christianity. At eighteen, Sarah is sent to the city to a finishing school. In the dime novel version, this episode is expanded from a few sentences to three chapters in which Sarah rescues an elderly man who lives next door to the school when he has a stroke in the garden. The elderly man turns out to be the younger William Danforth's grandfather. Through the grandparents Sarah meets the young man, just returned from Europe, and they fall in love. Although Mrs. Danforth suggests to her husband that William should

know the truth of his heritage, her husband replies "It is too late . . . . It would crush him forever" (141). So, they both die without ever telling William his true parentage.

Sarah and William return to her home to meet her parents before they are wed. Sarah asks William to accompany her on a visit to see her old Indian friend, but he refuses with an outburst that he "hates the whole race!" Sarah is mystified at his attitude and rationalizes that her friend is "white ... in everything but color" (151). But William, explaining that he cannot overcome the prejudice he learned from his grandfather, remains adamant. So Sarah goes off alone. Malaeska is overjoyed to see her friend again, but when she learns that Sarah is engaged to William Danforth she becomes wild with excitement. Assured that his grandparents are dead, Malaeska realizes she is no longer required to keep silent. She gives Sarah a message for young Danforth, asking him to meet her later that night. On a spot overlooking Catskill Creek, Malaeska reveals her true identity to William. Unable to bear the humiliation of mixed blood, young Danforth commits suicide by throwing himself off the embankment into the creek below. On his grave the next day Malaeska dies of a broken heart, which is the melodramatic ending of the serial. In the dime novel, readers learn that Sarah never marries but lives a "useful" but "lonely" life. In the closing scene, she witnesses the destruction of the old Danforth mansion to make way for progress in the form of "a block of stores, the usual fate of every relic of old time" (164). Such an ending seems to indicate that Stephens does not completely accept the concept of white civilization as necessarily superior to Native American ways of being.

## **Dramatistic Analysis of *Malaeska***

In *Malaeska*, the debate over nature/nurture, which appears in other contemporary discourses on race, forms the basis of the representative anecdote. In terms of plot, or dramatistic action, the representative anecdote is not just that racial hatred devastates all it touches but that if nurture produces the primary differences between the races, then such prejudice is counterproductive because it does nothing to resolve those differences. With this as the underlying anecdote, Stephens criticizes patriarchy for pursuing a policy of racial prejudice and for usurping women's nurturing responsibilities in the home.

In Burkean terms, Stephens "sizes up" the situations of racial and gender prejudice and strategically inscribes them in her fiction to lead readers to develop an attitude toward them consistent with her purpose. Or as Burke phrases it: thinking of literature as equipment for living means

consider[ing] works of art . . . as strategies for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off the evil eye, for purification, propitiation, and desanctification, consolation and vengeance, admonition and exhortation, implicit commands or instructions. (304)

In the fictional world she creates, Stephens selects the allies and enemies and in doing so gives the readers implicit instructions on the proper means for dealing with similar situations in real life. A pentadic examination of the primary characters and their acts reveals her intent:

Agent = Malaeska; co-agent = Sarah; counteragent = all Danforth men,  
especially the elder Mr. Danforth.

Agency = race/gender characteristics.



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**Act = demonstrating that racial prejudice and ideologies which prevent women from taking active roles in society are ruinous principles.**

**Scene = racial/gender relations in nineteenth-century America.**

**Purpose = to demonstrate the destructive effects of racial and gender prejudice.**

**Malaeska is the primary agent and clearly an ally. Her racial and gender characteristics are the agency through which Stephens reveals the injustice of current ideologies about race and gender. John Danforth, as the oldest, wealthiest, and most powerful male in the story, represents patriarchy and is the counteragent (enemy) against whom Malaeska struggles. Sarah, who similarly opposes the racial prejudice of Malaeska's son, William, becomes a co-agent.**

**Thus, *Malaeska* is a female-centered myth about the potential for human beings of both sexes and different races to live in harmony. Through her Indian woman heroine, Stephens questions the boundaries of race and gender.**

**However, since Stephens' own views of race and gender are complex and conflicted, certain ambiguities appear in her textual inscriptions. Most of these ambiguities are directly related to the nature/nurture debate about race that forms the foundation of the representative anecdote – whether biology or environment has the greatest influence on a person's ultimate character. Ultimately, the scene of racial and gender prejudice remains unchanged in Stephens' narrative, realistically reflecting American society of the nineteenth century. However, her story hints at the possible transformation of this situation, if men would be more receptive to women's words and ideas.**

## **Representations of Race**

Representations of Indian women in nineteenth-century American fiction have been investigated by several scholars in recent years, in an attempt to codify them and provide critics with a vocabulary with which to make generalized statements about them. In one of the most ambitious of these studies, Asebrit Sundquist analyzed the works of 56 authors (including Stephens) and their representations of 134 Indian women characters. Using quantitative analysis, she classified the characters according to stereotypes, which, as she observes, "tend to conform to nineteenth-century prevailing stereotypes of white women, and hence, contain few specific 'Indian' features" (17). She employs three major categories of stereotypes – sirens, angels, and mothers – each of which she further subdivides for more specific characterization. In her review of the history of the word "stereotype," she notes that it originally applied to the printing plates that could be used over and over without variation. More importantly she explains that

Walter Lippman was the first to introduce the concept of stereotypy to the social sciences and to point out the double function of this phenomenon: on the one hand stereotypes are easy to detect and categorize, therefore they make life easier to understand and cope with as they constitute some of the supports most people probably need to feel secure. On the other hand, they contribute to prejudice, falsification, and distortion" (19).

As Sundquist points out, stereotyping refers to the "*repetition of a pattern*" (20). She believes that in literature these patterns "may become fallacious" and that they are often used to create or maintain opinions about people belonging to the groups being represented (20). However, repetition of stereotypes also promotes their credibility, making it difficult for writers such as Stephens to avoid

stereotypes because both readers and writers rely on such codes to convey a wealth of information (including value judgments) in a few words.

Because of the quantitative nature of her work, Sundquist has to place each character into only one category, even though the character may fit into more than one classification. For example, for the purposes of quantification, Malaeska is assigned to the category of "Good Mother," but in her discussion Sundquist explains that Malaeska "is the typical Angel who turns typical Good Mother when she marries" (85). Since Angels and Good Mothers have many characteristics in common, this is not surprising. Echoing the cardinal virtues for "true [white] women," Good Mothers are virtuous, self-sacrificing, and devoted to husband and children. Angels are young, beautiful, sincere, and "have the ability to exercise a strong moral influence on people" (111). Even more interesting, given Malaeska's fate, both Angels and Good Mothers are associated with themes of death, victimization, and frustration of their desires (94; 111).

Although Linda Clemmons does not specifically analyze the Malaeska character, her study complements Sundquist's findings. In "'Nature Was Her Lady's Book': Ladies Magazines, American Indians, and Gender, 1820-1859," Clemmons' review of articles and stories about American Indians reveals that Indian women were typically portrayed as "beautiful, pious, thrifty, as well as diligent housekeepers devoted to their families" (40). In findings similar to those of other scholars (Sundquist; Carney; Woidat), Clemmons concludes that the Indian women in these stories "are not exotic princesses, but idealized versions of nineteenth-century white women" (52). She contends that these

characterizations are based, not on real Native Americans and their cultures, but "on a mythical view of how Indians are supposed to live their lives" (52).

### Malaeska

Stephens' representations of Malaeska fit precisely within these parameters or stereotypes. In her first appearance in the story, before readers are aware that the "young woman" is the heroine Malaeska, they learn that "[h]er laugh was as musical as a bird song . . . , her long hair glowed like the wing of a raven, and her motion was as graceful as an untamed gazelle" (64). Not only is she beautiful, but through animal metaphors she is closely linked to nature as befits a "noble savage." Most delineations of Malaeska's race are of this type – images which link Malaeska to all that is benign and sublime in nature, similar to Cooper's descriptions of Chingachgook. But even though Stephens' story crusades against the evils wrought by racism, her ideas about Indians are imbued with the ideologies of her culture. While Stephens consciously may be trying to present positive assessments of Indians, her descriptions frequently contain negative connotations. Furthermore, as post-colonial theorists such as Homi Bhabba have demonstrated, stereotypical portrayals always have negative implications and assert power over colonized "others" by attempting to fix them as unchanging and totally knowable (Childs and Williams 123-5). Even those standard representations that connect Malaeska with nature and portray her as good and beautiful are limiting because there is an implication that she is nothing more – a simple girl with no real depth.

Although the story of *Malaeska* is an ardent plea to end the destructive effects of racial prejudice, Stephens' representations of race often depend on

standard stereotypes. The tensions that result from these seemingly incompatible means and ends reveal the ambivalence of Stephens herself on the subject of race. Even the heroine, Malaeska, does not escape negative stereotyping. For example, when Malaeska begins to plan taking her child back to her own people, Stephens describes her actions in terms of race: "The stealthy art of warfare against an enemy awoke" in her (*Malaeska* 97), and with "native reticence" and "native craft, Malaeska made her preparations" (97). In other words, because Malaeska's acts involve deception, even though they may be for a good cause, they are incompatible with prevailing notions of womanhood; therefore, Stephens attributes them to her Indian heritage. Stephens even suggests that "but for the blood of her husband, which ran through the old man's vein, [Malaeska] would have given way to the savage hate of her people, against the household in which she had been so unhappy" (97). These references to Malaeska's race reveal that, even as Stephens struggles through theme and purpose to plead for an end to racial prejudice, she cannot escape some of the very ideologies and stereotypes on which such prejudice is based.

Certain racial characteristics, although they sometimes mark Malaeska as "other," primarily serve to allow her to go boldly where white women might fear to tread. Malaeska has a freedom of movement and an independence unavailable to white women living in the cities and towns of nineteenth-century America. For instance, her trips back and forth between the wilderness and Manhattan alone or accompanied only by her young son were adventures not open to white women, not because they were incapable, but because such exploits were considered inappropriate for proper ladies. The home was woman's sphere. A

woman appearing in public, unaccompanied by a male escort, could invite the intimation that she was a "public" woman, a woman of ill repute, a prostitute. As Mary Ryan deftly illustrates in her classic study, *Women in Public*, women in public places were generally seen as either sexually/morally dangerous or as sexually/morally endangered (68). Furthermore, she emphasizes that "the most dangerous female inhabitant of the public streets was singled out by her [dark] skin color" (73).

Stephens seems to refute these assumptions about unaccompanied women in public, as she establishes that Malaeska is more endangered than dangerous. Both race and sex make Malaeska the object of the white gaze. In the scene in which the newly widowed Indian woman first appears on the streets of Manhattan, "in full costume and with the proud, free tread of her race" (*Malaeska* 89), residents stare at her as she tries to find someone who will help her locate her in-laws. Stephens reports that Malaeska "had caught much of the delicacy and refinement of civilized life from her husband, and her manner became startled and fawn-like beneath the rude gaze of passers-by. The modest blood burned in her cheek" (89). Even though her race allows her to move freely about the country in ways that white women cannot, both her race and sex mark her as "other" in the streets of New York. Stephens squarely places the blame for this discrimination on the shoulders of whites. Their act, staring, is almost predatory, causing Malaeska to blush; whereas her act, walking the streets of Manhattan, is an innocent desire to fulfill a promise to her dying husband. Thus, in this scene, Malaeska is represented as more civilized than the whites who supposedly represent "civilization."

Malaeska's blush is but one indication of her "whitening" in the novel. Gaul believes that "Malaeska's assumption of whiteness throughout the narrative serves the interests of the dominant white culture" (126). Many whites, Stephens included, viewed the assimilation of Indians into white culture as the best solution for both whites and Indians. Malaeska adopts the faith of whites, and she learns to read, both of which are primary assimilation projects for Native Americans initiated by whites from the first contact. It is these white skills and beliefs that allow her to teach the Gospel to young Sarah and to elicit "[a]ll the latent properties of [her] warm, youthful, heart, and of [her] superior intellect" (*Malaeska* 124). Malaeska's face shows "more than the remains of beauty; the poetry of warm, deep feeling, shed a loveliness over it seldom witnessed on the brow of a savage" (124). Whitening makes Malaeska more attractive, more acceptable. In fact, Clemmons reports that articles and stories about Indians in nineteenth-century magazines "focused on the similarities between the two cultures" and "portrayed Indian women as being assimilated into white culture" (40). Sarah defends Malaeska's race with these revealing words: "I have no predilection for savages as a race . . . but you make one exception, may I also not be allowed a favorite especially as she is a white in education, feeling, everything but color?" (151) Such a sentiment raises the question of whether Malaeska could be a role model for young women if she were less white.

Although Malaeska embodies the intertwining of race and gender, at times Stephens appears to attempt to separate the two elements. In fact, when she wishes to emphasize Malaeska's womanly traits, she does so at the expense of her Indianly traits. By accentuating the gendered facets of Malaeska's identity to



the detriment of racial characteristics, Stephens' representations of race seem to indicate that in some ways Malaeska's race is irreconcilable with ideologies of womanhood as applied to white middle-class women. However, in certain situations in the story, the lines between race and gender are murky. For example, when John Danforth suggests keeping the child and sending the mother back to her tribe, Malaeska is described as being "like a lioness guarding her young" (92). Is it her race that makes her "like a lioness" or her maternal (womanly) instinct? No clear answer emerges. Just as Stephens portrays the elder Danforth wanting to "ren[d] the two races asunder in the very person of his grandchild" (94), Stephens may have wished she could separate race and gender in Malaeska. Even though Stephens is obviously disturbed by the effects of racial prejudice, she cannot lift herself above many of the ideologies of her time, which insist on the "savage" nature of Indians – a concept at odds with notions of womanliness. And while racial prejudice concerns her, gender issues, in particular the desire for greater freedom for women, consume her. For instance, none of her antebellum novels concern slavery, even peripherally, and her postbellum novels that do feature African Americans place them in servant roles and rely on stereotypical images of the wise and powerful Mammy, who is nonetheless the object of ridicule for her social aspirations.<sup>3</sup> Yet all of Stephens' fiction focuses on expanding roles for white women. Stephens uses an Indian woman heroine in this story, in part, because Indian women had greater freedoms than the white women of her time. However, when race and gender come into conflict in portraying Malaeska as a role model, race loses to gender.

But Stephens cannot ignore Malaeska's race since it is the agency by which she dramatizes the consequences of racial hatred.

Malaeska, then, through the greater freedoms allowed her by virtue of her race, represents the potential of greater freedom for white women – an ideal to which they should aspire. But even as race allows Malaeska greater liberty, it puts her at greater risk of being mistaken for a woman of ill repute and even threatens to unmask her underlying "savage" nature. While women of every race must confront the Madonna/Jezebel binary by which women have typically been judged, this evaluation is more problematic for women of color who are more frequently connected to sexual depravity. Consequently, to overcome such obstacles, Stephens frequently downplays Malaeska's race as she emphasizes her womanly qualities – particularly her maternal nature. Malaeska's race is connected to all that is benign and beautiful in Nature, while her womanly characteristics connect her to civilization.

#### Other Indian Characters

Although Stephens does rely on stereotypes to describe her Indian characters, she tries to demonstrate that the negative images by which Indians are generally depicted are not always accurate. This is a difficult task, for she must balance her desire to establish that racial prejudice wreaks havoc on all it touches with her reader's general "knowledge" of Indians, which comes from the same popular sources she herself uses – sources which stress that Indians are untrustworthy, blood-thirsty, revengeful. Thus, when Stephens describes the Indian warriors plotting revenge for the death of their comrade, thirst for revenge being a common stereotype of male Indians (Sundquist 56; Barnett 84-5;

Clemmons 48), she describes them as "a company of fiends . . . in their orgies" (73) and as "vipers" (74). And in her descriptions of the battle in which Malaeska's father and husband kill one another, Indian warriors as a group are depicted as "fiendish . . . wild beasts." Indian women, as a group, fare no better. When Malaeska returns to her tribe after her son is sent to Europe, its female members want to torture her to death for stealing her son, their future chief, from them. Stephens characterizes them as "menacing" and "fiendish," quintessential descriptions of the stereotypical Furies (Sundquist 75-6).

However, Stephens' representations of Indians are mild compared to those of Edward Ellis in *Seth Jones, or Captives of the Frontier*, another Beadle and Adams dime novel published the same year as *Malaeska*, which sold as many as 500,000 copies. By the end of the second paragraph of the story, Ellis has the Indians successfully vanished/vanquished: "ere many years . . . villages and cities would take the place of the wild forest, while the Indians would be driven further toward the setting sun" (172). But he does not blame American settlers for the friction between whites and Native Americans; he sets his tale back in post-Revolutionary times and denounces the "mother country" who "continued to incite the Indians to revolting barbarities upon the unoffending inhabitants" (176). Nor are his epithets reserved for Indian enemies; according to his eponymous hero, all Indians are enemies. "[I]t won't do to trust an Injin, They're obstropertous" (175). Ellis' description of Indians as "Five Nation niggers . . . all a set of skunks" (189) is a typical example of how Indians fared in much of the popular literature, including dime novels, in the 1860s.

While Stephens may label embattled Indians as "fiendish," individual Indian characters receive a different treatment. Her illustrations of particular Indians intimate that people are individuals who should be judged by their actions and character not their color or race. When Malaeska returns to her tribe, the man "whom she had once rejected" is now chief. He claims his right to decide her fate. He leads her into the woods, but instead of killing her as he implies in front of the tribe he will do, he sets her free, providing her with food for her journey. In depicting this chief as a gentle and generous man, Stephens suggests that not all Indian men are evil and warlike. By presenting conflicting representations of Indian characteristics, Stephens posits that race is not a stable category, describing people once and for all time.

#### William Danforth and Mixed Blood

Interestingly, Stephens' representations of race seem stronger in Malaeska's half-white son than they do in the full-blooded Malaeska. Although her descriptions belie contemporary beliefs that the half-blood inherits "none of the redeeming traits of the full-blooded Indian, and none of the virtues of the white man" (Howard, qtd. in Scheick 21), her racial depictions reflect certain beliefs about white racial superiority. On the one hand, William is intelligent, and he receives a European education, returning with all the polish and "steadiness of character" any "civilized" man could hope to exhibit (*Malaeska* 140). On the other hand, William also exhibits many stereotypical traits whites generally attributed to Indians; for example, he is "a true friend and a bitter enemy" (148). But William's most pronounced characteristic is his "passionate nature," a common stereotype for Indians and half-bloods (Berkhofer 78; Clemmons 48;

Scheick 11). There is a certain dramatic irony in this inheritance from his Indian mother, who except in her passionate love for her husband and son, is depicted as meek, mild, and submissive. This irony is further heightened by the rather unlikely assertion that Malaeska "had caught much of the delicacy and refinement of civilized life from her husband" (*Malaeska* 89). Since her husband is a fur trader, and she never leaves the wilderness until his death, one wonders how much "delicacy" she could have absorbed from a man who had adopted the wilderness lifestyle of her people. Whether intentionally ironic or not, William's inheritance underscores biological factors, whereas Malaeska's stresses environmental ones. In the 1830s, when the story was originally written, theories on race generally promoted one or the other as the primary factor in the development of character traits. Perhaps this is Stephens' way of suggesting that both biology and environment play a role in molding identity. The irony inherent in these depicted "inheritances" augments Stephens' questioning of innate traits in Indians while it simultaneously re-inscribes them.

Nevertheless, conforming to stereotypes of male Indians in white literature (Clemmons 48), the younger Danforth is represented as even more passionate than Malaeska; he is ruled by emotions he cannot control. For example, when he adamantly refuses to visit Sarah's Indian friend, Stephens reports that Sarah "turned pale at [his] violent burst of feeling" and that Danforth tries but fails to control his emotions.

"Forgive me, if I have spoken harshly, dear Sarah," he answered, striving to subdue his irritation, but spite of his effort it blazed out again the next instant. "It is useless to strive against the feeling; I hate the whole race! If there is a thing I abhor on earth, it is a savage – a fierce, blood-thirsty wild beast in human form!" (150)

Try though he might, he cannot control his racial hatred. Like his mother before him, even his love is marred by an overly passionate nature, as Sarah's thoughts reveal:

She knew that she was loved in return – not as she loved, fervently, and in silence, but with the fire of a passionate nature; with the keen, intense feeling which mingles pain even with happiness, and makes sorrow sharp as the tooth of a serpent. (148)

While these lines forebode the tragic ending, because they rely on stereotypes they also indicate that certain aspects of William's character are innate, inherited from his Indian parent. This inability to control his passion will lead to his death. Stephens' emphasis on William's ineluctable Indian traits also seems to indicate that exposure to white civilization cannot totally eradicate the biological exigencies of race.

In the melodramatic climax of the story, young Danforth learns from Malaeska that he is her son. Because he has been raised to hate Indians, his reactions are swift and passionate.

"Great God!" he almost shrieked, dashing his hand against his forehead. "No, no! it can not – I, an Indian? a half-blood? the grandson of my father's murderer? Woman speak the truth; word for word give me the accursed history of my disgrace. If I am your son, give me proof – proof, I say!" (159)

And, within moments of hearing Malaeska's tale, he commits suicide by throwing himself off a precipice. His passionate pride and racial prejudice lead him to conclude that without the racial superiority that whiteness conferred on him, he is somehow less worthy, less a person than he previously believed himself to be. He also wrongly concludes that because his blood is tainted by his "sable birthright . . . of dusky chiefs" Sarah could not possibly still want to marry him.

Readers know that he is wrong. For on her visit to Malaeska, Sarah explains the love she has for her fiancé, concluding, "[t]his feeling may not be the love which men talk so freely of, but it can not change – never – not even in death, unless William Danforth prove utterly unworthy" (154). William thinks his mixed heritage makes him unworthy, but Sarah, who never marries after his death, obviously believes otherwise. However, William, ruled by passion, pride, and racial hatred, assumes that his union with her, rather than "lifting her to [his] lofty station," would degrade her. He wildly begs Malaeska to

"unsay all this, if you would not see me die at your feet. I am young, and a world of happiness was before me. I was about to be married to one so gentle – so pure – I, an Indian – was about to give my stained hand to a lovely being of untainted blood." (159)

But this Malaeska cannot do "without bringing the stain of falsehood on her soul" (160). So, William, unable to bear the humiliation of mixed blood, commits suicide. This scene also represents Malaeska as Eve, the bearer of "forbidden knowledge" which leads to a fall from grace. But Eve is also the mother of all people of every color, symbolizing our common humanity, so such symbolism accentuates the ambiguities surrounding issues of both race and gender.

Burke's dramatistic pentad allows us to view this critical situation from several perspectives, each of which illustrates possible interpretations of the event. From the point of view of agent, the suicide fits with all readers know of William, and thus follows the imperatives of the agent-act ratio. Because he has been taught since infancy that whites are racially superior, he is too proud to live as one looked down upon by the whites with whom he had so long identified. Although he has always been of mixed heritage, he has been taught to be, think,

and act as a white person, and not just any white person but one of wealth and position, one who believed that these attributes made him superior to others. As Stephens writes, "[t]he prejudices of birth and station had been instilled into his nature, till they had become part of it" (149). This is a crucial point, for, despite Stephens' reliance on racial stereotypes, it implies that character is not racially determined but socially constructed, learned behavior (Bube 40). Learning that he is part Indian could have been a transforming experience as well, but it is not. Rather than being transformed by his new identity, he holds fast to the emptiness of the old. When he discovers that he is not totally white, William's racial pride dissolves, but leaves him with nothing to replace it.<sup>4</sup> Robbed of all that he believed made him better than others, he clings to his racial prejudices. He hates himself as he "hates the whole race." True to the words he spoke to Sarah when she questioned him about his "strange prejudice" against Indians, "it . . . cling[s] to [his] heart as long as there is pulse left in it" (151).

While William's words just before his plunge hint that he is concerned about corrupting Sarah's purity, he is equally perturbed by the idea that she is now above him in station. Stephens makes this clear when she informs readers that "he preferred bestowing wealth and station on the object of his choice, rather than receiving any worldly advantage from her" (149). In other words, he has not only learned the lessons of racial prejudice from his grandfather, William also has mastered other major attributes of patriarchy – male privilege and class prejudice. His act of suicide is in keeping with the selfish ideals of patriarchy – scene-act ratio. He thinks primarily of his own degradation, with only minor consideration for the pain he will cause Malaeska and Sarah. He does think of it:



"[t]here is one who will feel this more deeply than both of us, will you comfort her?" he asks Malaeska (161). But this knowledge of the anguish he will inflict on those who love him is not enough to stop him from the doing the cowardly deed. He cannot face the idea, erroneous though it may be, that his betrothed might be above him; he would rather die. By deciding what Sarah's reaction will be, by not trusting her goodness, by robbing her of the opportunity to make an informed choice, he further exhibits his selfishness.

Viewed from the perspective of act and agency, another interpretation becomes apparent. Act and agency merge – plunging headlong off the precipice describes both the act and the agency by which it is performed. Danforth's act is precipitous in more ways than one: he rushes headlong to his death over the precipice. Each of these words defines different usages or applications of the term "precipitous."<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of analyzing for motive, however, the connotation of first two terms, "acting, or done with excessive or undue haste, rash, headstrong" (*OED*) is especially significant. First of all, the precipitous nature of Danforth's action clearly demonstrates that he is ruled by passion rather than reason. Stephens emphasizes his rash and impetuous character through her descriptions of him during the tense minutes preceding his death as he learns the truth of his lineage. He has an "almost insane gaze" and is in a "frenzy" and "furious passion . . . every feeling which urges to madness and evil – were a fire in his heart" (159-160). And it is this fiery passion which precipitates his death. This representation is in keeping with stereotypes of half-bloods in nineteenth-century fiction that emphasize their volatile nature and, as William Scheick notes in *The Half-Blood*, often lead to their untimely demise (11).

In other words, William's Indian heritage results in a passionate, self-destructive nature that exposure to the finest education that white civilization provides cannot overcome.

The perspective of scene, nineteenth-century racial and gender relations, offers yet another interpretation, especially when the law of ratios is taken into consideration. William has been inculcated with the racial prejudice of white society "until [it] had become part of [his nature]"; he knows that Indians are a hated race. As a "half-blood," William embodies the tensions between Indians and whites, but unlike his mother he cannot mediate between the two because of his white-imposed indoctrination into racial hatred. The scene-agent ratio represents a "synechdochic relation . . . between person and place" (Burke, *GM* 7). The racial hatred William feels is part of the scene he must escape. From his perspective, he not only believes that most whites hate Indians, but that they should hate them. The white society he knows (his grandfather's world) not only does not accept Indians as equals, but views them as "savages," to be "exterminated from the face of the earth" (*Malaeska* 150). Since the scene must be a fit container for the act, the scene-act ratio dictates that William must die. William's "prejudice too violent for adequate foundation," is a true reflection of the beliefs he cannot dispel: it is no wonder that he cannot bear the thought of living as a "half-blood" (151). The scene of racial relations in nineteenth-century America that he conjures up in his mind, regardless of how realistic it may or may not be, dictates that he cannot live in such a society. In other words, William, too, is a victim of racial prejudice. Although his passionate nature and his selfish disposition may have led him to the brink, had the scene revealed any hope of

acceptance for him, he might have been spared. He is both victim and persecutor, racially oppressed and racial oppressor.

In this climax, although racial prejudice is at the foundation of the entire situation, Stephens does not resort to simplistic reasons for William's suicide. This Burkean analysis demonstrates the complexity of the issues that contribute to his precipitous action. As agent, William personifies racial hatred: "it is no prejudice, but a part of my nature," he tells Sarah (150). He can escape it no more than he can escape the Indian blood running in his veins. His "predominating pride" leads him to resolve the issue precipitously, without adequate reflection or consultation with those who love him. So racial pride, patriarchal privilege, and his headstrong attitude combine in act and agency to doom him. He cannot conceive of himself as a being of lower stature; the future scene he envisions appears worse to him than the death he chooses. Stephens cannot condone his suicide; however, this Burkean analysis reveals that she understands the power of racial prejudice to provoke such a turn of events.

### Whiteness as Race

As is typical of other Indian romance writers, Stephens uses the term "civilization" to discuss whites, which places the discussion in terms of environment, not biology or race. This distinction is in keeping with beliefs circulating in the 1830s that Native Americans could be "raised" to the intellectual and cultural level of whites if they were put into the proper environment (white civilization) and provided with the appropriate education. Although Stephens overtly supports the environmentalists' theory of race, she cannot totally escape the belief that certain traits are racially inherited.

However, Stephens balances negative portrayals of Indians with evidence that whites themselves are not above savagery, such as when Arthur Jones scalps his victim in the opening hunting scene. But Stephens did not have the benefit of recent scholarship on whiteness as raced. As Ruth Frankenberg points out in *The Social Construction of Whiteness*, her 1993 work "seeks to begin exploring, mapping, and examining the terrain of whiteness" (my emphasis 1). Because of the time in which Stephens lived and the privileges granted her by her race, she, like other white writers of her day, tended to see only the racial "otherness" of those who were not white, but saw no racial privileges, indeed no racialization at all, in whiteness.

White men, particularly those of wealth and position, are castigated for creating the conditions that prevent the assimilation of Indians into white culture. John Danforth, the villain of the piece, is directly responsible for the tragedies that befall Malaeska and her son. Stephens attacks his use of patriarchal privilege to prevent Malaeska from being a loved and valued member of his family. But Stephens does not comment on whiteness as a position of power, perhaps because she does not even see it, or because the overtly political nature of white privilege may have been more than Stephens was willing to pursue. She could more easily justify her denunciation of patriarchal privilege because of its devastating effects on the domestic realm. Furthermore, by the time Stephens wrote this story, an anti-patriarchal discourse already existed in fiction; for example, she had the benefit of such predecessors as Sedgwick and Child, whose Indian stories contain anti-patriarchal themes.

Stephens' treatment of her white women characters' relationships with Indians reinforces her emphasis on gender rather than race as the source of friction between the races and social friction in general. The white women in the novel develop (or attempt to develop) egalitarian relationships with Malaeska (Gaul 122). For example, young Sarah's relationship with Malaeska grows into mutual love and respect. However, even this relationship contains hints that whiteness is rightness. As Gaul points out, the alliance is predicated on the assumption that Malaeska is "kind and harmless," as indicated by the accouterments of white civilization that decorate her wigwam (126). Nevertheless, the two create a mutually beneficial relationship, for Sarah learns much from Malaeska (which she will need to face future dilemmas), and Malaeska gains a true friend (which she needs to ameliorate her solitary existence).

Even Martha, Sarah's mother and a relatively minor character, has a relationship with Malaeska that, though brief, is more egalitarian than that of the white men with whom the Indian woman comes in contact. When Malaeska appears in the white settlement after the disastrous battle to get the letter her husband had left with Martha, she is discovered by Martha's father who half drags Malaeska to his cabin with these revealing words:

Come along, you young porcupine! You skulking copper-colored little squaw, you! We shan't kill you nor the little papoose, neither; so you needn't shake so. Come along! There's Martha Fellows, if you can find enough of your darnationed queer English to tell her what you want. (85)

Although he concedes "[s]he's as harmless as a gartersnake," he still perceives her as "skulking" and "copper-colored" – that is, different, animalistic, and inferior.

Stephens emphasizes how wrong he is in his estimation of Malaeska through the irony of his mocking her "darnationed queer English" with his own garbled version, which is less melodious and grammatical than Malaeska's. When Martha reveals that Malaeska was Danforth's Indian wife, Mr. Fellows persists in his stance of superiority by his "kind" offer to bring the boy up as a farmer. Although he has sympathy for Malaeska and her son, he wishes to assimilate them into white culture, which Gaul suggests demonstrates his hierarchical thinking (123). On the other hand, Martha offers the baby some food, and in exchange Malaeska gives her a wampum bracelet. Martha does not presume to tell Malaeska what is best for her; she "compassionately" offers Malaeska assistance in her chosen path. Their relationship is co-equal. The juxtapositions of these two ways of being expose the patriarchal way as hierarchical. White women meet Malaeska on equal terms; white men, approaching from a position of power and presumed superiority, try to possess, appropriate, or assimilate her.

Representations of race in *Malaeska*, like the socially constructed concepts of race itself, are not stable, but fluid. At times Stephens represents environmental influences as a primary factor in character development, such as her detailed descriptions of the racial prejudice in young William. At other times, she indicates that people cannot escape biologically inherited traits, as in her portrayal of young William as ruled by a passionate nature. Like most white authors of the period, she appears not to see whiteness as raced, but as the unmarked norm against which all "others" are measured. But her vacillation on the debate between biology and environment, especially in light of the overt theme pleading for racial tolerance, demonstrates the complexities of the issue.

Because Stephens desires to present her readers with an atypical role model in Malaeska, gender is a significant complicating factor in her racial inscriptions.

### **Representations of Gender/Domestic Worlds**

Like many nineteenth-century women authors willing to address the problems of racial relations between Native Americans and whites, Stephens uses the female Indian character "as a means of redefining [her own] gender" (Woidat 6). Malaeska represents a distinct form of womanhood. While she has all the essential qualities of true women, she also has expanded freedoms more typical of the developing real womanhood ideal. Using the genre of the female-centered frontier myth, Stephens attempts to "encompass the situation" of gender and racial relations of her own time. But these relations are multifaceted, and Stephens employs techniques which at once provide distance and bring the reader closer, which both simplify and complicate. Bube astutely points out that "Stephens uses the frontier as a distancing mechanism – a removal in time and space – that allows her to dramatize conflicts over conventional prescriptions for gender identity 'safely'" (30). In 1839 when the original serial was written, Stephens is just establishing herself as an author and editor in New York City, and concerns about womanly propriety loom large in her writing.<sup>6</sup> By placing these questions of racial and gender conflict within the context of marriage and family Stephens also familiarizes, providing her readers, for whom questions of race seem remote, with narratives that correspond with their personal and cultural schema for interpreting appropriate behavior within the family.

## Familial Dynamics

Unlike her male counterparts in traditional frontier stories who represent rugged individualism, Malaeska, through her intermarriage and friendships with whites and her motherhood, represents and embodies relationships. In other words, Malaeska herself is a symbol. As an embodiment of relationships and family, she symbolizes the possibility for peaceful coexistence between people of different races and sexes. Almost all of Malaeska's deeds and words mediate differences that threaten the sanctity of the family. The only time she commits an act that might be construed as disruptive of familial bonds is when she kidnaps her own child to preserve the more precious bond between mother and child. In this scene, Stephens exploits the purported mystical powers of mothers as promoted by the cult of motherhood, which grew exponentially in the nineteenth century. When Malaeska uncharacteristically disassembles and even kills a bird without any use for its body (except to entice her son to follow her), she is merely following the dictates of motherhood to preserve, at all costs, the bond of love between mother and child. Given the plethora of printed materials touting the glories of motherhood at the time, readers understand Malaeska's atypical behavior is motivated by maternal love. Furthermore, she does not initiate the breaking of familial bonds. She is driven to these desperate acts by the conduct of her father-in-law who symbolically kidnaps young William, initiating the fissure between family members by intentionally disrupting the "natural affection" between Malaeska and her son (*Malaeska* 95). Her aborted kidnapping foreshadows the mournful denouement and suggests that although Malaeska



symbolizes the possibility of peaceful coexistence, it takes more than one person and people of both sexes to overcome the power of racial prejudice.

However, despite the pessimistic ending to her story, Stephens manages to raise issues that needed to be recognized and appreciated to ameliorate the problems of racial prejudice in nineteenth-century America. Because intermarriage results in a domestic world in which the races mix, the supposed hierarchy of races is called into question. In the very first scene in which we see Danforth with his Indian wife, this issue dramatically bursts forth. As Danforth holds his infant son, who bears "scarcely . . . a tinge of its mother's blood," he mutters, "It's a pity the little fellow is not quite white" (72). Although Malaeska feels "proud anguish" at the remark, she does not rebuke or retort in kind. Rather, speaking of herself in the third person, her reply indicates her belief in the equality of the races: "Malaeska's father is a great chief – the boy will be chief in her father's tribe, but Malaeska never thinks of that when she sees the white man's blood come into the boy's face" (73). With these words, Malaeska mediates between the two cultures in ways that appease rather than disturb the balance. By pointing to the boy's noble Indian blood, she reminds Danforth that, although from her perspective she might consider her bloodline superior to Danforth's, she does not because, for her, distinctions between the races are inconsequential. This scene prepares readers for Malaeska's mediation in the larger world of whites, which she will soon face. It also symbolically represents the iniquity/inequity of racial hierarchy in the larger realm by demonstrating how such sentiments and words disrupt the harmony among humans in ostensibly loving relationships. For if such "inadvertent speech" between husband and wife

causes anguish, how much more destructive is purposeful hate speech between people who have little knowledge of the "other"? The scene's resolution foreshadows the child's future and the story's denouement. Stephens tells us that "Danforth, anxious to soften the effects of his inadvertent speech," agrees that the boy "will make a brave chief" and quickly changes the subject (73). But his act of diverting attention from his words has more meaning than his actual mollifying comment, for readers, already aware of Danforth's racial prejudice through his "inadvertent speech," have less reason to believe him than does Malaeska whose life "centered in the love she bore her white husband" (72).

Issues of gender hierarchy are also addressed within the familial context. Stephens suggests that there are more differences between white men and women than between Indian women and white women. For example, Mrs. Danforth, assuming a role typical of female characters in nineteenth-century women's fiction, becomes a mediator between her husband and Malaeska. It is Mrs. Danforth who convinces him "[w]ith gentle and persuasive words" that Malaeska should not be sent back to the wilderness away from her young son (93). Moreover, Mrs. Danforth cannot embrace her husband's proscription which barred Malaeska from expressing the "natural affection" she felt toward her child.

Mrs. Danforth had compassion on the poor mother. She remembered the time when her own child had made all the pulses of her being thrill with love, which now took the form of a thousand regrets. She could not watch the lone Indian stealing off to her solitary room under the gable roof – a mother, yet childless – without throbs of womanly sorrow. She was far too good a wife to brave her husband's authority, but, with the cowardliness of a kind heart, she frequently managed to evade it. Sometimes in the night she would creep out of her prim chamber, and steal the boy from the side of his nurse, whom she bore on her own motherly bosom to the solitary bed of Malaeska. (95)

Here the conflict between two nineteenth-century versions of womanhood – woman as wife and woman as mother – are revealed. In her role as wife, woman was expected to obey the law laid down by her husband. Mrs. Danforth apparently has no other option – "she was far too good a wife" not to conform to this law. But the privileged position of motherhood in the nineteenth century creates a conflict for her. Although true women were to be subservient to their male protectors, motherhood was considered woman's preeminent role. During the antebellum period, motherhood was glorified in books, sermons, and ladies' magazines. For example, *Godey's Lady's Book* proclaimed that motherhood was "one of the chief sources of her happiness, and her mightiest power for good" (60 (June 1860): 530). Thus Mrs. Danforth enacts her womanly destiny as a mother who has known the pain of losing one's son by allowing Malaeska secret access to her son. While ostensibly obedient to her husband's command, Mrs. Danforth does what she can to ameliorate the effects of his "obstinate" rule. Although she has a small measure of success in granting Malaeska limited opportunities to express her "natural affection" for her son, in the long term, patriarchy wins, for the boy learns to hate Indians and to resent Malaeska's embraces, which is exactly what the old man intended.

In another more pointed example, a young white boy, having already mastered certain rules of patriarchy (particularly the right of "men" to ignore women's words and the knowledge that accusing opponents of sexual deviance wins arguments), prevails over his mother. When Sarah discovers Malaeska living nearby, she is immediately drawn to the Indian woman. Sarah's younger brothers unmercifully tease that she has "fallen in love with an old squaw" and

taunt her with jeering questions such as "how did the old squaw's lips taste?" So Sarah appeals to her mother for help. Although Martha threatens them with mayhem, the oldest boy not only ignores his mother's admonitions but also turns the argument against Sarah for refusing to answer what he calls "a civil question" (122). But as the narrator reports: "[t]here was something altogether too ludicrous in this impudent appeal, and in the look of demure mischief put on by the culprit. Mrs. Jones bit her lips and turned away, leaving the boy, as usual, the victor of the field" (122). Martha is "ashamed of her want of resolution," and fails to use the opportunity to teach her little men to become more loving and less disruptive of the bonds which bring and hold people together. Here, Stephens points to the opportunity women have to teach boys how to be more loving and caring, more respectful of the "ties that bind." Martha, although she has some good qualities (e.g., industry, thrift), never fulfills the promise of womanliness. In this scene, rather than becoming an agent of transformation by teaching the boy more appropriate ways of being in the world, she remains silent. This allows her son to emerge as an agent of disruption, coming between mother and daughter and attempting to break the budding relationship between Sarah and Malaeska.

Within these familial interactions, Stephens posits the potential for change, but the outcomes suggest that men must change as well. Only Malaeska and Sarah, representatives of a new ideal of womanhood, directly confront the disruptive issue initiated by the words/deeds of the representatives of patriarchy. Neither Mrs. Danforth nor Martha have the courage necessary to directly challenge male authority. Mrs. Danforth tries to heal the growing rift between Malaeska and her son, but in this case, actions do not speak louder than words.

The only way to counteract the deleterious effects of Mr. Danforth's plot to steal young William from his mother is to end it. But this she cannot do; she is "far too good a wife." Stephens paints her as a kind-hearted soul who is deeply troubled by the situation, but powerless before her tyrannical husband. Martha's failure to confront her son is another matter. Although he is tyrannical in his own way, he is only a boy, a patriarch-in-training, but the tenets of motherhood, as expounded by Protestant ministers of the time, dictate that Martha has a moral obligation to bring him up in Christian love and charity. Her neglect of this duty is inexcusable because it allows her son's unchecked growth into patriarchal privilege and acclimates him to the practice of ignoring women's words. Similarly, although Malaeska tries to counter her husband's disruptive notions when he bemoans his son's mixed parentage, she is no more successful than Mrs. Danforth or Martha. Her words may have a chastening effect on Danforth, but they do not change his attitude.

Stephens' dark perspective on the ability of women to successfully mediate conflict differs from the typical female mediator in nineteenth-century women's fiction. For example, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, except for the failure of Mrs. Shelby to prevent the sale of Tom in the opening scene, women mediators, including Mrs. Bird, Eliza, Cassie, the Quaker women, and of course, Little Eva, manage to resolve conflicts that break social and familial bonds.<sup>7</sup> Although Stephens posits the potential women have to create a more equitable society, she clearly recognizes that without changes in patriarchy, without male acceptance and support for such goals, success is unlikely.

While Mrs. Danforth's actions remain strictly within the confines of the domestic sphere, Malaeska demonstrates that women can take active part in the world without sacrificing their womanliness. The idea of the "noble savage" permeates this story. Although most traditional sympathetic fictional portrayals of Indians have male characters, such as Chingachgook in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, Stephens seems to have taken her lead from Sedgwick's character of Magawisca in *Hope Leslie*. The noble savage is transformed by gender. In *Malaeska*, Stephens suggests that for an Indian woman to create empathy in the white reader, she must "combine all that [is] strong, picturesque, and imaginative in savage life, with the delicacy, sweetness, and refinement which follows in the train of civilization" (124). For example, although Malaeska exhibits deep faith in "the wild religion of her race" (82), without the "white man's religion" she cannot be a mentor to Sarah. However, this issue is multilayered. First of all, there is the irony in Malaeska's religious training taking place in the white Danforth household (an event that occurs only in the original version of the story). She learned "the beautiful and simple truths of the Gospel" (*Ladies Companion* 10 (1839): 244) from Mrs. Danforth at the same time she was being forced by Mr. Danforth to live a life of deception. While she was being taught about the mysteries of Christ's love for all people, her son was being taught to hate Indians. Despite this inimical situation, Malaeska abandons her "wild, poetical religion" in favor of Christianity. This conversion puts her in a position to teach the "white man's religion" to Sarah, who "had sat under preaching all her life" yet had failed to gain the "refinement of principles and feelings" that Malaeska's example of "Christian meekness and enduring faith" provides (125).

In this case it seems that to overcome the problems posed by the amalgamation of gender and race, in order to become a "true" lady, Malaeska must abandon certain "picturesque" characteristics of her race (such as her "wild, poetic" religion) in favor of, not combined with, the "refinement" of the white race.

Interestingly, in this female myth, the white men in both renditions of the story are hardly the type of individuals on whom a lady would want to depend. Malaeska's husband, who "had never thought of introducing her as his wife among whites," thinks only about "his disgrace" and "degradation," when circumstances force him to leave the tribe (76). Only when he is dying does he consider her ambiguous position. The grandfather's bigotry results in his own grandson's suicide. Even a minor male character, Sarah's father, exhibits irresponsibility when his "foolish shot" (67) kills an Indian and begins the uprising in which Malaeska's husband and father are killed. None of these men seem worthy of the admirable Malaeska, who despite some changes in the story from one genre to the other, remains a resilient heroine who struggles for her rights as a mother and a person.

### Intermarriage

While some scholars view Malaeska's marriage to Danforth as a "happy" alliance (Bube 39; Carney 81), Stephens provides ample evidence to support a contrary assessment. The interracial aspect of the marriage does not make it "unnatural"; rather, the marriage is tainted for a variety of reasons having little to do with race. Danforth's commitment to the marriage is held in doubt; Christianity holds no place in the marriage; Danforth's motives for marrying Malaeska are suspect; and, even Malaeska's love for Danforth is not beyond reproach. These

hints that the marriage is not as it should be make it "unnatural." The true nature of Malaeska's marriage begins to be revealed when Malaeska's husband is falsely accused by her tribe of killing the Indian shot by Arthur Jones. Danforth thinks he must abandon Malaeska and their infant son to escape the wrathful vengeance of her tribe and to return to the safety of white civilization. Malaeska, whose quick thinking has just saved his life by hiding him from his pursuers (the Pocahontas re-enactment scene), makes it clear that she intends to come with him, bringing their son along as well, but

[Danforth] had never thought of introducing her as his wife among the whites, and now that circumstances made it necessary for him to part with her forever, or to take her among his people for shelter, a pang, such as he had never felt, came to his heart. His affection struggled powerfully with his pride. The picture of his disgrace – of the scorn with which his parents and sisters would receive the Indian wife and the half-Indian child presented itself before him, and he had not the moral courage to risk the degradation which her companionship would bring upon him. (76)

This action, while entirely metaphorical as it all occurs within Danforth's mind, is pregnant with juxtapositions which reveal that William Danforth has not entered into this marriage with the same purity of motive as Malaeska. Just a few pages earlier readers learn that "her heart, rich in its natural affections, had no aim, no object, but that which centered in the love she bore her white husband" (72). Yet he views his marriage vows as his "degradation" and "disgrace." In this comparison of their attitudes towards their marriage, Stephens demonstrates that Malaeska, the one marked as "other" by virtue of her dark skin, not the "brave" white hunter, is the hero to be emulated. Her love is selfless, honest, and pure; whereas Danforth's, tainted by his selfishness, has been deceptive from the start. When he imagines his degradation, he sees his wife as "other," certainly not as



one with him, as befit pervasive nineteenth-century notions of marriage (Gilman in Woloch; Sarah Hale in Norton; Welter).

This incident occurs at the threshold of the wigwam he has shared with Malaeska, symbolizing that they both are in the borderlands between two worlds. But Danforth is transported in his mind to a contrasting scene – white society – in which he becomes the object of scorn. His disregard for the young wife who has placed him on a pedestal, in an era when husbands were supposed to place wives on pedestals, merely amplifies the juxtapositions. Moreover, in this scene both Danforth and Malaeska are agents: he, an agent of racial hatred, she, an agent of wifely love. In his mind, he has not one thought for his wife nor child, only his own position in white society, which he believes is ruined by his alliance with Malaeska. He is not concerned with how the racial hatred of whites will affect her or the boy, only with how it affects him, illustrating not only his selfishness but also how ingrained racial opinions can be in many white people. On the other hand, Malaeska's selfless concern centers on Danforth: she saves his life at the risk of her own and is prepared to leave her people and the only life she has ever known to follow him. Stephens' allusion to the Biblical story of Ruth, "wither thou goest, I will go, wither thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, thy God, my God" (Ruth 2:16), would not be lost upon nineteenth-century readers who had a greater familiarity with Judeo-Christian Scripture than today's readers. In other words, despite her ignorance of Christianity, Malaeska exhibits a more Christian attitude than Danforth. This biblical allusion is further augmented by Danforth's thoughts as he lies dying alone on the battlefield just before Malaeska finds him.

Now his heart lingered with strange and terrible dread around the shadowy portals of eternity which were opening before him; again it turned with a strong feeling of self-condemnation to his Indian wife and the infant pledge of great love, which had made him *almost* forsake kindred and people for their sakes. (my emphasis, *Malaeska* 81)

But to "almost" forsake is contrary to Jesus' words: "For this cause [marriage] a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife" (Matthew 19:5), another biblical allusion that most women readers would probably notice. Even as he is dying, Danforth's perspective on marriage lacks Christian commitment.

Danforth's emotional and protracted death scene reinforces these ideas. With Malaeska at his side, Danforth realizes he is dying, and he ponders, "my poor girl, what will become of you?" (82) But Malaeska is unafraid. Relying on the beliefs of "the wild religion of her race," she assures Danforth that she will follow him to "the land of the Great Spirit" where they will be reunited (82). Danforth realizes, too late, that he has never discussed religion with her, but has left her in "heathen ignorance." In other words, God has had no place in his marriage to her. He disabuses her of the notion that there is a "great hunting ground," taking away her "wild poetic faith." He tells her, "The whites have another faith, and — Oh god! I have taken away her trust and have none to give in return!" (82) This passage is revealing because both the lower case "g" on God and the idea that he has no faith to give demonstrate just how ungodly Danforth is and how ungodly his intentions toward Malaeska have been. He prays for forgiveness that he has "left this poor girl in her heathen ignorance" (82). Then, perhaps to make amends for this oversight or perhaps to save his own soul, he tells her that if she is to join him in another world, she "must learn to

love the white man's God." Ironically, he sends her to his parents for this task, and Malaeska promises to do as he has bidden her.

This act of Danforth's sets up the rest of the tragedy. Stephens' text relating to his purposes for sending Malaeska to his parents is ambiguous: is it to save his own soul or to save hers? Burke asserts that when there is ambiguity involved in the pentadic terms, transformation is possible. Does Danforth undergo a death bed transformation? He knows the prejudice of his father. Just a few days before the fatal battle, he was willing to leave Malaeska rather than face the "degradation" he would encounter if his family knew of his Indian wife. But now he sends her into the city, alone, with only their infant son, to face the prejudice he so feared. He says, "beseech them to cherish you and the boy for [my] sake" (83). Yet, given his knowledge of his father's prejudice, does he really think they will accept her and the boy? While it is true that his impending death is robbing him of the time and strength necessary to say all that he might, to have a son old enough to crawl means that he had well over a year to teach Malaeska about the white man's God himself. But he did not.

The Christian concept of marriage, with which nineteenth-century readers would be familiar through a variety of discourses including conduct literature and fiction, is one of seeing Christ in each other, loving the other as part of Christ's creation. Marriage "signifies . . . the union between Christ and his Church" (*Book of Common Prayer* 423).<sup>8</sup> In her nineteenth-century advice manual, *Womankind*, Charlotte Yonge cautions that a young woman should "not . . . become attached to a man outside her own Church. If he be in earnest in his religion, he cannot but try to bring her over to him; if he be not, she ought not to marry him at all"

(169). Naturally, her advice book is addressed to white middle-class women; Yonge does not even intimate the possibility of intermarriage. However, her counsel indicates that men have a religious responsibility in marriage – a point Yonge reiterates several times, most emphatically when she writes, "No one ought to marry a man whom she does not *know* to be religious and sound in faith and doctrine" (her emphasis<sup>185</sup>). Reverberating the strains of many religious texts of the day, Yonge contends that only those "hearts linked together 'in Christ' . . . [have] true love" (174). This idea is a major theme in many women's novels of the period, including *The Lamplighter* and *St. Elmo*. Because Malaeska has no knowledge of Christianity nor of such courtship conventions, she is not implicated in the failure to adhere to such rubrics. However, with Danforth it is another matter. He had a Christian responsibility to "try to bring [Malaeska] over to" his religion. His death bed act of sending her to his parents could rectify his sin of omission on this account, but the ambiguity within the text suggests that even he himself doubts the outcome.

Since he never even discussed religion with her, Danforth obviously had other, more worldly, intentions in mind when he married Malaeska. As a proper middle-class woman Stephens does not directly address this issue. But neither does she ignore it. At the time *Malaeska* was written, the late 1830s, many social reform movements were underway in a rapidly changing and expanding America. One of the most vigorous was the Female Moral Reform movement, which attempted "to reform the standards of sexual morality and to regulate the sexual behavior in their communities" (Ryan "Power" 27). The movement, which began in New York, was sparked by the Second Awakening and in particular the

revival meetings of Charles Finney, held in New York City between 1829 and 1834 (Smith-Rosenberg 112). The association with religion provided members of the American Female Reform Society with the necessary authority to attack male privilege. In his revival meetings, Finney charged attendees to take seriously their duty to go forth into the world to reform sinners. The Society took this command to heart and worked to save prostitutes from a life of sin. They also fought the double sexual standard, which traditionally held women to blame, by exposing licentious male customers and regarding them as equally liable and sinful. By 1839 the Society was a powerful force for sexual morality: it had 445 chapters in greater New England and boasted a circulation of 16,500 subscribers to its weekly publication, *The Advocate of Moral Reform* (120; 115). Members of the Society were active reformers. They went into the streets and even brothels to rescue prostitutes from their fate. In the course of their investigations, they learned that many prostitutes had been seduced at an early age. "Ruined" for entry into polite society, these young girls had little choice in finding alternative ways to earn a living. Thus began the moral reformers' long battle to make seduction a crime and to raise the age of consent, which was as low as ten in some states (Odem 8-9).

Stephens hints that Danforth's marriage to Malaeska amounted to such a seduction of a young girl. Although no extant records directly connect Stephens to the Society, she may have been a member, especially given her interest in social causes concerning women. Even if she were not a member, she still would have had access to its findings through her women friends, newspaper reports, church attendance, or other social interactions. Twice Stephens makes

reference to Malaeska's young age at the time of her marriage to Danforth. On both occasions Malaeska is the speaker. The first instance occurs when Malaeska first arrives at the Danforth's in Manhattan. Standing in their parlor, pleading for the acceptance her husband had said she would find there, she beseeches them, "he said that his mother's heart would grow soft to the poor Indian woman who had slept in his bosom while she was *very* young" (My emphasis, *Malaeska* 91). By using the adjective "very," Stephens indicates that Malaeska's age was unusually young, even for those days when brides of 16 were not uncommon.<sup>9</sup> But the second mention of Malaeska's youth more explicitly indicts Danforth by making him agent of the act. Malaeska is explaining the details of his heritage to her son. When he asks if she is "mad" to insinuate that he is her son, she replies:

It was a blessed madness – the madness of two warm young hearts that forgot every thing in the sweet impulse with which they clung together; it was madness which led your father to *take* the wild Indian girl to his bosom when in the bloom of *early girlhood*. (my emphases, 158-9)

These words clearly incriminate Danforth as the one who "took" her, even though the word at that time did not have the sexual connotation it does today (*OED*). She admits they were both "mad," but her words ("warm hearts," "impulse," "clung together") suggest sexual passion, not love, as the basis of their madness. Stephens stresses Malaeska's young age by the words "early girlhood," which indicate that Malaeska is indeed "very" young. Under the circumstances, Danforth, as older and more knowledgeable of the world through his travels, seems to have taken advantage of her youth, inexperience, and innocence. In other words, he seduced her. By his act of taking her to his bosom, he took

away her innocence. She may not have been unwilling, but because she was so young, she had not the experience to make an informed choice. Once in his bosom, she is totally committed to the relationship and willing to forsake all her people for his sake. He, on the other hand, like the seducers in many novels, is duplicitous. By keeping his Indian wife a secret from his parents and by an unwillingness to forsake his family for her, he reveals the nonchalance with which he entered into this alliance. His willingness to desert her at the first sign of trouble between whites and Indians underscores that he does not consider her a "legal" wife, such as a marriage to a white woman would be. For him it is a sexual attraction not a commitment. Stephens draws attention to this perverse aspect of the relationship between Malaeska and Danforth by repeating how young Malaeska was when she met him.

Even Malaeska's love for Danforth is questionable. She loves him blindly, unable to see his duplicity. In keeping with stereotypes by which whites represented Native Americans, Stephens depicts Malaeska as having an overly passionate nature, especially in her love for Danforth:

her untutored heart, rich in its natural affections had no aim, no object, but what centered on the love she bore her white husband. The feelings which in civilized life are scattered over a thousand objects, were, in her bosom, centered on one single being; he supplied the place of all the high aspirations – of all the passions and sentiments which are fostered into strength by society. (72)

Although white women are expected to be devoted to their husbands, Malaeska's "untutored" love is problematic. Given Danforth's fraudulent nature, since Malaeska equates him with "all the high aspirations," obviously the value of her love must be correspondingly lowered. But Stephens' description also suggests

that, because Malaeska loves Danforth to the exclusion of all else, it is a weak love, not "fostered into strength" by spreading it. Stephens hints that if Malaeska were white, she would have knowledge of literature, music, and the arts which strengthen and ennoble love by providing examples of love and beauty to guide the uninitiated on the proper bounds of love.

Malaeska's passion for Danforth and her promise to him as he is dying promote the circumstances which allow the eldest Danforth to steal her son's affection from her. Stephens emphasizes this point in several passages:

It would have been an unnatural thing, had that picturesque young mother abandoned the woods, and prisoned herself in a quaint old Dutch house, under the best circumstances. . . . But love was all-powerful in that wild heart. (93)

Nothing but her husband's dying wish would have kept Malaeska in Manhattan. (94)

[P]assion had been too strong in Malaeska's heart . . . and the refinement which affection had given her, enslaved the wild nature without returning a compensation of love for the sacrifice. (94)

But alas, poor woman! submission to the wishes of the dead was a terrible duty; her poor heart was breaking all the time; she had no hope, no life; the very glance of her eye was an appeal for mercy . . . she had nothing on earth to live for. (96)

Malaeska is ruled by her passions, rather than ruling them. Her love for Danforth has no compensations; in fact, it is a curse that will steal her child from her heart and take away her reason for living. Although Malaeska does finally conquer her passion for her dead husband, it is too late to rescue the love of her son, and the passionate love she bore her husband is transferred to the son, who like his father, does not return that love. This uncontrollable passion results in her death of a broken heart.



Stephens suggests that the marriage between Malaeska and Danforth is "unnatural" because it was not a marriage based on mutual love and respect. Stephens not only questions Danforth's commitment to the marriage but also hints that it may have been "improper." Although Malaeska loves her husband deeply, she loves to the exclusion of all else. In both cases, Christianity is not integral to the relationship, which Stephens, as a practicing Episcopalian and a woman affected by the ideologies of her time, believed to be essential to a good marriage.

### **Conclusion**

Stephens' emphasis on her protagonists as potential role models for young women readers necessitates close investigation of these characters' fictional acts. Both Malaeska and Sarah offer examples of ways in which women can be active participants in the world, yet remain womanly.

In certain situations, Stephens' attempts to separate race and gender in Malaeska's character are clearly demarcated. It is Malaeska's race which allows Stephens to represent her in ways that would be considered inappropriate for nineteenth-century American white women. Malaeska is self-reliant. Bereft of a protector, she successfully travels alone with her infant son to Manhattan. Furthermore, when she returns to the wilderness, she lives alone and provides for all her own needs. She has indomitable strength, which is recounted throughout the novel. Reminiscent of Magawisca in Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, Malaeska's physical and moral strength mark her as an admirable woman, worthy of emulation. With "almost superhuman strength," she attempts to rescue her "self-murder[ed]" son carrying him up a "steep bank where at another time no

woman could have clambered even without incumbrance" (162). But even more remarkable is her indomitable fortitude despite the unbearable sorrow of losing father, husband, and son to racial prejudice.

In the original 1839 story, written for middle-class ladies, this is the predominant picture of Malaeska. But the dime novel version, rewritten over a generation later, for a larger audience, presents an altered character. In the original serial, Malaeska's time in the Danforth Manhattan home is reduced to three paragraphs, mostly devoted to her "unappeasable" desire for freedom. But in the dime novel, three entire chapters describe Malaeska's inability to kidnap her son. In this rendition, although she is still able to provide her young son with food, she is beset with the vicissitudes of weather and wilderness. The young boy is nearly bitten by a rattlesnake, and a cold and bitter rainstorm allows her pursuers to overtake her "before she had the least idea of their approach" (111). In other words, in the later version, Malaeska loses many of her Indianly characteristics, such as the ability to live in harmony with nature. Instead, her maternal essence is emphasized. Since motherhood was considered the ultimate fulfillment of womanhood, such characteristics mark her as a woman worthy of emulation.

It is in conjunction with these maternal duties that Stephens discusses Malaeska's "womanly self-abnegation," words which never even appear in the original story. However, these two words have received an inordinate amount of critical attention. After making a bed of moss for the child, Malaeska sinks into

a broken rest, piling up soft couches for those she loved, and taking the cold stone for herself. It was her woman's destiny, not the more certain

because of her savage origin. Civilization does not always reverse this mournful picture of womanly self-abnegation. (103)

Although this inscription of gender has been interpreted to mean that Ann Stephens believed that women are supposed to be self-effacing (Papashivily 143), the entire quotation, taken in context, offers another interpretation. The three chapters describing the kidnapping constantly refer to Malaeska's wildness and Indianly behavior (such as paddling a canoe, shooting down game with her bow and arrow). To modify these qualities, to make her an acceptable role model, her womanly characteristics are needed to balance the scale. The words "it was her woman's destiny" imply that racial differences are less significant than the common bonds of womanhood. Here gender is the metalanguage.

Stephens' gentle reminder that "civilization does not always reverse this mournful picture of womanly self-abnegation" tells her readers that they, too, may be called upon to be self-sacrificing for their "loved ones." But this designation as a "mournful picture" also suggests a certain sadness that things are not as they should be, that civilization is not as civilized as it might be were women allowed to be self-actualizing. This passage is one of the most direct criticisms of societal restrictions on women that Stephens makes in her frontier fiction.

Using the Burkean dramatistic lens to analyze this act of self-abnegation immediately brings to light the ambiguity between act and agency. "Womanly self-abnegation" describes both; that is, being womanly and self-abnegating is both the act and the means by which the act is performed. This ambiguity in the pentadic terms depends, in part, on the tautological nature of the words. In the parlance of True Womanhood, to be a woman was to be self-abnegating, and

even "real" women were expected to have "a sense of duty to others" (Cogan 5). Malaeska is the agent, the scene remains race and gender relations in nineteenth-century America, and the purpose is to question why women in both cultures are expected to be self-sacrificing. Malaeska's long years of suffering in the Danforth household constitute a single protracted act of self-abnegation brought about by the rule of patriarchy. But out there in the wilderness, where she is apparently free to be whatever she wants to be, her "woman's destiny" requires continued self-sacrifice. Stephens uses hyperbole to accentuate what "woman's destiny" means – "soft couches for those she loves" and "the cold stone for herself." The absurdity of this situation – Malaeska certainly could have made herself a soft bed of moss without causing any harm to the boy – represents the absurdity that some human beings must give up everything for others simply on the basis of sex. Presaging the "real womanhood" ideal, Stephens is suggesting that women need not "renounce" themselves entirely for the love of others. In fact, she suggests that had Malaeska been more self-loving, she might not have died of a broken heart.

Why does this passage regarding "womanly self-abnegation" appear only in the dime novel version? Most likely because of the time in which it was written. While the "Trail of Tears" may have evoked sympathy for Native Americans in 1839, "Manifest Destiny" had become a national obsession by 1860. With more and more white settlers moving West and invading Native American lands, skirmishes between the two groups became more common; consequently, in an effort to justify whites' actions, descriptions of Indians became more vitriolic. Therefore, to make an Indian maiden a more acceptable

protagonist, she has to be more womanly and less Indianly in 1860 than in 1839. In other words, in 21 years the construction of race had changed so drastically that Stephens was compelled to compensate for the changed ideologies of her readers. However, the construction of gender had changed little. If anything, the concept of women's sphere was even more ingrained in the minds of Americans through the proliferation of printed materials, especially women's magazines, novels, and giftbooks which intoned didactic messages of true womanhood. Consequently, sentences that described Malaeska's desire for freedom in the original serial were quietly replaced with scenes in which she submits (albeit not without an active struggle) to the will of her father-in-law in the dime novel.

Furthermore, by the time the dime novel version was written, the all-time best-seller, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, had been published. Because of its popularity and its American themes, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* generated a plethora of novels, poems, plays, and even songs, both pro and con, responding to its tragic tales of slavery. The kidnapping scene in the dime novel version of *Malaeska* evokes images of Eliza taking her child across the water to save him from the powerful whites who would steal him away from his mother. Both Eliza and Malaeska are servants in the household of whites, and although Malaeska is not a slave, she is a prisoner in the household nonetheless. In both cases, it is the patriarch of the family who separates mother and child against the expressed wishes and hopes of his kindhearted wife. Both Eliza and Malaeska believe they have no other alternative than to take their child across the water to a place where he will be safe from harm. In both novels, water marks the boundary between two modes of life. The journey is perilous for both mothers. Whether Stephens' portrayal of

Malaeska's attempt to rescue her son is an intentional imitation of Stowe's tale is impossible to ascertain, but it certainly bears many similarities to Eliza's brave escape. Although Malaeska fails while Eliza succeeds, Malaeska's strength and courage during her dangerous attempt to rescue her son are unforgettable and mark her as a woman and mother worthy of emulation as well as sympathy.

Sarah's role is greatly expanded in the dime novel version of the story. Although the facts of her part in the tale remain essentially unchanged, three added chapters recount her experiences at boarding school and her courtship with the younger William Danforth. These revisions of the original serial bring the novel more in line with other women's fiction of the time by centering more of the story on a young maiden on her own in the world, who thereby learns the value of self-reliance as do the heroines featured in many woman-authored novels of the 1850s and 1860s (Baym, *Woman's* xix). The added chapters also recount experiences (school and courtship) with which many young female readers were familiar, whereas the life of an Indian woman would have been much less familiar. Although Malaeska remains a heroine, the expansion of Sarah's role displaces her as the sole heroine. This scenario is also in keeping with the less sympathetic attitudes of white Americans toward Native Americans.

Sarah's most important acts, like those of Malaeska, are acts of mediation between Indians and whites, between savagery and civilization. Although Sarah does not embody a relationship between the two cultures in the ways that Malaeska does, she has been interpreted as a "figurative half-blood" because of her status as Malaeska's "adopted child" (Scheick 73). Such a characterization befits her role as mediator. As co-agent with Malaeska, Sarah creates bonds

and destroys barriers between Indians and whites. She befriends Malaeska and attempts to defend that friendship in the face of her brothers' ridicule. But her most important act is her refusal as an adult to give up Malaeska's friendship despite William's obdurate reaction. Although William asks forgiveness for his violent retort to her appeal in support of Malaeska, it is clear that Sarah will not be submissive to male authority at the expense of her personal beliefs. In other words, Sarah will not be self-abnegating, but she is definitely womanly. She has strength in her convictions and will not be untrue to herself.

Thus, in some ways, Sarah becomes a more important role model for young women readers than Malaeska, who is too passionate and so self-sacrificing, such that when William dies, she has nothing to live for. Sarah, on the other hand, finds ways to make her life "useful," even though she is "lonely" without the man she loved. Sarah does not need a man to complete her. She is a "real" woman, physically active and healthy; she exhibits common sense and does not allow academic pursuits to take precedence over learning the necessary domestic skills. Although Stephens is vague about the ways that Sarah's life was "useful," Sarah's story suggests that marriage and motherhood, the twin idols of True Womanhood, are not the only viable alternatives for women. They can find meaning and fulfillment in life by making themselves "useful" to others, as Malaeska made herself useful to Sarah by teaching her the true meaning of Christianity.

Stephens' use of an Indian woman protagonist allows her to encompass and confront the problem of racial prejudice while she simultaneously provides women readers with exemplary models of new womanhood. Through

unequivocal examples of border crossings and ambiguous references that emphasize the indeterminacy of race and gender, Stephens demonstrates that neither race nor gender is a stable, unchanging category. Because Malaeska is an Indian, she is not impeded by the rubrics of True Womanhood, which would restrict her freedom of movement. Yet she always, even under the most crushing anguish in the Danforth home, remains womanly – that is pure, pious, "meek", and most of all, maternal. However, as an Indian, she also is capable of living on her own in the wilderness, exhibiting traits generally applied to males – self-reliance, independence, physical strength, and courage. At certain points in the story, Stephens seems to accentuate gender at the expense of race, especially if the presumed racial traits are at odds with prevailing notions of womanliness. But even though Malaeska crosses both racial and gender boundaries, she remains a strong model of womanhood. Stephens uses her as a challenge to male authority – as one who attempts to rectify patriarchal moral turpitude and to reclaim woman's rightful place as guide and guardian of the young. When Malaeska attempts to kidnap her own child, it is merely to save him from the symbolic kidnapping being perpetrated by Mr. Danforth, who usurps for patriarchy women's ultimate position as mother.

In the story of Malaeska, Stephens emphasizes how differently white men and women treat Indians. She posits that women tend to approach interracial relationships more equitably than men, who tend to view themselves as superior to racial "others." Stephens suggests that women's mediation and relational ways of being – thinking and acting in terms of relationships with others, rather than in terms of their own individual desires – offer possibilities of transforming



racial prejudice. However, she argues that white men must be more receptive to women's words and ideas before real change can occur. Malaeska and her son go to their deaths doomed by patriarchal privilege that sanctions deceit and hate over truth and love. In this female-centered myth of the frontier, Stephens posits that had men been more accepting of Indians in white culture and more responsive to women's words, the entire tragedy might have been avoided.

Although Stephens appears to vacillate on whether biology or environment determine character, her insistence that both play a key role in the formation of young William's character indicates not indecision, but rather a belief that both are factors in character development. Environment made him a racial bigot; biology made him too passionate. Both contribute to his death. Malaeska's passionate nature is attributed to biology, but she is also meek and demure, is this biology or environment? Regardless of the origin of these traits, such inscriptions suggest that certain stereotypes about Indians are invalid and that Stephens believes that people need to reconsider their beliefs about the nature of Indians. Malaeska's placement squarely in the middle of the nature/culture divide reinforces this point. On the one hand, Malaeska, as is typical of depictions of both women and Indians in literature, represents Nature. But as she shows herself to be more civilized and more Christian than whites, she is also connected to white culture.

In *Mary Derwent* race plays a less central role. Stephens explores the possibilities of women's leadership through Indianized white women who represent what women should not do to gain independence and a whitened Indian woman who models appropriate types of womanly leadership.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Actually, as the first dime novel, *Malaeska* has generated the attention of scholars several times during the twentieth century. Because the ephemeral nature of dime novels and the collectibility of extant copies, reprints of *Malaeska* have been issued twice prior to Brown's reprint of it with several other dime westerns. In 1929, Frank O'Brien, dime novel collector, arranged for the first reprint since the Beadle series' demise. In 1971, Blom also issued a reprint.

<sup>2</sup> All subsequent citations from the dime novel version of the story are from the reprint in *Reading the West: An Anthology of Dime Westerns*, Bill Brown, ed. (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> See Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, particularly Chapter 1, "Jezebel and Mammy: The Mythology of Female Slavery" for more detailed information on stereotypes of black women in the antebellum period.

<sup>4</sup> Such identity problems are a common source of frustration for those of mixed heritage (Scheick 6; Gunn Allen 129).

<sup>5</sup> I gratefully acknowledge that Lora Romero's chapter, "Vanishing Americans: James Fenimore Cooper," in *Homefronts* first brought my attention to the multiple meanings of this word and its connections to "vanishing Americans."

<sup>6</sup> See especially, "Women of Genius," where she defends women of genius who use their powers of description to "convey images of truth and beauty" to others while she simultaneously champions their womanliness and domestic skill.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the more familiar nineteenth-century women's novels featuring successful woman mediators include: Louisa May Alcott, *Work and Little Women*; Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*; Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok*; Harriet Brent Jacobs (Linda Brent), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; Caroline Kirkland, *A New Home, Who'll Follow?*; Judith Sargeant Murray, *The Story of Margaretta*; Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Silent Partner*; Catharine Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie* and *A New England Tale*; E. D. E. N. Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*; Sara Payson Willis (Fanny Fern), *Ruth Hall*; and, Augusta Evans Wilson, *St. Elmo*.

<sup>8</sup> Since Stephens was a practicing Episcopalian, the *Book of Common Prayer* probably reflects her understanding of Christian marriage.

<sup>9</sup> The age of consent for marriage for women was 14 – 16 in most states, with only 2 exceptions (New Hampshire, 18 and Kentucky, 12) as late as 1928 (Richmond, Appendix B, Table 3, 370-1). Although minors (generally classified as though under 18) had to have parental permission, such statistics suggest that many women did, in fact, marry at a young age.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**INDIANIZED WHITE WOMEN AND WHITENED INDIAN WOMEN IN**  
***MARY DERWENT***

In *Mary Derwent* Stephens attempts to demonstrate that women can be capable leaders in public affairs, contrary to the prevailing norms and notions of nineteenth-century middle-class Americans, which deem women unsuitable for such positions. She appeals to her readers by using actual historical figures and events, blending fact and fiction, thereby making it difficult to refute her assertions about the potential benefits of women's governance. Because the strictures against women in public life were so strong, she provides a cautionary example of a woman who loses her womanliness and becomes ruthless in her relentless pursuit of power. This strategy further disarms critics who argue that women should not be in positions of power because they will become unsexed. By admitting this can happen, Stephens is then free to provide examples of women's successful, womanly use of authority.

In this chapter I examine Stephens' visions of ideal womanly leadership – governance guided by concern for others not for the power it represents. As a tale of intermarriage, issues of race enter the equation, but with no major full-blooded Indian characters, race issues are secondary to gender. However, since Stephens tends to equate Indian traits with masculinity, the analysis is complex. She does suggest that racial otherness/manliness must be eradicated before a woman can become a suitable model for women in public life.

### ***Mary Derwent* as a Female-Centered Myth**

*Mary Derwent* is not the typical domestic tale. It violates many of the accepted beliefs about nineteenth-century American women's novels. For example, Cogan, reiterating Baym's contention in *Woman's Fiction*, notes that popular women's fiction was written "primarily for female audiences and featured a heroine making her way in the world, dealing with immediate, realistic, and often domestic concerns as opposed to exotic adventures" (20-1). While Stephens' frontier novels were undoubtedly primarily written for female audiences, they are definitely stories of women's exotic adventures. The appeal of such adventuresome heroines is understandable for both middle-class women, whose lives were dictated by the never-ending chores of domesticity, and working-class women, whose long days were spent in relentless toil in textile mills and other factories. These heroines suggested that women's lives need not be so restricted, that women could have adventures without incurring social disapprobation.

Unlike *Malaeska*, which is clearly presented as an old Indian legend, *Mary Derwent*, subtitled *A Tale of the Wyoming Valley in 1778*, is not only represented as grounded in historical fact, but is actually based on real events and populated with real people. Stephens weaves her fictional tale and fictional characters with actual historical events, creating a sense of verisimilitude for her readers. But, more importantly, she uses historical fact to demonstrate not just the devastating effects of war on women, but women's vigorous strength and courage in response to the desperate situations that war creates.

The two Indianized white women, Catharine Montour and Queen Esther, both of whom are represented as leaders of their tribe, are based on real people, and some of their actions reflect actual events. However, like Malaeska, these characters assume mythic proportions. In this story Stephens posits that life could be different, and perhaps more equitable, if women were leaders of society. Through the opposing characters of Catharine and Esther, Stephens provides examples of benevolent as well as despotic leadership. Under Catharine's leadership, the Shawnee tribe experiences peace and prosperity, represented by the gardens and orchards planted under her tutelage. Conversely, under Queen Esther, they become involved in wars between whites, and their villages and lands, indeed their way of life, are destroyed.<sup>1</sup>

The young Tahmeroo best exemplifies Stephens' ideal of the potential of female leadership. It is she who re-enacts a Pocahontas-type rescue when the male leaders of the tribe refuse to undertake a rescue attempt for her Tory husband, Butler, who is being held captive by the Americans. And it is she who, at the end of the story, leads her people further into the wilderness toward a new life in the West. In this female myth, men's political leadership is found wanting, and women's leadership is suggested as a viable alternative.

Young white women living domestic lives more typical of the young women readers of the tale also are important figures in this female-centered myth of the frontier. The eponymous heroine, Mary, is compared and contrasted with her sister, Jane, calling into question the ideal of True Womanhood. Through Mary's story, as well as Catharine's and Tahmeroo's, Stephens posits a new, more active ideal of womanhood.

## **Historical Background**

*Mary Derwent: A Tale of the Wyoming Valley in 1778* is a stirring fictionalized account based on what is known in white American histories as the Wyoming Valley Massacre, in which Indians allied with the British attacked and wiped out white settlements in the area near Monockonok Island in the Susquehanna River.<sup>2</sup> Queen Esther, the seemingly improbable white woman leader of the Indian tribe, is actually based on a real person. In his 1851 *History of Wyoming*, noted nineteenth-century historian Benson J. Lossing explains that Queen Esther, also known as Catharine Montour, was a French Canadian, probably the daughter of Frontenac (357).<sup>3</sup> Stephens uses Lossing's suggestion that Esther's "superior mind gave her great ascendancy over the Senecas" in her narrative of the events (357).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Lossing concurs with Charles Miner who emphatically declares that Queen Esther did, in fact, while singing a death chant, kill "fourteen or fifteen" captured American prisoners who were seated around a rock. Lossing describes the event:

Surrounded by a body of Indians, queen Esther, a fury in the form of a woman, assumed the office of executioner with death maul or tomahawk, for she used the one with both hands, or took up the other with one, and passing round the circle with words, as if singing, or counting with a cadence, she would dash out the brains, or sink the tomahawk into the head of the prisoner. (226)

Although Stephens' description is more melodramatic and sensational, the results are the same – many men die at the hands of the white Indian queen.

Furthermore, in accordance with Miner's carefully researched history (358),

Stephens maintains that the cause of Esther's great fury was the death of one of her sons in an earlier battle with the Americans.

The character of Catharine Montour is entirely fictional as presented in the story. Typical of melodramas, several characters in *Mary Derwent* are incognito and have many names, but Stephens draws from recorded history as well as Indian custom when she suggests that the fictional Queen Esther bestowed her own previous name upon Catharine at the time of her adoption into the tribe. Gi-en-gwa-tah, Catharine's Indian husband in the novel, is also based on a real person. Lossing records that he was "a celebrated Seneca chief," who led the main force of Indians in the Wyoming Valley attack (354). The idea that he is the son of Queen Esther is apparently pure fiction. Walter Butler, the villain of the novel, is also a real person, and, as Stephens indicates, the son of Col. John Butler, leader of the British forces in the battles at Wyoming Valley. However, no records attest to Walter's presence at these engagements. Apparently, as Stephens suggests, he did die in a later battle in the same general vicinity (Miner 235). Other characters in the novel based on real people include Col. Zebulon Butler, Sir William Johnson, Sir John Johnson, and Joseph Brant, the renowned Iroquois leader known to his people as Thayendanege, signifying "two sticks of wood bound together" (Thompson Kelsay 43).

Besides the horrific execution by Queen Esther and the general rout and defeat of the Americans, other events recorded by Stephens appear in white histories as historical fact. For example, the histories mention that women assisted the Americans by making saltpeter for gunpowder and working in the fields (Miner 212; Lossing 352), but Stephens tends to emphasize women's deeds and hard labor in keeping with her message of female strength and capability. Her accounts of white male savagery – brother killing brother,



neighbor killing neighbor, Tories promising quarter to fleeing rebels and then ruthlessly slaying them – also derive from these nineteenth-century sources (Miner 224-5; Lossing 356-7). Thus, the story of *Mary Derwent* is a curious admixture of fact and fiction. Although readers must suspend disbelief regarding some of the elements of this melodramatic work, such as Catharine's failure to recognize the missionary as her husband, Varnham, some of the more improbable events are part of recorded history.

### **Plot Summary**

Like *Malaeska*, the tale of *Mary Derwent* had an illustrious history before it was ever published in book form in the United States in 1858. It was first published in *Ladies Companion*, May through October 1838, as a prize-winning article.<sup>5</sup> The serial proved so popular that *Ladies Companion* took the unprecedented step of reprinting the entire serial in 1840. As the editors explained:

At the very pressing solicitation of many of our present subscribers, we have been induced to republish the Prize Tale of "*Mary Derwent*." At the time of its former publication, there were only four thousand, five hundred copies issued, now the "*Ladies Companion*" has a circulation of *seventeen thousand*. (their emphasis, *Ladies Companion* 13 (May 1840): 18).

Capitalizing on Stephens' tremendous success with the full-length novels *Fashion and Famine* (1854) and *The Old Homestead* (1855), T. B. Peterson published an expanded and drastically revised edition of *Mary Derwent* in 1858. In fact the changes in the story from the serialized version to the book version are so radical that the Indian woman character, Tahmeroo, who is an heiress in the serial, becomes, in the novel, a dispossessed Indian who must trek West in search of a new life. Paola Gemme contends that these changes represent "a

legitimization of contemporary Indian policy which pursued segregation rather than the integration of Native Americans" ("Rewriting" 386); however, the truth in the matter may not be so simplistic. In 1862, when Beadle and Adams published a sixpenny British novel of the story, they reverted to the original serialized version so that Tahmeroo remains the heiress of a British estate. Because these denouements are so diametrically opposed, other major revisions in the plot also occur. These changes are discussed in the conclusion of this chapter. The plot summary is based on the 1858 American version.

Mary Derwent, a young woman with a beautiful face, but a deformed body, lives with her equally beautiful sister, Jane, and Grandmother Derwent on the island of Monockonok. In the opening chapter, Mary is cruelly made aware of her deformity by the malicious taunting of a schoolmate, Jason Wintermoot, a Tory and close companion of William Butler, who will later become the false-hearted suitor of Jane. Edward Clark, the future true-hearted suitor of Jane, comes to Mary's rescue, incurring the abiding enmity of Butler and Mary's undying love. After this transforming incident, Mary avoids the company of any but loved ones who accept her as she is. She comes to understand God's love through introspection and prayer. Jane, by contrast, is a thoughtless young woman and a flirt. She disregards Mary's feelings by entertaining thoughts of marriage to Butler, who is simultaneously wooing Tahmeroo, the beautiful mixed-blood daughter of Catharine Mantour (a.k.a. Caroline Varnham and Lady Granby), white chief of the nearby Shawnee. Catharine, recognizing Butler's base character, attempts to protect Tahmeroo from the possibility that he might

desert her by arranging a lawful, Christian marriage for her daughter to Butler and bribing him with the offer of a large dowry.

When Catharine goes to the Indian missionary to arrange the ceremony, she is overcome by his "power" and "sympathy" and tells him her own painful history. Orphaned in England at a young age, Caroline, as she was then known, married Varnham, her father's ward. Although they had no real wealth, they had plenty for their needs and were happy and loving. However, she unexpectedly inherited a vast fortune and a new title, Lady Granby. The change of fortunes transformed her and she became a social butterfly, much to Varnham's dismay. Misfortune touched their lives when she and her husband's best friend, Murray, fell in love with each other, confessed, but did not consummate it. Realizing the futility of their love, Murray sought a marriage partner. Driven to despondency, even insanity, by these events, Caroline went to Varnham and revealed all. He did not reproach her, but denounced Murray, and she sank into madness. Although Varnham watched over her carefully throughout her long illness, during a rare absence of his, she, in her debilitated state of mind, dropped their infant child out the window.

When her sanity returned, she discovered her horrific act. Unable to face Varnham in the mistaken belief that she had killed their child, she escaped to the wilderness of America. Once there she heard that Varnham had perished at sea while searching for her, so she joined a tribe of Shawnees in which a white woman, Queen Esther, was the leader. Catharine was accorded great power by the people, who regarded her as one "sent to them by Manitou." Queen Esther's son, Gi-en-gwa-tah, was attracted to the new arrival, but she refused his

advances. However, when a white family was captured and brought to the village for a death feast she acquiesced to Gi-en-gwa-tah's proposal, for the family was none other than Murray's, her former lover. To save Murray's life Catharine married the "savage," and their daughter, Tahmeroo, becomes her only solace.

After Catharine's interview with the missionary, Mary espies Butler negotiating a lucrative contract with Catharine to marry Tahmeroo. Catharine insists that he must take Tahmeroo to England and, in return, she promises him fifty thousand pounds dowry. Mary is even more shocked to discover that Butler, upon leaving, has a clandestine meeting with her sister, Jane. Later that night, the very evening of his Christian marriage to Tahmeroo, Butler returns to elope with Jane, but he is foiled by the combined efforts of Tahmeroo, Mary, and the missionary. Catharine finds out about Mary's kindness to Tahmeroo and arranges a meeting. Catharine thanks Mary and gives her a serpent bracelet to wear to protect her from danger should hostilities begin. Both feel an inexplicable bond of sympathy between them, but they have no idea that they are actually mother and daughter.

Time passes. Jane, her passions subdued by her humiliation over the Butler affair, is engaged to marry Edward Clark. Catharine, her ruthlessness softened by memories of her former life, has lost power over the tribe. Queen Esther once again rules, just in time for the outbreak of hostilities between the Shawnee and the American settlers. Catharine is powerless to stop the fight. Thinking the bracelet will save them from harm, Mary and her relatives remain on the island. On the other hand, Catharine, realizing her bracelet no longer holds

power, worries about Mary but does nothing. Suddenly the missionary appears at her tent. Seeing that she is paralyzed with indecision, he reveals that Mary is her own daughter whom she believed dead, and that, he, the missionary, is her husband, Varnham. Finally spurred to action, Catharine heads for the island. She meets up with Murray, her former love, now an English agent in America. Together with Tahmeroo, they go to the island to save the Derwents, but by then the fighting surrounds them. Both Murray and Catharine are stabbed by Queen Esther. Meanwhile, Mary, Jane, and their grandmother manage to escape by hanging on to a floating log, but Mary, realizing it will not bear the weight of all three, purposely slips off, only to be rescued by the missionary. Murray dies, but Catharine is snatched from Varnham by Gi-en-gwa-tah, who takes her back to his people for recuperation. But Esther still rules and demands that Tahmeroo leave her mother to go with her husband to England. When Gi-en-gwa-tah is away, Queen Esther riles up members of the tribe against Catharine, and she is dragged out into the wilderness in mid-winter to die. Having finally learned the truth of her birth, Mary, along with her father, Varnham, come upon Catharine as she breathes her last.

In the denouement, Butler learns that as the eldest daughter, Mary is legal heir to the Granby estate. Jane's husband, Edward, manages the estate, and Mary and Varnham live out their days peacefully. Butler deserts Tahmeroo and returns to America. She pines for him until, at last, she returns to America too, only to find him dead. But she lives on to become a leader of her people and to pass down the stories of her mother, Catharine Montour.

## **Dramatistic Analysis of *Mary Derwent***

Because *Mary Derwent* is a melodrama, with plots and counterplots and a long cast of characters, its dramatistic analysis is more complex than *Malaeska*. The representative anecdote in this narrative tells the story of two contrasting modes of female leadership in society – one, destructive and immoral, the other, constructive and beneficent. In other words, the representative anecdote confronts contemporary questions in society about the extent that women should participate in the public sector, by posing the question: Can women be effective leaders in public/political affairs? Although the formal woman's movement had not yet begun in the late 1830s when *Mary Derwent* first appeared in print, women had begun to agitate for more equal participation in society. Many had joined various reform movements of the period, including the abolition of slavery, moral reform, and temperance. A few women had begun to speak in public on behalf of those causes. In the early days, most women reformers addressed only the female branches of their respective societies, but some attempted to speak before "promiscuous" audiences, as mixed-sex groups were called. As Angelina Grimké's experience with the mob at Pennsylvania Hall demonstrates, even when these women were working for a good cause, they had to defend the right of women to enter into the agon of public debate.<sup>6</sup>

The furor over women's right to speak in public provoked discourses on the proper role of women in society as well as predictions regarding the future of society if women gained a more prominent role in public life. By addressing both the hopes and fears of American society, the representative anecdote of *Mary Derwent* depicts the possibilities of women's leadership in society as well as its

potential pitfalls. The fears are represented by the anecdote of the woman who is unsexed by political power, and the hopes are expressed by the tale of the woman who uses power wisely to create a more just society. Although Stephens advocates a more active role for women in American society, she warns that women must remain womanly in such roles or disaster will likely follow. Consequently, as in the case of the representative anecdote in *Malaeska*, a certain ambivalence resides in her inscriptions.

In *Mary Derwent*, Stephens questions contemporary ideologies of womanhood and suggests that women need to be more active participants in society than these current notions permit. To effectively "confront and encompass" this situation, Stephens creates a number of characters to act as agents to demonstrate both appropriate and inappropriate ways of being a woman. In this novel she begins to experiment with the literary device of comparison and contrast, which she will use to even greater effect in some of her later frontier (and other social) novels.<sup>7</sup> Labelling a contrasting character as "counteragent" may be somewhat misleading, since Stephens' purpose is to illustrate both positive and negative examples of womanhood; however, for the sake of clarity, this term will be used. Her use of irony further complicates analysis. Thus Burke's dramatism, which specifically highlights ambiguities, is especially useful in interpreting Stephens' intentions in this provocative yet sometimes convoluted narrative. Agent is the most significant term in *Mary Derwent* because characters (agents), through their acts, demonstrate new ideals of womanhood (purpose). Stephens holds up certain characters for readers to emulate and others for them to reject. In other words, in keeping with

Tompkins' insistence that authors had "designs" on their readers, Stephens provides both good and bad examples of womanhood, which she hopes will effect changes in current ideologies through her readers who will enact a new, more active ideal of womanhood.

Because it is a melodrama with several intersecting plots, *Mary Derwent* has many agents and counteragents; however, only those discussed in this analysis are listed below.

Agents = Mary Derwent (a positive example of womanhood), Catharine Montour (both a positive and a negative example of womanhood), and Gi-en-gwa-tah (an idealized male character); co-agent = Tahmeroo (both a positive and a negative example of womanhood); counteragents = Jane Derwent (a negative example of womanhood, against whom Mary and Tahmeroo struggle), Queen Esther (a negative example of womanhood), and William Butler (a totally reprehensible male character).

Agency = gender characteristics.

Act = demonstrating appropriate (womanly) or inappropriate (masculine) methods of leadership.

Scene = nineteenth-century gender relations.

Purpose = to question current ideologies of womanhood and propose more active leadership roles for women.

Catharine and Mary (mother and daughter) are the primary agents through which Stephens reveals her ideas about a more liberal and realistic womanly ideal.

Tahmeroo, as a mixed blood character, is freed from certain restrictions placed on white women, but she is a co-agent with her mother and half-sister and further



develops the theme that women can be active agents in the world without losing their womanliness. Varnham and Gi-en-gwa-tah represent an ideal manhood, that is, men who are good, just, honest, and less prone to violence. But Stephens does not fully develop this idea because, in this novel, she is more concerned with limitations on women than with reforming men. Jane Derwent is a pivotal character because she represents a negative example of white womanhood, yet, ironically, she wins the hero. Queen Esther and Walter Butler are both thoroughly evil, and thus mitigate the comparatively minor flaws in the characters of Catharine and Tahmeroo, who, while not perfect, demonstrate the potential of women as leaders in civic affairs.

### **Representations of Race**

Race in *Mary Derwent* does not hold the central place it does in *Malaeska*; however, in a novel of intermarriage, Stephens cannot avoid the subject. As a member of the dominant race, her representations of race are fraught with notions of otherness, even when she invokes mixed-blood characters as ideal role models to be emulated. At the same time, Stephens destabilizes notions of savagery as a trait peculiar to Indians by emphasizing the savagery of whites, particularly of Queen Esther and Butler.

### **Tahmeroo**

There are no major full-blooded Indians in this tale. Tahmeroo is actually three-quarters white, but Stephens still exoticizes her as though she were some alien creature. For example, in her first description of Tahmeroo, Stephens emphasizes her strangeness both in her description and in the reaction of Mary, who espies Tahmeroo but remains unseen herself.

Mary held her breath and remained motionless, for her poetical fancy was aroused by the singular and picturesque attitude of the figure [of Tahmeroo]. There was a wildness and a grace in it which she had never witnessed before. At first glance she supposed the stranger to be a wandering Indian girl belonging to some of the tribes that roamed the neighboring forests. But her complexion, though darker than the darkest brunette of our own race, was still too light for any of the savage nations yet seen in the wilderness. It was of a clear, rich brown, and the blood glowed through the cheeks like the blush on a ripe peach.

Her hair was long, profusely braided, and of a deep black; not the dull lustreless color common to the Indians; but with a bloom upon it like that shed by the sunlight on the wing of a flying raven. She appeared to be neither Indian nor white, but of a mixed race. The spirited and wild grace of the savage was blended with a delicacy of feature and nameless elegance more peculiar to the whites. In her dress, also, might be traced the same union of barbarism and refinement . . . (27)

Thus, in a few strokes of the pen, Stephens deprecates Indians, while presenting whites as being of a higher standard. This description insinuates that it is Tahmeroo's white blood that provides her beauty, "delicacy," and "refinement," although it does grant that Indian blood bestows a certain "spirit and wild grace."

Yet it is her spirit, not her beauty, that makes Tahmeroo an admirable character. For example, when her Tory husband, Butler, is captured by the Americans, both her grandmother, Queen Esther, and her father, Gi-en-gwa-tah, refuse to risk their lives to rescue the white man. Instead they offer to "revenge his death," should his death sentence be carried out (228). Desperate, Tahmeroo then appeals to her mother, but by this time Catharine admits she is "powerless" to do anything. Horrified that Butler might be killed, Tahmeroo decides to rescue him herself. Thus, she journeys to Albany with just a few warriors to attempt that which those who are supposedly more powerful and courageous dare not do. Butler arranges a plan, which involves much deception on the part of Tahmeroo, and she manages the escape without any difficulty.

Thus, she demonstrates the ability of women to actually do something, to intervene in men's military realm and to save her man from certain death, unlike many white women in the novel who are passive recipients of the news that their loved one has been killed in battle.

However, in this re-enactment of the Pocahontas rescue Tahmeroo's motives and behavior are imbued with ambiguity. In pursuing this active course, she exhibits, on several occasions, Indianly behavior (i.e., stereotypical behavior attributed to Indians), which is sharply rebuked by whites to whom she appeals. For example, when her mother reveals she no longer has power to help Tahmeroo, Tahmeroo retorts that she will resort to violence: "Let a band of warriors go to their city . . . we will burn it to ashes if they refuse to give him up" (231). Catharine is horrified. "Oh Tahmeroo!" she cries, "do not become a fiend like the rest" (231). And, although Tahmeroo apologizes, she retains this revengeful spirit.

When she resolves to rescue Butler herself, she turns to Mary and the missionary for help and advice. But when the missionary mentions that Butler is considered a spy, Tahmeroo's Indianly passion for revenge bursts forth once more:

A spy! . . . he serves his king. Those that have captured him are miserable rebels. But let them beware – it is Gi-en-gwa-tah's son that they have imprisoned; the children of Queen Esther never forget nor forgive.  
(239-240)

Although she immediately repents when scolded by the missionary, such outbursts of passion indicate that she has unacceptable Indianly traits, which must be expunged if she is to be a worthy role model. Her passionate love for

Butler provokes these stereotypically Indian-like responses. As Stephens explains:

That strong love had completely subdued the passionate pride of her nature and, rather than being parted from him, she would have sold herself a slave in his behalf, asking only the sunshine of his presence and the glory of his love. That wild devotion had so mingled itself with the religious creed her mother had taught her that it had become part of her religion, and only death could have torn it from her heart. (224)

But a passionate love that obliterates the self is definitely not part of the new womanhood ideal that Stephens is proposing – that is, women who do not sacrifice the self, but live for the self as well as others (Cogan 5).

To become an appropriate model of new womanhood, then, Tahmeroo must be whitened. She must exhibit proper womanly virtues and eliminate her Indianly vengeance. Mirroring her mother's slow redemption process, Tahmeroo does just that. For, enacting another, albeit inverted, Pocahontas rescue, she saves Mary, Jane, and Grandmother Derwent from certain death at the hands of her own tribe. Chastened by Butler's cruel treatment of her and motivated by the pure love that Mary has shown for her, Tahmeroo risks her own life to save the Derwents, including Jane. This is significant, for Tahmeroo fully realizes that Butler still is enamored of Jane. In fact, she rightly believes that he has led the Indians to the Island to "seek vengeance" on Jane (319). Yet, in this case, she is able to put aside her own emotions and pangs of jealousy to come to the aid of others. In fact she realizes that she "do[es] not wish [Jane] to die" (320). So, exhibiting the physical strength and health of a new more active womanhood ideal that Stephens advocates, she plunges into the waters of the Susquehanna and swims across to the island to locate a canoe in which the Derwents might

escape. Later, on the island, she charges fearlessly through the battlefield to rescue the Derwent women.

These acts mark her redemption – from this point forward, her ways are more womanly, more white, and less Indianly. In other words, her redemption feminizes and whitens her. Tahmeroo's plunge into the Susquehanna represents a purification ritual, a baptism. Although she still loves Butler, she is able to look beyond her own personal desires to the needs of others, which is exactly the attitude she needs to achieve her final destiny as a leader of her people. Burke asserts that acts of self-sacrifice (such as Tahmeroo's perilous rescue of the Derwents) operate as a kind of mortification of the self, obliterating sin and guilt. Tahmeroo's act coincides with Burke's definition of mortification as "the deliberate slaying of appetites and ambitions" (*RR* 135), which "must come from within" (190). Tahmeroo knows that she has done wrong by meeting with and marrying Butler without her mother's knowledge. In fact, at one point she thinks the Great Spirit intends to punish or even kill her for this secret sin (35). But, after the marriage is blessed by the Christian minister, and she realizes she must accept Butler as he is, not as she wants him to be, she is ready to be redeemed. Through the process of self-mortification, she slays her Indianly passion for revenge against Jane and is purified/whitened and reborn.

By juxtaposing these two Pocahontas-type rescues, Stephens calls attention to their differences. In substance, they are similar – Tahmeroo risks her life for others in both. But in motivation, they are antipodal. In the first, her act is based on her selfish desire to save her husband at any cost because she believes she cannot live without him; however, in the second, she thinks only of

the safety of others, even Jane, whom she had considered a rival. The second act is also an act of forgiveness, not just words with which she asks others to forgive her transgressions (as in her apologies for Indianly outbursts), but a bona fide act of contrition and selfless love – a transformative act that purifies her and makes her a worthy role model. Furthermore, the agency by which these two acts are committed differs. In the Butler escape, Tahmeroo resorts to deception, including using her womanly wiles to beguile the guard. In the rescue of the Derwents, Tahmeroo proceeds openly into the battle, no deception is required.

In this representation of Tahmeroo, Stephens equates Indianly ways with stereotypical negative traits associated with the ignoble savage – particularly a desire for revenge against white enemies and an inability to control her passions (Clemmons 48). However, as Clemmons points out, such traits were usually applied to male characters, not females. Thus, it is difficult to separate representations of race from those of gender, for Stephens' depictions of Tahmeroo's Indianly behavior might equally be considered masculine. In other words, race operates as a metalanguage masking gender.<sup>8</sup> The use of such negative stereotypes to describe Tahmeroo's conduct marks Indians as a race as inferior to whites.

In other words, in Clemmon's account Stephens aligns Indians with masculine behavior and whites with feminine conduct. By contrast, Bube, in her dissertation, suggests another interpretation. She believes that

[i]n making her main characters Indians or Indianized women, [Stephens] establishes the equation that women are to men as Indians are to whites, and she then offers two dichotomized social positions for women using race as a code for exploring gender. (36)

Framing her discussion in terms of the assimilation-extinction dichotomy that Maddox insists is inherent in the Indian question, especially as presented in nineteenth-century literature, Bube believes that, by equating women with the less powerful Indians and men with the more powerful whites, Stephens is able to exploit the dualities implied in such dichotomies. According to Bube, "Stephens finds ways to contest and resist the dualities, masculine or feminine and civilized or savage" (37). I suggest that one method Stephens uses to unfix these categories is to portray both sets of opposing dualities (equating both Indians and whites with both men and with women), effectively cancelling both sets. Such connections undermine the subservience of both women and Indians to white men, freeing both from the limitations/stereotypes that inhibit their full participation in the world. For example, only when Catharine is liberated from the bonds of white civilization/patriarchy can she accomplish leadership tasks usually accorded to men, such as building cities and making alliances with other nations.

#### Picturesque Indian Women

Stephens frequently uses the word "picturesque" to describe Tahmeroo, Malaeska, and her Indian women heroines in other novels. Burke believes that authors often reveal their attitudes through "associational clusters," that is, through certain images or words that they identify with certain character types (*PLF* 20). Burke contends that while a writer may "be perfectly conscious of the act of writing, conscious of selecting a certain kind of imagery to reinforce a certain kind of mood, etc., [she] cannot possibly be conscious of the interrelationships among all these equations" (20). He believes that these interrelationships are the motives behind the writing and that by "statistically"

examining an author's associational clusters, critics can "disclose" such motives (20). Thus, Stephens' repeated use of "picturesque" in connection with her Indian women characters seems particularly noteworthy.

Bube contends that by stressing the word "picturesque," Stephens is "aligning her[self] with the writers of the romantic school who portrayed Indians sympathetically as part of a larger search for American uniqueness" (41). She astutely observes that while

Stephens' use of the word picturesque as a descriptive label and as a category participates in this sympathetic attitude toward Indians. . . . [It] also [is] an implicit confession of white cultural, social, and racial limitations; the Other can only be received through a drastic social/cultural filter. (42)

In other words, in describing Tahmeroo as "picturesque," Stephens marks her as "other," while simultaneously pleading the cause of a common humanity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition clearly reveals the ambiguity of this term as applied to Tahmeroo and other Indian women heroines in Stephens' fiction.

Like or having the elements of a picture; fit to be the subject of a striking or effective picture; possessing pleasing and interesting qualities of form and colour (but not implying the highest beauty or sublimity): said of landscape, buildings, costume, scenes of diversified action, etc., also of circumstances, situations fancies, ideas, and the like. (*OED*)

In other words, the term is not usually applied to human beings, so for Stephens to use it in this manner, not only suggests that Indians are not of "the highest beauty," but dehumanizes them as well. It also attempts to colonize – to fix them as completely knowable.

#### Gi-en-gwa-tah

In Stephens' narrative, Catharine's Indian husband is the half-blood son of Queen Esther. According to a witness of their marriage ceremony, Sir John



Johnson, a British emissary, Gi-en-gwa-tah had "just enough of white blood in his veins to save the whole thing from being repulsive" (183). Ironically, this same character suggests that Gi-en-gwa-tah's "noble presence" derived from the white blood he had inherited from his mother, who just happens to be the most vicious, vengeful, blood-thirsty character in the story. Yet Sir John claims that "from her [Gi-en-gwa-tah] had learned many of the gentler graces, both of manner and costume, which made his appearance rather picturesque than savage" (183). Just a few pages later, readers are informed that Queen Esther "allowed no bright color or glittering ornament to soften the grey of a stern old age which hung about her like a garment" (195). Yet ostensibly from her, Gi-en-gwa-tah learned to dress in clothing of "rich color, heavy with fringes and embroidery" (183). By presenting such contradictory equations of whiteness with rightness, Stephens destabilizes dualities such as civilized or savage.

In relating her story to the missionary, Catharine also presents Gi-en-gwa-tah as superior to other Indians because of his white blood.

The eldest son of Queen Esther was a noble. He came of his father's race, with something of the refinement, which his mother could never entirely cast aside, blended with it. . . . Queen Esther had given him fragments of a rude poetical education, and this, with the domestic refinement of her lodge, had lifted him unconsciously above the other chiefs of his tribe. (94)

Although this description occurs fairly early in the text, before Queen Esther has shown her true colors, and readers learn just how "refined" she really is, there is still reason to doubt the veracity of Catharine's words. First of all, just a few minutes earlier, Catharine acknowledges that Esther, as the daughter of a French governor of Canada, had a fine education prior to being taken prisoner by

the Indians. But Esther, she relates, preferred "savage rule to all the remembrances of a delicately nurtured childhood and . . . [had] flung off the refinements of life" (90). Catharine also explains, comparing Esther to Queen Elizabeth, that "both were arrogant, crafty, selfish, and ruthless, proving their power to govern, only as they became harsh and unwomanly" (90). Esther, she declares, "was, doubtless, from the first, a savage at heart" (90). Furthermore, as Catharine continues her tale, she reveals Esther's "savage passions" and vengeful nature, provoked by Catharine's initial rejection of Gi-en-gwa-tah (95). Consequently, the implausibility of this attribution of Gi-en-gwa-tah's virtues to Esther's "refinement" is readily apparent and further undermines notions of inherent racial qualities.

Despite all the irony with which Stephens fills others' descriptions of Gi-en-gwa-tah, when he finally appears in the story, he is presented as a reasonable man, a caring father, and a shrewd statesman (111-12). Stephens never portrays Gi-en-gwa-tah as "savage." Catharine, herself, admits that Gi-en-gwa-tah is "eloquent, sincere, [and] manly" (95). And, although he may not understand Catharine, particularly after she begins to "soften" under the influence of Mary and the missionary, his actions prove he loves her. After the terrible battle on Monockonok Island, he takes the wounded Catharine from the arms of Varnham and carries her back to his tribe for recuperation. Unaware that it is his own mother who stabbed Catharine and that Esther has long been plotting against Catharine, he leaves the village to resume the business of a warrior. When he returns to find that Esther has banished Catharine, causing her death, he announces to the tribe: "[t]hat woman [Esther] is not my mother,

but the murderess of my wife" (370). He deserts her and all those who assisted her in Catharine's death, leaving her "to the Great Spirit, whose curse shall hang about her as lightning strikes an old hemlock dead at the top" (370). And he then leads his loyal followers West.<sup>9</sup> Such characteristics mark him as a stereotypical "noble savage," and although scholars today recognize the inherent racism in such a concept, Stephens appears to be attempting to establish Gi-en-gwa-tah as an admirable person.

Viewing this incident through the dramatistic lens elucidates such an intent. Gi-en-gwa-tah is the agent; his denunciation of Queen Esther is the act. Since the scene is nineteenth-century gender relations, not race relations, and the overall purpose is to question current ideologies of womanhood, the agency – the manner in which he commits this act – takes on special import. He does not react in ways typical of the "ignoble savage," that is, he does not seek "an eye for an eye" type vengeance. The agency is his words, which reveal the awful truth about Esther. He renounces her as no mother, no woman at all; her lust for power has not only brought about Catharine's death, but the ruin of the tribe as well. Although Gi-en-gwa-tah recognizes the truth too late, he bravely defies the woman that even Brant, the great Indian warrior, feared encountering (194). Gi-en-gwa-tah's willingness to brook her animosity redeems his masculinity. He becomes the unquestioned leader of the tribe. Through the rebirth of this transformative act, he can now, as Burke phrases it, "mov[e] forward towards a goal" (*PLF* 203), that of reuniting the remnants of his tribe and moving west to establish a new life.

## Whiteness as Race

### *Catharine*

The figure of Catharine Montour fascinates the imagination. Stephens gives readers a taste of the mystery that surrounds Catharine when she is first presented in the narrative:

And this was the stern, haughty woman – the white Indian – who ruled the Shawnee braves with despotic rigor – whose revenge was deadly, and whose hate was a terror. This was Catharine Montour! (39)

After Catharine recounts her narrative to the missionary, an act that functions as a confession, both in terms of content and results, she develops into a mediator between the white and red cultures. Indeed, part of her value to the tribe is her connection as a white person to Sir William Johnson, British agent for relations with the Six Nations (Lossing 232). Queen Esther willingly adopts her because of her wealth and the power she can bring to the tribe. But Catharine's most important role is mediating, not between the Indians and the British, but between the Indians and the Americans. After her confession, although she begins to lose her power over the Indians, her role as mediator grows more significant. Prior to that time, she had not been concerned about Americans, but about extending the power of her tribe through alliances with the British. Once she meets Mary, the changes in her personality are accelerated. The special bond she feels toward Mary transforms her attitude toward the Americans. Her act of giving Mary the serpent bracelet for protection marks her reformed attitude.

As a leader of the Shawnee, Catharine "grew stern, selfish, and despotic, but never cruel" (94). In her confession to the missionary, Catharine attempts to rectify the perceptions that many Americans have of her. Although in her thirst

for power she required homage from the tribe, she claims to have used that power to save "many poor victims from the stake . . . , many a village from the flames, and many hearths from desolation" (94). Knowledge that she is innocent of murder and violence, in stark contrast to Esther, prepares readers for Catharine's gradual redemption. These revelations also illustrate that Catharine has used her power as a leader of the tribe for benevolent purposes.

However, it is Catherine's race that allows her to lead the Indians. They give her homage and respect and benefit from it, but in Stephens' tale no full-blooded Indian women are presented as leaders; in fact, they are depicted as squaws and furies, with little intelligence or ability to think for themselves. But by demonstrating the expediency of the Indians' acceptance of female leadership, Stephens hints that women should be allowed more influential roles in white society as well.

### *Mary*

Mary, without any prejudice or guile, is a perfect mediator between the races because she, like Natty Bumppo, belongs to neither world. Because she has a condition commonly referred to as "hunchback," both whites and Indians regard her as different from "normal" people. To whites, Mary is disfigured and consequently "unlike other girls . . . never to be loved as they were" (9). But to the Indians, Mary's deformity is "a sacred seal of holiness which the Great Spirit sets upon his own" (166). Either way, Mary is set apart from both cultures, allowing her to mediate between the races. However, like the Indians, she is marked as "other" by whites because of her bodily difference from them.

Her very presence calms Indian "savages" from their violent ways, such as when she shields the missionary from their arrows or when she interrupts Queen Esther's execution of the American captives. Yet she seems to have the opposite effect on savage whites (Jason Wintermoot and Walter Butler) whose acrimonious words reveal that they are provoked to greater shows of violence in her presence. For example, when Mary appears as Butler is attempting to convince Jane to elope with him, he cries, "Out of my path, lying imp! before I trample your shapeless carcass under my feet" (126). White savages hate Mary for the same reasons that Indians honor her: she represents a higher truth and goodness. Thus, Stephens exposes the baser nature of barbarous whites while she simultaneously reveals the moral rectitude of Indian culture.

### *Esther*

Esther, on the other hand, epitomizes the savagery of whites. Her wanton violence destabilizes notions that Indians are savage and whites are civilized. However, for Stephens, Esther's abandonment of womanliness is more serious than her abandonment of white civilization. Forsaking the traits of her gender has masculinized her, resulting in her eventual decline to a ruthless savage. While Esther's barbarity proves her degeneracy, the Shawnees' acceptance of Esther as a leader constitutes proof of their debasement as well. The Indians are subjugated by Esther's reputation as a brutal enemy. For example, Stephens has her fictionalized Joseph Brant, the Iroquois leader who was mistakenly placed at the Wyoming massacre in white histories, express anxiety at Queen Esther's wrath. "I would rather encounter a troop of fiends than her tongue," he admits (194). Esther's association with the Indians is not the cause of her

savagery. Readers are informed, "[s]he was, doubtless from the first, a savage at heart" (90). Thus, Stephens demonstrates that the line between civilized and savage, white and red, is fine indeed. By showing how whites can become savage, Stephens also questions the opposite assumption that Indians cannot become "civilized" and be assimilated into white civilization.

### **Representations of Gender**

In her representations of gender, Stephens compares and contrasts suitable and unsuitable models of womanhood. While she believes that women deserve expanded roles in public affairs, she expresses concern about the effects of political power on women, as evidenced by her depictions of Catharine and Esther. On the other hand, Stephens has little ambivalence about the crippling nature of the "true womanhood" ideal that attempts to keep women subservient to men. Stephens contrasts Mary and Jane to propose that the ideology of true womanhood suppresses women rather than encouraging them to advance toward their potential.

#### **Catharine**

The contrasting stories of Catharine and Esther are the heart of the representative anecdote in *Mary Derwent*, portraying possible options for women interested in taking leadership roles in society. Catharine's story represents the potential benefits of women's leadership in society; she uses her power for benevolent purposes – saving the lives of whites held captive by the tribe and distributing money to the needy. But more importantly, she has a "civilizing" effect on the Indians. Under her government, the Shawnee build Catharinetown at the head of Seneca Lake, "one of the most lovely spots in all the world" (204).

The "richly cultivated" lands replete with fruit trees and grape-arbors represent the peace and prosperity of her administration. They suggest that Indians can be civilized and change from their nomadic existence to a more agricultural, rooted life like that of whites, a primary goal of assimilationists.<sup>10</sup> But Catharine's influence accomplished even more. "With her benevolence, her gold, and those wonderful powers of persuasion, with which no woman was ever more richly endowed, she had softened many a savage heart" (204). Thus, Stephens suggests that women's leadership can ennoble society through nurturing benevolence in others.

However, even the kindhearted Catharine experiences the corrupting influences of power. When she first arrives among the Shawnee, she merely wants to hide from the world of whites where she has committed so many wrongs from betraying her husband to harming (and she believes killing) her infant daughter. Although she may not consciously realize it, she also attempts to escape the guilt arising from these sins. Her beauty, intelligence, and wealth have given her power over the Indians, but it becomes an overwhelming force in her life. As she explains it in her confession to the missionary:

For the first time in my life I felt the force of liberty and the wild sublime pleasures of an unshackled spirit. . . . There was something of stern, inborn greatness in the savages who adopted me – something picturesque in their raiment, and majestic in their wild, untaught eloquence, that aroused the new and stern properties of my nature till my very being seemed changed.

The wish to be loved and cherished forsook me forever. New energies started to life, and I almost scorned myself that I had ever bowed to the weakness of affection. What was dominion over one heart compared to the knowledge that the wild, fierce spirits of a thousand savages were quelled by the sound of my footsteps? – not with a physical cowardly fear, but with an awe which was of the spirit – a superstitious dread, which to them was a religion. . . . They looked upon me as a spirit from the great



hunting ground . . . , endowed with beauty and supernatural powers, which demanded their rude worship, and fixed me among them as a deity.

I encouraged this belief for a thirst for rule and ascendancy was strong upon me. (93)

In other words, although Catharine had hoped to find a new life among the Indians, she is still besieged by sin. Power corrupts Catharine, miring her ever deeper in sin, for setting herself up "as a deity" breaks the first commandment of the God of Christianity. Although Catharine was already alienated from God before she entered her new life with the Indians, her desire for power masters her, obliterating the Christian lessons of her youth that might have chastened her hardening heart, until she feels left with "no hope, no God" (53). But as the missionary rightly perceives, deep in the recesses of her heart and soul, she still believes in God.

Once she recounts her Christian upbringing and the sins of her past that led her to forsake white civilization, she begins to lose her power over the Indians. In the first place, her heart no longer hungers for power but for peace of mind. The guilt she feels over the past she tried to forget comes back to haunt her, and she begins to search for new meaning. Moreover, the changes wrought by her confession affect her outward demeanor. No longer is she haughty and proud, but "kind and gentle as a child" (229) and a "poor weak woman" (313); consequently, she no longer commands the respect of the tribe. Even more significant, given the sexual mores requisite for nineteenth-century white women, Gi-en-gwa-tah cannot comprehend the changes that come over Catharine, and because of this they become estranged. This paves the way for Catharine, who is unknowingly a bigamist, to be redeemed.

Catharine's redemption follows a Burkean pattern similar to Tahmeroo's. To be redeemed she must first purge herself of her "ambitions" for power over the Indians. Her confession to the missionary operates as her self-mortification. She, the great Catharine Montour, humbles herself before an indigent man of God. Through her words, she begins the process of purification, purging her sin and guilt, but she has lived in sin for many years, and her redemption is an arduous and painful process. Even after her meeting with the missionary, she remains self-absorbed. Other than trying to protect Tahmeroo from the pain of an unhappy marriage, Catharine takes little notice of the people and events around her.

However, her rendezvous with Mary moves her closer to redemption – "the gentle, almost holy presence of the young girl changed the whole current of [Catharine's] feelings" (162). But it is not just Mary's demeanor that transforms Catharine; it is her fortitude in suffering. Catharine has come to tell Mary to warn Jane to keep away from Butler, who is married to her daughter. Although Mary never explicitly reveals her love for Edward, whom she explains loves Jane, Catharine intuitively understands Mary's anguish and moves beyond her own problems and pains to feel compassion for Mary. As a result Mary admits to Catharine those feelings that she has never revealed to others. "You are straight and proud as a poplar. You don't know what it is like to go through life with your head bent to the ground, and the heart in your bosom warm and full of love, like other people's" (165). Catharine is so moved by Mary's suffering that she claims that "if my own life could remove the cause of your sorrow, I would lay it down this moment" (166). When Mary asks her if she says this out of love or pity, the

godless Catharine answers," God knows [the love I bear you] is some holy feeling that has taken me unawares" (167). When their talk turns to the immortal love of God, Catharine answers, "I know nothing of that" (167). But Mary replies that Catharine must not let such ideas "be strangers . . . when you send them away, as I once did, it is like turning angels out of doors" (168-9). Catharine begins to weep copiously, and Mary recognizes the healing power of tears. She tells Catharine that the door of salvation "is open now, or you would not cry so; gentle thoughts always follow tears, just as violets start after the brook overflows" (169). Thus, through the genuine offer of self-sacrifice and the baptism of tears, Catharine moves toward a new identity that will mark her spiritual rebirth.

Her redemption cannot be complete until she is absolved from all her sins. Although she no longer lusts for power, and despite all the years that have passed and her subsequent marriage to Gi-en-gwa-tah, she remains under the obsessive spell of love for Murray. They meet up once again, just as she is attempting to rescue Mary and her family from the attack of the British and Indians. Just before he dies from the stab wounds inflicted by Esther, Murray begs for and receives forgiveness from both Varnham and Catharine, liberating both from the secret sin each has carried for so many years – Varnham, his malice against Murray, and Catharine, her illicit love. So, although Catharine loses her earthly power, her leadership of the Indians, she gains the more significant power to save souls, for it is her willingness to forgive Murray that moves Varnham to also forgive him.

Stephens depicts Catharine's gradual redemption not only as a process of Christianization but also as feminization. For example, when it becomes clear

that the Indians and British are planning to attack the Americans, Catharine pleads with Gi-en-gwa-tah to prevent the violence. "Never in the days of her loftiest pride," Stephens writes, "had Catharine appeared so touchingly lovely, so gentle, and so woman-like" (289). Redemption, in her case, equals womanliness. Although Catharine is never as thoroughly masculinized as Queen Esther, never commits violence or murder to command respect, in her days as leader she had been "almost as stern and unyielding" as Gi-en-gwa-tah (289).

This portrayal of power as a masculinizing force represents societal fears about women as leaders – especially the fear that women's "thirst for rule and ascendancy" will be so strong that they will become manlike. On the one hand, Catharine's leadership is benevolent and successful. The lives of the Indians are more productive, and Catharine moves them toward the possibilities that civilization offers. But on the other hand, her life with the Indians is a fabrication. She is hiding from the truth and from God. Under such circumstances, she cannot flourish, even if her leadership allows her subjects to flourish. Her flaws and sins make her vulnerable to further corruption, including the hypnotic attraction of power for its own sake, as opposed to what it can allow one to do for others. But her leadership, which proves beneficial to her people, suggests that women can be effective leaders. Catharine, had she not been beset by so many problems, might have been able to conquer the corrupting influences of power, but without God, she unable to resist such temptations. In typical fashion with nineteenth-century stories of Christian redemption, she must "die to sin" (Rom. 6: 10 -11). Her death symbolizes her complete redemption. But her story does not die. Her daughter Tahmeroo carries on Catharine's productive work as a great

leader by keeping her mother's legend alive; thus, the ability of women to be great leaders remains a consistent narrative of possibility.

### Queen Esther

Queen Esther represents the other end of the spectrum. Her story is the representative anecdote of "woman run amok." Thoroughly depraved, Esther exemplifies the perceived correlation between women and witches in Western culture.<sup>11</sup> Stephens' description likens her to the typical witch.

Esther[’s garments were] gathered at the bosom by a small stiletto, with a . . . keen blade that glittered like the tongue of a viper. . . . Her hair was white as snow, silvery as moonlight, and so abundant, even at eighty years of age, that it folded about her head in a single coil, like a turban. The high forehead, the aquiline nose, curved with time, like the beak of an eagle, and the sharp, restless eyes, stood out from beneath this woof of hair stern and clear, as if chiseled from stone. (195-6)

These physical characteristics – particularly the beaked nose, the sharp eyes, and the white hair coiled high on the head like a witch's hat – resemble the traditional witch and identify her with the evil and mystery surrounding witches. She is continually described as cold hearted and frequently compared to stone. Others consider her "mad" (199). Stephens even writes that Esther is "less human" than the "savages" she leads (366). But it is Esther's obsession with mayhem and murder, with the spilling of blood that separates her from other human beings. Even Tahmeroo, who fears the old woman, chides her, "blood, always blood – I am sick of vengeance" (227).

Esther is the unredeemed – defiant to the last breath. She symbolizes the fears that both men and women in the nineteenth century may have held about women in power. In her lust for power, she is more violent and ruthless than any man. She becomes not just unsexed by power, but demonic, not just inhumane,

but inhuman. Her leadership results in the destruction not only of the bountiful village cultivated under Catharine's reign, but also of the tribe itself. If her story were unopposed, readers might rightfully assume that Stephens does not advocate greater power for women in civic affairs. But through the contrast of her story with Catharine's, a different message emerges. Women can be civic leaders, but they must be ever vigilant against the corrupting influences of power by remaining true to their womanly selves and close to the God whom they serve – qualities that will guide them to use their power for the benefit of all.

### Mary and Jane

Mary's story demonstrates that womanliness does not mean weakness. Although she is considered by others to be disabled, Mary is fully capable of arduous physical labor, suggesting that disability is a social construction in the eyes of the beholder. Mary also has all the cardinal virtues of True Womanhood – piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness – yet she is denied the rewards of True Womanhood (husband and children) solely on the basis of her physical appearance. On the other hand, her sister Jane, who has none of the virtues of True Womanhood but is beautiful, gains the hero, Edward. Although Mary secretly loves Edward, she knows that her deformity prevents her from being loved as others are (9).

The most significant contrast between Mary and Jane are those virtues so integral to the ideal woman of the nineteenth century. Mary, despite her handicap and the knowledge that it means she can never marry, remains generous and kind to all she meets. Jane, on the other hand, is self-centered and cruel, particularly to Mary. She invites Wintermoot, who had so callously

called Mary a "hunchback" in front of schoolmates, to her birthday party, fully realizing how Mary will feel. During the aborted elopement with Butler, Jane fails to defend Mary when he calls her "the little Hunchback" and a "lying imp" (126). After the incident, Jane is more concerned about her own reputation than Mary's feelings.

Ironically, it is the able-bodied Jane who is actually dependent. For example, she demonstrates little skill at "feminine needlework. . . . [S]he would put her work on Mary's lap with pretty childish petulance, asking Mary for help" (233). And even after Grandmother Derwent declares that Jane has become "industrious," Jane shows herself to be clinging and dependent during the Indian uprising, where she depends on Edward and Mary to make all the decisions for her. Furthermore, since readers see much more of Jane as the petulant, selfish, and cruel child, and very little of her as the competent, worthy woman, her transformation remains questionable.

Rosemarie Garland Thomson believes that "the disabled figure [in fiction] operates as the vividly embodied, stigmatized other whose social role is to symbolically free the privileged, idealized figure of the American self from the vagaries and vulnerabilities of embodiment" (7). Such a description certainly applies to Mary, the agent who frees Jane from the vulnerabilities of embodiment by acting as a distorted mirror of Jane's normalized beauty. For example, at one point in the story Mary asks Jane, "am I not hideous to look upon?" (22). Mary draws her to the water so that both girls' faces, equally beautiful, are reflected in the pool. But only the faces show; Mary's "distorted" body is not reflected. In fact, Stephens writes that with "the loveliness of her face concealed [Mary's] form

seemed scarcely human" (23), and that Mary walks with her face "bent to the ground" (165), leaving readers to conclude that Mary is indeed "hideous to look upon." As the "vividly embodied, stigmatized other," Mary makes Jane appear comparatively "privileged [and] idealized." But not only that, twice she actually offers up her body to save Jane: first, when Mary prevents Jane's impulsive elopement with Butler, and second, when to escape an Indian attack the girls and their grandmother cling to a log floating in the river. Mary, noticing it will not support the weight of all three, slips off so that "the old grand-dame and that beautiful sister should be saved" (*Mary Derwent* 333). That Mary herself is rescued does not diminish the significance of her self-sacrificial act.

The emphasis Stephens places on the physical capability of the "disabled" Mary not only interrogates the meaning of disability, but also elicits the question of why she is represented as disabled at all. The meaning of disability is so destabilized by the physical feats and endurance of Mary so as to suggest that it holds more meaning than just her physical nature and appearance. Burke's notion of ratios helps solve this riddle. An act and all its component parts must be consistent with the scene. Since the scene is gender relations in the nineteenth-century, which place white women within the confines of the home and prevent them from freely developing their talents and abilities, the agency (disability) must fit within that ideal. Mary has the requisite characteristics of True Women, even though she is considered "disabled" – equating True Womanhood with disability. However, her actions reveal that she is not disabled at all, confounding that equation. Perhaps the transformation that Stephens advocates is that even though society views True Womanhood (disabling though it may be)



as the appropriate mode of action for women, women need not be disabled by it. Such an interpretation is further supported when we, following Burke's recommendation, use what is known about an author to complement textual analysis (*PLF* 23). Stephens wrote other novels featuring traditional non-disabled heroines who blatantly disregard the most disabling feature of True Womanhood – submission to male authority.<sup>12</sup> Freed from this precept, women can become independent, unfettered by the prosthetic support of True Womanhood. While it is clear that Jane will never move beyond the sphere of True Womanhood, both Mary and Tahmeroo, daughters of the redeemed Catharine, enact a more physically and mentally active type of womanhood – one that engages in civic affairs. Mary administers her wealth and estates, and Tahmeroo leads her people to a new life.

### Tahmeroo

As noted in the previous section on Tahmeroo in *Representations of Race*, Stephens tends to equate "Indianly" behavior with "masculine" behavior, making it difficult to separate representations of race from those of gender. Tahmeroo's redemption process transforms her into an acceptable model of womanhood by washing away her negative Indianly characteristics. However, from her first appearance in the novel, Tahmeroo has striking admirable characteristics. She is brave, physically and mentally strong, and loyal – traits befitting the new model of womanhood Stephens proposes. If Mary's role in the novel is to deconstruct True Womanhood as an ideal, Tahmeroo's purpose is to construct a new, more active womanhood ideal. At the end of the novel, once Butler's death frees her from the debilitating passion he represents, Tahmeroo

emerges as a capable leader of her people. As she leads them away from the death and destruction of Queen Esther's regime, her youth and vigor symbolize rebirth and the flowering that will follow in her wake.

### Intermarriage

#### *Catharine and Gi-en-gwa-tah*

When Gi-en-gwa-tah makes his first advances toward Catharine upon her arrival in the wilderness, she rejects him, incurring Esther's wrath. After Murray and his family are taken prisoner and are to be sacrificed, Catharine appeals to Esther, but is met with a "cold sneer that froze [Catharine] to the heart" (96). Catharine alone could prevent the torturous deaths of the captured whites, and her only recourse was to agree to marry Gi-en-gwa-tah. This racially inverted Pocahontas narrative features a white woman saving the life of a white man from death at the hands of Indians over whom she has some political power.<sup>13</sup>

While literary references to the Pocahontas story frequently, at least subliminally, hint that Indian women prefer white men as marriage partners, in this inscription Stephens clearly demonstrates Catharine's disgust at the idea of marrying an Indian. As Catharine explains "[m]y heart recoiled at the unnatural suggestion" (95). Whereas in *Malaeska* Stephens provides other possible interpretations for the term "unnatural" as a descriptor for intermarriage, in this case, the meaning is crystal-clear – the marriage of a white woman to an Indian man is unnatural because it is "at variance with natural feeling or moral standards" (OED).<sup>14</sup>

Gender and race account for the different perceptions of Catharine's and Malaeska's marriages. First of all, male writers such as Cooper established the

idea of intermarriage between white women and Indian men as "morally repugnant" (Wardrop 62), in part by representing even the suggestion of it as a threat to the woman's chastity. Because Indians in white fiction represent the opposite of civilized life, they are "a danger to [both] ethnic and sexual boundaries" (Mitchell 130). Caren Deming points out, "white women in America have [been assigned] a 'receptacle' function where culture is concerned. Bearing the white civilization to the frontier, their main function is to preserve it" (90). "Bearing the white civilization" also means bearing white children. A white woman who marries an Indian will be derelict in this duty. On the other hand, no comparable moral standard is required of Indian women; marriage between them and white men "is viewed as a natural occurrence" (Deming 94).

Although Catharine is horrified at the prospect of marrying an Indian, her feelings accord with nineteenth-century notions of appropriate white womanhood. She agrees to marry Gi-en-gwa-tah solely to ransom Murray and his family, but she claims to respect Gi-en-gwa-tah as a man and as a person. She admires his intelligence and comments that he had "all the elements of a warrior and a statesman" (94). While race is never specifically mentioned as the factor most troubling to Catharine, no other explanation makes sense. Gi-en-gwa-tah as a person is not the problem; crossing the racial boundaries disturbs her.

The marriage never would have taken place, had it not been to save Murray. But once Catharine recognizes Murray as one of the white captives, a "strong resolve of self-sacrifice" displaces her fears and disgust, and she immediately agrees to marry Gi-en-gwa-tah if he will free the captives (98). As she admits, "in that moment of my stern resolve, my heart would not have shrunk

from its purpose though the fang of an adder had been fixed in it" (99). Because her motives for marrying Gi-en-gwa-tah are not love, nor any of the typical reasons one marries, the act of marrying has an ambiguous quality – marriage, self-sacrifice, and ransom all describe the act. Catharine is the agent, for it is her word that saves Murray and allows the marriage to take place. Her "self-sacrifice" constitutes the agency by which the act is accomplished. The purpose is not to marry Gi-en-gwa-tah, but to save Murray. And the scene is nineteenth-century race and gender relations in which such an act can occur.

But the situation is much more complex, as a discussion of ratios can help clarify. Both race and gender ideologies of the scene insist that intermarriage of white women with Indian men is improper and counterproductive to the goals of white society; so in one sense, Catharine's act crosses the bounds of white propriety, albeit unwillingly. However, women also are to be self-sacrificing, in accordance with gender ideologies of the scene; in this case, her act remains within the prescribed parameters. In other words gender imperatives dictate conflicting solutions for the situation – it is a no-win situation. Catharine allows her "self" to be sacrificed as ransom for the life of the man she cannot stop loving. Thus, the marriage becomes suggestive of the "forced marriages" that appear in newspaper accounts about white captives of the Indians. In fact, before Catharine realizes who the white captives are, she believed that "it was far better that blood should be shed than I should *force* my heart to consummate a union so horrible as mine with this savage" (97 my emphasis). Catharine is forced to accept the marriage proposal of Gi-en-gwa-tah to save Murray's life. Gi-en-gwa-tah, although he loves her and wants to marry her, did not "yield [her]

the homage which was so readily rendered by the more ignorant of his tribe" (94). In other words, he is a *manly* man in the nineteenth-century patriarchal tradition – worthy of a good woman. He will only accept one ransom for the lives of Murray and his family, her promise of marriage. Imperatives of the purpose-act ratio compel Catharine to acquiesce, for Catharine's purpose (to save Murray) can only be achieved by the act of marrying Gi-en-gwa-tah.

Even though the marriage begins inauspiciously, Catharine keeps her word and maintains her respect for Gi-en-gwa-tah. He builds her a fine house, and they have a daughter on whom she dotes. Although readers are privy to little of her domestic life with Gi-en-gwa-tah, it is clear he loves and admires her. Only when the marriage is in decline do readers learn that Catharine and Gi-en-gwa-tah had developed a deeper understanding of one another. Butler, intent upon weakening Catharine's power, callously reveals that Murray is alive, in America, and knows of Catharine's bargain to save his life. When Catharine hears this, she is devastated. Gi-en-gwa-tah notes her anguish, and remembering the circumstances surrounding her acceptance of his proposal, feels betrayed: "His savage heart was stung with memories to which those few cruel words [of Butler] had given a bitter interpretation" (210). Catharine and Gi-en-gwa-tah separately spend the night agonizing over Butler's revelations. Then, as Stephens reports: "The next day Catharine and the chief recognized each other as ever. But, alas! in their souls they never met again" (211).

Although this statement implies that Catharine and Gi-en-gwa-tah had a soulful relationship during their long marriage, that readers only learn of it after it has ended seems significant. It suggests that Stephens hopes to lead readers to

see the marriage more as "self-sacrifice" than as a "marriage of the minds." That neither Gi-en-gwa-tah nor the domestic arrangements of the marriage are developed to any great extent promotes this view. Catharine is redeemable because her motives were not selfish, but selfless. Had she married the chief to gain more power in the tribe, as Esther had done, she might have been as unrepentant. But the development of the marriage into a more profound understanding in which their souls met indicates that crossing racial boundaries does not necessarily result in a degeneration of the spirit. And Tahmeroo, as one who grows into an ideal model, represents the idea that it does not dictate the degeneration of future generations either.

#### *Tahmeroo and Butler*

The marriage of Tahmeroo and Butler differs greatly from that of Catharine and Gi-en-gwa-tah, although it shares some similarities. Neither marriage is entered into with full faith and love. Tahmeroo loves Butler, but blindly, obsessively. She cannot see his true colors. Originally, Butler marries Tahmeroo in an Indian-style ceremony, which whites do not recognize or accept as lawful, for his own deceitful purposes – lust and power. Tahmeroo is beautiful and he desires her, but his marriage to her will also strengthen his ties to her father and solidify Indian-British alliances, increasing his stature with both groups. He never intends to remain with her. But when he learns that his marriage to her also represents financial rewards, he is willing to go through the motions of a white, Christian ceremony, even though he still has no intention of keeping his vows. Just as he formerly planned to use her sexually, he now intends to use her financially as well, for his own personal gain. In other words,

like Catharine's pledge to Gi-en-gwa-tah, he does not enter into the marriage with honesty and love.

However, while Catharine grows to respect her husband and they develop a more profound spiritual basis for their relationship, Butler never moves beyond his sordid motives. The marriage cannot thrive because Butler is evil and self-absorbed. Neither can Tahmeroo nurture the relationship because she is too passionate, too trusting, too oblivious to the facts. She loves him despite all evidence that he has no respect for her or their marriage vows. She clings to him because she believes she cannot live without him. As a nonwhite woman, she is not subject to any of the sexual or racial impropriety that so haunted her mother prior to her marriage to Gi-en-gwa-tah. However, her passion for such a reprobate undermines her thinking and actions. Until he dies and she is freed from the enthrallment which captivates her, she cannot develop into the strong, resolute leader her people need.

## **Conclusion**

Even though Tahmeroo's marriage fails, race is not the cause. Butler's deception and selfishness doom the relationship. However, racial attitudes in the United States at the time the novel was published in 1858 do make a difference in how the marriage is portrayed, as the conflicting denouement of the British sixpenny novel version (1862) demonstrates. The British edition follows the original 1838 serialized version of the story. In this narrative most of Butler's more despicable actions are minimized or eliminated, although his attempted elopement with Jane just after his Christian marriage to Tahmeroo remains because that incident connects Mary to Catharine. But in this rendition Butler is

the son of Murray, known as Colonel Butler in America (Beadle (1862): 174). Chastened by his father's death in the attempt to save Jane and Edward, the very people that he himself had sought to murder during the battles on Monockonok Island, Butler repents and becomes the loving husband of Tahmeroo. Mary is not Catharine's daughter in this version, so Tahmeroo inherits Catharine's estates in England, where "her Indian blood [is] . . . no reproach to her" (135). In other words, in the mid-nineteenth-century, British readers were perceived as less racially prejudiced than American readers, so the in the British dime novel Butler lives and is redeemed, and the marriage develops into a happy, equitable alliance.

In the American novel, Butler, who as an enemy of the American patriots is painted in much darker colors, must die. Racist attitudes of society shape this version because American readers at mid-century are considered less likely to accept a mixed-race marriage, so the marriage must also die. In this rendition, Tahmeroo is dispossessed by Mary's right, as the eldest daughter, to Catharine's wealth. Butler deserts her and returns to America. Although she is encouraged to remain with Mary and her family, Tahmeroo has not shaken her obsessive love for Butler, so she follows him back to America. When she discovers he has died, she seeks out her tribe and, doubly dispossessed, finds their lands in ruins and the tribe nearly destroyed through Esther's disastrous leadership. Tahmeroo leads the remnants of her tribe west to start a new life. Thus, like most Indians in nineteenth-century American fiction, she *disappears* from the world of whites, fading into the vast West of the American continent. Further substantiating Maddox's insistence that Indians must either be removed or exterminated,



Tahmeroo and her father Gi-en-gwa-tah remove themselves to the far West where they pose no threat to white American settlement in the post-Revolutionary period setting of the novel.

These conflicting plot resolutions suggest that although the American public was willing to accept assimilation of Native Americans into white culture in 1838, albeit assimilation at a remove across the Atlantic Ocean, twenty years later it was not, or at least Stephens may have believed it was not.<sup>15</sup> Many factors contribute to these changing ideologies. The increased volume of settlers moving west at mid-century escalated the number of violent encounters between whites and Native Americans. These clashes were widely/wildly reported in the press, coloring many white Americans' perceptions of Indians. Furthermore, by mid-century scientific discourses, which also appeared in the popular press, promoted polygenesis, suggesting that Indians were a separate, inferior species to whites. These elements combined with belief in white American progress, as demonstrated by the exponential growth of invention and technology, spelled doom for those outside "civilization."

While Stephens' own perceptions of Indians remain ambiguous, her later Indian tales tend to be more racist than *Malaeska* and *Mary Derwent*, suggesting that her ideologies had changed along with the majority of American society. However, race is not the central issue in *Mary Derwent*. Expanded roles for women concern Stephens more than the eventual fate of Native Americans. Responding to the hopes and fears of Americans regarding women's proper place in civic affairs, Stephens posits that women's leadership can have a positive effect on the lives of ordinary citizens, but improvement of society must

be the goal of such governance, not power itself. Using the stories of Esther, Catharine, and Tahmeroo, Stephens demonstrates the pitfalls and the possibilities of women's leadership.

As three generations they also represent the past, present, and future of women's leadership in civic affairs. The representative anecdote of Esther's story is that of the evil witch – the woman who uses her power to bring tragedy and misfortune to all she touches. But the days of witchcraft are past. Esther dies and with her the evil she represents. People need not fear women's leadership as the representative anecdote of Catharine reveals. Catharine's narrative hints that female power can be used for benevolent purposes, but that women in positions of authority must guard against godlessness which can lead them to seek power for its own sake rather than for the benefit of all people. Catharine represents the present – the women of the mid-nineteenth-century who were "unsexing" themselves to gain women's rights in the public forum. Catharine's story is a parable – a cautionary tale – warning women to remain womanly regardless of where life may take them, whether it be the wilderness of America or positions of public service in the "civilized" world. Mary retains her womanliness and represents an acceptable, traditional, contemporary role for women leaders – that of benefactress. Stephens tells us, "[g]ravelly and quietly, like one who takes up a pleasant duty, the young Countess of Granby assumed the great power of her birthright," which provided her "ample scope" for "remedying the evils" of civilization (378). Stephens connects the loveliness of womanhood with "moral goodness" (289). Without that quality women's leadership is no different from man's and may deteriorate into disaster, as

Esther's ascendancy over the Shawnee suggests. Tahmeroo's tale is the promise of tomorrow when women will be accorded leadership of society based on their ability to guide people in the proper direction. Tahmeroo has to come through the fire of trial to prove herself worthy. Baptized by the waters of self-sacrifice, she affirms her worthiness/womanliness. She will lead her people wisely with the temperance she gained in her struggle to overcome her own passions. Women can lead, not for the power leadership represents, but for opportunities for service to others that it provides.

The next chapter also discusses women's leadership, but its picture is much darker. In a trilogy of novels regarding women leaders, Stephens seems to back away from the possibilities and dwell more on the pitfalls. In these later dime novels, Stephens' representations of Indians, both male and female, tend to be less favorable and to support the idea that Indians are savages. Questions of race tend to take precedence over questions of gender. However, in the *Mahaska* trilogy, Stephens does return to the incisive critique of patriarchy that resonated so strongly in *Malaeska*.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Stephens uses published histories of the events in creating her story, notably, Isaac Chapman, *Sketch of the History of Wyoming* (Wilkes-Barre: Sharp D. Lewis, 1830); Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, Vol. 1 (New York, Harper, 1851); and, Charles Miner, *History of Wyoming, in a Series of Letters from Charles Miner to His Son, William Penn Miner* (Philadelphia: Crissy, 1845). In fact, as Henning notes, "[t]he descriptive language of those sources appears almost indistinguishable from hers" (*Beyond* 145, n. 9). While Stephens emphasizes the historical role of the white woman leader of the Iroquois, Queen Esther, she makes little use of the fact that the Iroquois were a matrilineal society. Interestingly, however, she applies this concept to the white Granby family peerage in which "the Granby honors descended alike to male and female heirs" (*Mary Derwent* 62).

<sup>2</sup> The island, according to Lossing, is actually Monockasy Island. Why Stephens fictionalized the name of the island is unknown.

<sup>3</sup> There is much confusion about the historical Catharine Montour. Apparently, more than one real person of this name with connections to Seneca peoples existed in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. According to John Freeze in "Madame Montour," the Catharine who called herself "Queen Esther" was a "French half-breed who had a French Governor of Canada for [her] father" (81-2). Miner and Lossing agree that the historical Queen Esther was of mixed parentage, although Stephens makes her white in her narrative. Freeze insists that the Catharine Montour for whom Montour's Ridge and other locations in Pennsylvania were named "was a French Canadian without any admixture of Indian blood – that she was educated – [and] that she preferred the Indian custom, and roving unsettled habit of life . . ." (81). According to him this white Catharine married a mixed-blood Seneca, Roland Montour. Unfortunately Freeze does not give his sources for his information. Whether Stephens, who was definitely aware of Miner's and Lossing's works, had access to some source that suggested that Catharine Montour was white, which she then used to develop her white women leaders of the Indians, or whether she simply used creative license to further her own goals is unclear. Ascertainable facts are that there was a mixed-blood woman named Catharine Montour, also known as Queen Esther, who had

considerable influence among the Seneca, and that Stephens' fictional Catharine Montour bears little resemblance to any historical person by that name.

<sup>4</sup> In the serial and the British Sixpenny novel, Stephens calls the tribe Mohawks; in the 1858 book, she changes it to the Shawnee. Although the Shawnee were not part of the Iroquois Confederacy (Six Nations), both the Mohawk and the Shawnee peoples joined the British in fighting against the Americans during the American Revolution. However, such blending of fact and fiction is typical of white authors and demonstrates their lack of understanding about Native Americans. For many, an Indian was an Indian.

<sup>5</sup> Although the reported amounts of the prize vary from \$ 200 to \$ 400 (Edgar Allan Poe seems to have been the source for mistakenly inflated prize value, which was repeated by later authors), a notice attached to the beginning of the serial as it appeared the 1838 magazine clearly states that Stephens won \$200 for it. To absolve themselves of charges of favoritism, as Stephens had just become editor of *Ladies Companion*, the note also explains that she had entered the story under a pseudonym, Mrs. Catharine Rogers, and that at the time the prize was awarded, Stephens was not yet connected with the magazine. Regardless of any shenanigans that may have been involved in the contest, the story itself was highly popular.

<sup>6</sup> In May of 1838, Angelina Grimké delivered a stirring speech in Pennsylvania Hall supporting the abolition of slavery, while a mob outside jeered, threw rocks, and otherwise attempted to disrupt the meeting. Because many churches and other public facilities were afraid to allow abolitionists a public podium, abolitionists raised money to build the hall, as a symbol of free speech, to provide a place where the society, and other groups interested in moral causes, could present their views. Later that night the mob destroyed the building, burning it to the ground.

<sup>7</sup> Some of her best uses of comparison and contrast occur in her two best-selling social novels. In *Fashion and Famine* (1854) and *The Old Homestead* (1855) she not only contrasts the lives of the poor with the rich but she is also one of the first American authors to compare city life unfavorably with country life (Papashvily 143).

<sup>8</sup> This is also a subversive method of critiquing male behavior.

<sup>9</sup> By choosing to move west rather than being removed by whites, Gi-en-gwa-tah absolves whites of guilt for taking over Indian lands. Paola Gemme takes this interpretation even farther. In "Rewriting the Indian Tale," she contends that because Tahmeroo rejects white offers to live in white civilization, her choice of going west places the onus of land dispossession on Indians and their "natural unredressable savagism" and not on whites. She sees *Mary Derwent* "as a legitimization of contemporary Indian policy, which pursued the segregation rather than the integration of Native Americans" (384).

<sup>10</sup> Although early white accounts of Indian customs and life, including Heckewelder's (*History* 193), detail the peoples' use of agriculture to raise food crops, Stephens omits this fact, insinuating that Catharine's influence over the Indians had established agriculture as well as the more settled life that such agrarian pursuits allow.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Chapter 5 of *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* by Carol. F. Karlsen, which provides a brief history of the correlation of women with witchcraft.

<sup>12</sup> For example in Stephens' *The Old Homestead*, several women characters are "strong-minded" and refuse to kowtow to male authority; however, each maintains womanly dignity and demeanor.

<sup>13</sup> One interesting aspect of this rescue is that Catharine wields some power over the tribe, as did the real Pocahontas as the daughter of Powhatan, leader of a confederacy of numerous small tribes in the Chesapeake area.

<sup>14</sup> The connotation of sexual impropriety for the term "unnatural" is made even more obvious by the nineteenth-century usage example cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It comes from Sir Walter Scott and refers to "incest," thus emphasizing the connection between the term and sexual deviance. Furthermore, Biblical references to sexual impropriety use the word "unnatural" to describe such "vices" (Rom. 1:26; Jude 1:7).

<sup>15</sup> However, Stephens returns to the assimilationist plot in her dime novels written during the Civil War, which suggests that she was unwilling to give up the hope for the eventual assimilation of Indians into white culture.

## CHAPTER 5

### **"WHITE OR RED?" COMPARISON AND CONTRAST IN *ESTHER: A STORY OF THE OREGON TRAIL* AND THE *MAHASKA TRILOGY***

Although the plots of *Esther: A Story of the Oregon Trail* and the *Mahaska* trilogy differ greatly, Stephens uses comparison and contrast in both narratives as a primary rhetorical device to develop paired characters – one white, one Native American – to pose the question: What difference does race really make? For example, *Esther* features two young women, Esther, a white woman heading west and Waupee, a member of the Sioux nation. Both are beautiful. But race and culture – the only ostensible differences between them – drastically affect their outcomes in the narrative: Esther marries the hero, while Waupee dies of a broken heart. The *Mahaska* trilogy takes a similar approach. In these novels two step-sisters, one blonde and pale, the other half white, half Indian, not only are compared and contrasted, but they compete for the affection of the same white men. The men's preference for the white woman drives the mixed blood character to seek vengeance on the whites who reject her. Though concerns about race take precedence over gender in both narratives, Stephens simultaneously manages to provide social commentary on women and their place in society.

This chapter examines how Stephens adopts comparison and contrast as a strategy to "encompass and confront" contemporary ideologies about women and Indians and to offer alternative perspectives on these issues. Through various sets of paired characters, Stephens discredits racial prejudice and

stereotypes about Indians by highlighting the similarities between Indians and whites. She invites readers to confront their own prejudice by presenting fictional characters' encounters with their racial biases. Because these tales emphasize questions of race, Stephens returns to the nature/nurture debate inherent in discussions of race in the nineteenth century and posits that nurture is more significant than nature in establishing moral character. She also stresses women's capabilities to act in the wider realm beyond the home, comparing and contrasting active women with their passive counterparts. This chapter also reveals how Stephens uses a palimpsest to blame white males for much of the trouble besetting both Indians and women.

### **The Stories as Female-Centered Myths**

Unlike *Mary Derwent*, which is based on historical events, *Esther* and the *Mahaska* narrative are imaginary tales conceived by Stephens. Written specifically as dime novels for dime novel audiences, they tend to replicate more closely, although in female-centered ways, the more traditional western adventure, which was quickly becoming a staple of the dime novel genre. In them Stephens reverses certain conventions of the male-centered western. In these tales, the passive white woman who faints at the slightest danger, typical of the heroine in male-authored novels, appears as a pale shadow of a woman in comparison to her stronger, more vibrant, Indian sister. The role of white men as protectors of white women is also undermined in these stories as Indian or mixed-blood men prove their mettle and save white women captured by Indians. Furthermore, in the trilogy, men, both white and Indian, are ancillaries of women; that is, they must react to women's actions, inverting the stereotypical plot.



Contrary to her use of female heroines in *Malaeska* and *Mary Derwent*, Stephens uses the cautionary tale with flawed women characters to warn women of the hazards of liberty and freedom of choice in these later female-centered myths. Both protagonists abuse their liberty: Esther through thoughtless wandering alone in the wilderness, Mahaska through blind ambition. On the surface, *Esther: A Story of the Oregon Trail* appears to be a typical novel of the American West, complete with scenes of man versus nature, savage Indians, and the perennial damsel in distress, whose virtue is threatened by "bad" men. However, Stephens sets up these familiar scenarios, in part, to satirize the passive heroines of the Cooperian tradition. Comparison and contrast of Esther and Waupee, quickly reveals that Waupee, not Esther, is the real heroine; Esther's passive nature is gently, but firmly, chided. In this novel Stephens also points out that the romantic ideal of "happily ever after" is often chimerical, as she emphasizes how Waupee's husband of less than a month has become enamored of a beautiful woman, Esther, whom he only knows by sight.

The *Mahaska* trilogy is the darkest of Stephens' frontier stories. The main character, Katherine/Mahaska, rejected by whites, rejects them as well and turns "savage." When she fails to get the love she seeks among whites, she lusts after power over the Indians instead. As in the encoded message in *Mary Derwent*, Stephens warns readers of *Mahaska* that power can be a corrupting force, especially when feminine qualities are abandoned. However, unlike *Mary Derwent*, the tale of Mahaska has no positive female role models to counterbalance the tragic results of overweening ambition. Mahaska's lust for absolute power at any cost and her abandonment of womanliness take center

stage, covering the more subversive plot which indicates that patriarchal policies of exclusion promote "savage" aggression against whites who think they are above Indians and thus exclude them from white society. However, even though Mahaska is an antihero who abandons her womanly principles, her tale is a thrilling adventure of a woman who lords over men and of men who kowtow to her authority, reversing the typical male plot.

### **Plot Summaries**

#### **Esther: A Story of the Oregon Trail**

This novel, written in 1862, follows the adventures of Esther Morse, a young white woman who is captured by the villainous Black Eagle, a Dacotah Indian, who ostensibly plans to sell her to an even more nefarious Mormon. Actually, he plans to keep her as his wife and collect gold from the Mormon as well. Esther claims that rather than be his bride, she will "die first!" (38). Waupee, her beautiful Indian friend and Black Eagle's bride of less than a month, provides Esther with a knife for whatever purpose she may deem necessary. Two men, Kirk Waltermeyer, a Natty Bumppo type, and Claude LaClide, a wealthy man who is one-quarter Indian, attempt to rescue her, but it is Claude, the hero, dressed in Indian garb and calling himself Osse'o, who saves her. Claude, raised in St. Louis, has abandoned civilization for the world of his Indian ancestors when his fiancée proved faithless and her racist remarks led to his mixed-blood Indian mother's fatal heart attack. Meanwhile, Kirk successfully battles a prairie fire and saves Waupee, despondent over Black Eagle's faithlessness, from committing suicide. In the climax all six main characters meet up. In the ensuing melee, Black Eagle kills the Mormon, then dies himself.

Claude is injured, but Waupee treats the wound before she goes down to the grave of her husband where she dies of a broken heart. Claude, his true "white" identity revealed, marries Esther, and Kirk rides off into the sunset.

### The Mahaska Trilogy

In 1863-4, Stephens wrote a trilogy of dime novels: #56, *Ahmo's Plot, or The Governor's Indian Child*; # 63, *Mahaska, or The Indian Princess*; and, # 70, *The Indian Queen*, which follows the misfortunes of Katherine/Mahaska, the mixed-blood daughter of Frontenac, the French Canadian Governor. Katherine is rejected by the white men she loves: her father and Gaston La Guy, who marries her step-sister, Adele. Katherine's Indian grandmother, Ahmo, has taught her that her Indian name, Mahaska, means "Avenger" and that she must live up to her name and her destiny as a great leader of her people. Enthralled by the idea of power, Mahaska seeks revenge on whites, particularly Adele, whom Mahaska believes has wronged her. Mahaska leaves white civilization and joins the Seneca as a leader. She arranges for the Indians to kidnap Adele and vows to marry the man who kills Gaston, who has rescued Adele. Gi-en-gwa-tah,<sup>1</sup> a Seneca chief, is mistakenly identified as the man who has fulfilled her desire, but in actuality, he has only wounded Gaston. Mahaska remains true to her word. Even though the idea is "repugnant" to her, she marries Gi-en-gwa-tah, but only because she sees no other means to gain her ultimate goal – total power over the Indians.

To avenge the French who rejected her, she secretly plots to break the Six Nation's alliance with the French and team up with the English. She tries to gain Gi-en-gwa-tah's support for this idea, but he resists. She comes to hate him; and

to increase her power, she continually undermines him in the eyes of the tribal council whenever he is away. Although motherhood softens her fury, it does nothing to curb her desire to go out on the warpath (53). To further enhance her power over the "superstitious" Indians, she arranges for gifts from the English to seem like gifts of the Great Spirit. When Gaston returns to Canada to take over the post of Governor, Mahaska again has Adele kidnapped. But this time, Gi-en-gwa-tah, who has seen through Mahaska's mysterious powers and understands her true motives, foils the attempt. Mahaska has her henchmen arrest him, and she brings him before the tribal council and the people. She demands that the council be delayed until she has had time to commune with the Spirits, but Gi-en-gwa-tah urges them not wait upon the wiles of a woman. When the Elder, Upepah, agrees with him, she tries to kill Gi-en-gwa-tah, but her tomahawk kills Upepah instead. This turns the people against her. She withdraws, and Gi-en-gwa-tah's eloquence brings the people to their senses. Mahaska is banished and goes off in her canoe. The next day, the canoe is found empty: "Mahaska, the Indian Queen, was no more" (112).

### **Dramatistic Analyses**

#### **Esther: A Story of the Oregon Trail**

The representative anecdote in this novel is an inversion of the traditional captivity narrative in which a white woman is saved from "a fate worse than a thousand deaths" (intermarriage) by the white hero. By creating a hero who is one-quarter Indian and by placing the question of his race at the center of Esther's thoughts, Stephens confronts the moral dilemma: What difference does race really make? This question became more important in American society as

the Civil War raged over the right of one race to enslave another and as hordes of whites moved West, displacing Native Americans from their ancestral lands. Whether or not race makes a difference in a person's character was a boiling political question during this period, but Stephens poses the problem in terms of a romantic/domestic relationship. From the moment Claude/Osse'o arrives on the scene, Esther feels as if "she had gained a protector" (56), but she is obsessed with determining whether he is white or Indian. Although Stephens, from her first lines, clearly provides her answer to the conundrum by indicating that all people are ultimately the same, she simultaneously reinscribes perceived differences by employing the racial stereotypes of her day to describe both good and bad Indian characters.

Whites do not inevitably compare favorably with Indians. Stephens creates several sets of comparable characters, similar in age and sex, to demonstrate that race does not necessarily dictate moral character. Particularly through her comparison and contrast of Esther and Waupee, Stephens emphasizes that race really makes little difference in a person's character. A pentadic analysis of the novel reveals that the primary agents are those whose acts reveal that race is a moot point for predicting behavior. Thus race is the agency that reveals the purpose of the novel, which is to question its significance as a predictor of human behavior. Interestingly, as the only Indian novel by Stephens which is not set in the far past, its scene is less metaphorical than her other frontier novels because it clearly represents nineteenth-century American society. Yet it is also the most nostalgic, raising the issue of the "vanishing" Indian to a *fait accompli*.

The overall pentadic analysis reveals that, in this novel, agent is again the most important term because agents either demonstrate that race makes no difference or are forced to examine their own racial prejudices.

Agent = Waupee (a positive example of active womanhood and proof that full-blooded Indians can have high moral standards); co-agents = Claude/Osse'o (a mixed blood character who demonstrates racial mixing does not lead to degeneracy) and Kirk (a white man who is forced to examine his own racial prejudices); counteragents = Esther (a negative example of passive white womanhood, prejudiced against Indians) Black Eagle (a negative example of Indian manhood) and Elelu Thomas (a greedy Mormon and negative example of white manhood).

Agency = ways of being Indian/white; race.

Act = self-sacrifice; selfishness.

Scene = 19th century American society.

Purpose = to question/determine the difference race makes.

Although Esther does struggle against Black Eagle when he kidnaps her, most of her acts, most notably fainting, are passive motion rather than motivated action.<sup>2</sup>

At one point in the story, she does manage to slip away unnoticed, but other than that, she relies on the actions of others to save her from peril. Her only

motivated act is her prejudicial assessment of Osse'o based solely on his race.

Waupee, on the other hand, actively participates in Esther's struggle, at great personal cost, providing her with a knife to escape and nearly killing Black Eagle.

Osse'o and Kirk also selflessly struggle against the counter-agents. Their acts lead readers to question contemporary racial prejudices that correlate particular

types of behavior with specific racial traits. As might be expected counteragents' acts are the opposite of agents', being selfish and motivated by personal gain. To avoid reifying the racial stereotypes of the ignoble savage, Stephens creates an equally sinister white man to counterbalance the evil Indian. By placing certain characters in situations where they must come to terms with the difference race makes in their acts and/or in the acts of the racial "other," Stephens "confronts and encompasses" a major problem that many in society were trying to understand. Her fictional solutions provide readers with possible responses to one of the burning questions of the day.

### The Mahaska Trilogy

The trilogy represents a major change from Stephens' previous novels of Indian women; Mahaska, even though she is half white, is heavily racialized and stereotyped. Perhaps Stephens' publishers requested a sterner view of Indians to increase sales. By the time these novels were published, Orville Victor was the editor of Beadle dime novels (Stern, *Publishers* 39). The success of Beadle's dime novels had spawned many competitors, and Victor had suggested that all that authors needed to do to keep Beadle sales high was to "kill a few more Indians" (Pearson 99). Thus, perhaps novels portraying Indians favorably were no longer considered marketable. This could have been a significant concern for Stephens. Her husband of 31 years died in 1862. While he never contributed as much to the household income as did Stephens herself, with two children still at home, she may have been concerned that she might not be able to support them in the manner to which they had become accustomed. Furthermore, ever aware of readers' tastes, Stephens probably realized that the recent wars between

Native Americans and whites may have colored the attitudes of her reading audiences.

However, even though this trilogy appears to be the most racist of Stephens' Indian tales, it still insists that all Indians are not necessarily inferior to whites. Through the characters of Chileli, Mahaska's ill-fated mother, and more significantly, Gi-en-gwa-tah, Mahaska's loving husband, Stephens insists that Indians can be good, faithful, and loving, as well as great leaders. And, if the main plot centers on an Indian gone "savage," she is driven to it by white men who exclude her from their society. Secondary plots and characters repeat themes from Stephens' earlier novels that racial essentialism cannot adequately define all "others" and that people must be judged by their character, not their race.

Because the *Mahaska* trilogy is a cautionary tale, its dramatic analysis is complex. Mahaska's savagery develops because of uncaring, unthinking white patriarchy. These novels indict such indifferent male leadership and warn that its results can be devastating. Standing alone, the trilogy could be considered an indictment of female leadership, but, as Stephens' other frontier novels reveal, she believes that women should be more active in their society and culture. In Mahaska's story Stephens reiterates the warning she issued in *Mary Derwent*, that to be effective leaders women must remain womanly. Because Mahaska fails to do this, her leadership is doomed; however, her experience of racial antipathy and prejudice at the hands of white men initiates her vengeful spirit and annihilates the last vestiges of womanliness from her heart and soul.



The representative anecdote, then, of these novels recounts the devastating results of men's continued leadership and policies of exclusion. It is the story of white men using their power and privilege to maintain their position and keep "others" subordinate by excluding them from "civilized" life. With the country in the midst of a civil war and Indian wars raging in the West, Stephens writes a novel that suggests that men's policies of exclusion must be held accountable for the needless wholesale killing that their type of administration has wrought. Had Mahaska's own father not recoiled from her as from one unclean, she might never have left civilization, sought absolute power over her tribe, and become a vicious killer. This theme is a faint palimpsest under the cover story of the Shakespearean plot, "hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."<sup>3</sup> Stephens paints Mahaska's ambition, fury, and vengeance with broad and brilliant strokes, but hiding beneath that portrait lies a distinct discontent with patriarchy. As Bube points out:

the conventionality or deviance, conformity or rebellion dichotomy is the key tension operating on many levels in Stephens' life and explaining its major disjunctions: between her public pronouncements on "womanly" behavior and her own social and professional activities and between the gender norms she verbally promoted and her disturbing melodramatic portrayals of Indian women in her frontier fiction. (49)

Stephens' fantasies of deviant women who move beyond the limits of patriarchal civilization bespeak her own frustrations with the limits imposed on women and "others" by white males.

A pentadic analysis of the Mahaska trilogy helps illuminate this covert message.

Agent = Mahaska (mixed-blood woman who seeks revenge on whites after being

rejected by the white men she loves), counteragents = Frontenac and Gaston de LaGuy (the white men who reject Mahaska).

Act = going "savage"; rejecting "others" because they fail to meet racial and/or gender criteria.

Agency = gender/racial characteristics; perceived notions of race and gender.

Scene = nineteenth-century American society.

Purpose = to demonstrate the effects of patriarchal policies of exclusion.

Although these three novels contain many other characters, Mahaska is the primary agent, for she is the one who goes "savage" and thereby exposes the purpose of the narrative: just how ruinous the policies of white men can be.

Frontenac, the white father, is responsible for his daughter's existence, yet he finds "her presence . . . almost painful" (*Princess* 15). His acts, from marrying Mahaska's mother without love simply to ease his own "loneliness," to rejecting the daughter she bears him, reveal not only his shallowness, but his policies of exclusion. The segregating guidelines by which he lives create a hierarchy setting whites above Indians, men above women, separating husband from wife, father from child. Gaston's act of rejecting Mahaska's advances is more understandable; he already loves and is betrothed to Adele, and Mahaska has already become bitter over her father's rejection, so her motives are fraught with deception. However, Gaston's act and words reveal that he believes "how impossible [it would be] for a woman" to wield power over nations (*Princess* 60). He prefers the demure Adele, a "weak girl" whose "clinging affection" (61) "fills his [heart] thoroughly" (59). In other words, he represents male power and privilege that seeks to keep women subordinate to men. His rejection seals

Mahaska's fate. The complicity of white men in Mahaska's rejection of civilization, pushing her over the accepted boundaries of sex and race, permeates the tale. The agency of Frontenac's and Gaston's acts is their narrow-minded beliefs about race and gender. Because Katherine/Mahaska fails to meet their criteria for what a woman should be and because she exhibits certain racial characteristics that they find undesirable, they reject her – exclude her from their company. On the other hand, those characteristics that they find so repellent are the agency by which Mahaska goes savage. Mahaska tries to fit into white society, but, once excluded, the racial and gender characteristics which prove unacceptable in civilization are the very qualities she needs to be a leader of "savages."

### **Representations of Race**

#### **Esther: A Story of the Oregon Trail**

In *Esther*, Stephens directly confronts the issue of the difference race makes. She opens the novel with an elegy for the vanishing Indian, which she tempers with the thought that all are equal in the grave.

Our every footstep treads upon a grave! The keel of the snowy-pinioned vessel but turns a fleecy furrow while plowing its way over the abodes of death. Earth is but one vast tomb, where sleep, side by side, commingling their dust, the king and peasant, the master and slave, the beautiful and repulsive. . . . We turn from the scenes of busy life, and enter the deep forest, unthinking and careless that beneath our footsteps lie the mouldering bones of the war-painted warrior, beside his broken spear and stringless bow; and, in another place, the dusky forest maiden, who once wreathed amid the dull blackness of her hair the gorgeously-tinted buds and blossoms of the God-cultured prairie. But so it is. The star that leads civilization westward shines sadly upon the graves of a people almost extinct – a people that have been hunted ruthlessly from their greenwood haunts till every year has seen their graves multiplying thicker and thicker in the wilderness. Then the Anglo-Saxon comes to plow it up and plant corn above the dead warriors, stooping now and then to pick up a stone

arrow-head from his furrow, and examine it curiously, as if he did not know what soil his sacrilegious plow was upturning. (5)

*Esther* is Stephens' only novel of intermarriage between whites and Indians that is set in a contemporaneous nineteenth-century time frame. Although in 1862, when this novel was published, Native Americans were not as Stephens suggests "a people that have perished" (6), she merely reiterates the Romantic notion of the vanishing noble savage that had been a staple of American literature since the 1820s (Dippie 18-21; Deloria 64-5). She also follows the tradition of other women writers such as Sedgwick who insist that white men's policies toward Indians are "ruthless" and "sacrilegious." By asserting from the opening that all people and races are equal in the grave, she prepares readers to seriously confront the issue of race in the main plot. Stephens places the question of race at the center of Esther's thoughts, which allows readers to vicariously consider the issue themselves. To emphasize that race is not the important criterion in establishing a person's moral disposition, Stephens "confronts and encompasses" the issue in a secondary plot, when Kirk, whose heart is a "pure diamond" (18) must confront his own prejudicial attitudes.

#### *Waupee and Esther*

Race is the paramount issue in *Esther*. Stephens compares and contrasts Waupee and Esther to demonstrate that categorizing peoples by contemporary racial expectations can lead to erroneous conclusions. Indians can be generous, kind, and resourceful while whites can be narrow-minded, self-centered, and helpless. Encounters between Waupee and Esther highlight these notions. Waupee "risked her life" (10) to try to prevent Esther from being kidnapped by

Black Eagle because Esther had been "kind" to her, yet Esther barely remembers meeting the young Indian. Waupee, hurt by this apparent indifference, comments that "the memory of the white squaw is not true like the heart of the red one" (9), a point that accentuates the difference between the two. Waupee fills the all-important role of mediator between the world of whites and Indians. When Black Eagle succeeds in his devious plan, Waupee sneaks into the camp where he has imprisoned Esther and slips her a knife to help her escape. While Esther is grateful, she is consumed with frantic terror over Black Eagle's plan to have her as his bride. She begs Waupee, "Save me from this awful fate!" (38) totally disregarding Waupee's feelings and that the fate that Esther finds so loathsome had once been Waupee's greatest joy. Esther is insensitive and helpless, while Waupee, though her heart is breaking because her husband prefers Esther to herself, proves loyal and resourceful as she risks her life to save Esther.

Esther's obsession with race is the most significant difference between her and Waupee. Even though Esther is of a different race than Waupee, that does not deter the young Indian from trying to help her. But for Esther race is a crucial consideration, and her prejudices against Indians inform her reactions. Although Osse'o rescues, protects, and guards her, she continually, from their first encounter, until his race is finally revealed, ponders whether he is white or red.

That he could not be an Indian was her first thought; but as she looked again, the idea was discarded. (68).

"I will trust you" [she tells Osse'o], "for you have been kind to me. Still, you are an Indian, and a stranger." (91)

**"Oh forgive me for having doubted you . . . ," she pleaded, touched to the heart, not only by the care he had bestowed upon her, but by the truly gentle and respectful manner in which it had been performed, so entirely different than any thing she had before seen among the Indians. (92)**

**Who could he be [she thinks], with the garb of a savage and the graceful courtesy which marks the highest civilization? Truly he was an Indian, but that voice, those gentle words, it was difficult to think of him as a savage. . . . Or – her heart bounded again, as if serpent-stung – could all this be treachery? She put this idea aside and she thought of her father, of his agony at her loss. . . . But again she looked and saw Osse'o. . . . Could he, also, have bitter thoughts? Did the heart of an Indian ever feel the fierce passions that cause the sufferings she was enduring?**

**"Oh, shame! shame!" almost burst from her lips, as she reflected how nobly he had acted. (92-3)**

**Esther is ambivalent. On the one hand she is attracted to Osse'o, "he seemed more like a warrior of the air, . . . than a mortal being" (64-5).<sup>4</sup> When she first sees him, indeed before she knows that he will rescue her, Esther is so transfixed by him that she "forg[ets] her peril, her bonds, her captivity" (65). Later, after he had proven himself trustworthy and "he [had] held her firmly with his strong arm" (113) to prevent her from falling off her horse, readers are told that "in her gratitude and her admiration, Esther forgot every thing which might have revolted her at another time" (114). On the other hand, she cannot entirely forget that which revolts her. When Osse'o is wounded in the climactic battle and his shirt is removed, Esther rhapsodizes: "[she] saw the white shoulder glowing from beneath the torn hunting-shirt, and knew, with a thrill of joy, that the man she had so long taken for a Dakotah was the same complexion as herself" (121). In other words, until she knows he is mostly white, even though he has risked his life for her, she cannot trust him. While he sleeps to recover from his wounds, Kirk tells Esther Osse'o's history, so she finally learns that he is actually one-quarter Indian.**



In the denouement, readers discover that Osse'o, again known as Claude, loves Esther and that his attitude toward her "was changed after he knew how *near* Esther had been to forgiving the savage character he had assumed" (my emphasis, 124). Although this sentence is purportedly about Claude's attitude, it reveals more about Esther's attitude toward race and racial differences. She did not forgive him for his "savage character," she came "near . . . to forgiving" it. In other words, race still makes a big difference to her. Although Claude/Osse'o is the same person, regardless of how much Indian blood runs through his veins, she cannot ignore race. Until she knows that he is mostly white and that he has been raised as a white, she cannot give in to her desire for him. As a "proper" lady she cannot cross the racial divide. Stephens' emphasis in this novel that character, not race, defines a person suggests that such a dictum restricting intermarriage is specious because it is based on false assumptions.

#### *Claude and Kirk*

Like Esther and Waupee, Claude and Kirk are closely linked, even though they have no blood ties. Both are honest and true-hearted. Osse'o's name means "True Heart" (68), and Kirk "has a heart that beats like a trip-hammer, and always in the right place" (107). Both are experts in hunting and wilderness survival and have legendary reputations in the West. Both operate as mediators between the world of whites and Indians. As a mixed-blood, Claude literally straddles both worlds, while Kirk, although white by birth like his prototype Natty Bumpo, is more at ease in the wilderness than in the world of whites.



In a clever secondary plot, Stephens makes Kirk's rescue of Waupee a complete inversion of Claude's rescue of Esther, providing readers with a different response than Esther's. Whereas race is a crucial factor for Esther, for Kirk, "[w]ho it was he did not pause to think. Enough for him to know that some fellow-being was in trouble and bent on self-destruction" (103). He saves Waupee from committing suicide, just as she is about to leap off a cliff. She faints in his arms, and only then he does he recognize her as an Indian.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, in disappointment. "It is only a squaw;" and then, as if ashamed of himself, he smoothed the long, black hair from her bronzed face. . . .

"Wall, she's real pooty, too," he muttered between his teeth. "The pootiest squaw I ever sot eyes on. Who would have thought a red-skinned gal could look so much like a human?" (103)

When she awakens, Kirk learns that she has much in common with him, no home and no people. He also learns that Black Eagle's desertion is the cause of her despair and that, although she had thought to kill her faithless husband in his sleep, she was unable to do the deed because "she had loved him once" (105). Kirk is relieved, for the thought of "murder[ing] a sleeping man in cold, calculating blood" made him "shudder" (105). But when she says she will go, live all alone, and wait for death to relieve her of her painful burdens, Kirk objects vehemently. He insists that Waupee accompany him. Waupee replies that "the chiefs of the pale-face will laugh at their brother for being kind to a woman of the Dacotahs" (107), but Kirk retorts that he does not care what others may think and that he will protect her from the taunts of whites. In other words, Kirk confronts his racial prejudice – his shame at his initial disappointment at discovering that Waupee is

"only a squaw" – and realizes, at least in this case, that individuals should be judged by their character not their skin-color.

However, Kirk is not free of prejudice. He cannot quite comprehend that such a view might also apply to those with evil characters, for when Waupee tells him that Black Eagle has kidnapped Esther, he replies, "Black devill . . . But he's an Indian, arter all, and its his natur', I suppose" (84). His contradictory view of the meaning of race can be interpreted several ways. First of all, it mimics Stephens' own inconsistent representations. Through Kirk's and Esther's encounters with racial others, Stephens posits that race is inconsequential in determining moral character. However, as narrator, Stephens sometimes employs the very racial stereotypes and prejudices she seeks to nullify. For example, when Waupee sneaks up on her sleeping husband to kill him but checks herself at the last second, the narrator explains, "No thank God! She was a savage, but could not stain her innocent hand in blood, wronged though her love had been" (98). So even Waupee, who in many respects represents the proper role model for active womanhood, can, by virtue of race, be called a "savage." But because Stephens satirizes Cooper's version of the American West in this novel, another explanation of Kirk's prejudicial statement about Black Eagle's Indian "natur'" becomes apparent. His comment simply reiterates, almost verbatim, a point that Leatherstocking makes over and over and over again about the "natur" of "red gifts" and "white gifts" – the idea that each race has certain characteristics.<sup>5</sup>

The ambiguity of the meaning implied in Kirk's words and actions in this scene make it a prime candidate for closer examination using Burke's pentad.

Kirk's confrontation with his own prejudice – the scene in which he saves Waupee and promises to protect her from prejudicial treatment – is intermingled with his own biased pronouncements – the scene in which he maintains that Black Eagle is evil because he is an Indian. These intertwined scenes involve two different acts. In the first, Kirk confronts his own racial prejudice through actions – treating Waupee as he would any other woman. In the latter, he only speaks prejudicially, he does not act on his bias. The adage or proverb "actions speak louder than words" seems particularly apropos to this situation. In "Literature as Equipment for Living," Burke contends that all literature can be considered "proverbs writ large" (*PLF* 296). He insists that proverbs "name typical, recurrent situations" (293) within a society. He continues:

Proverbs are *strategies* for dealing with *situations*. In so far as situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them. Another name for strategies might be *attitudes*. (Burke's emphases, 296)

Since Stephens' overall purpose in the novel is to question the validity of the common notion that race determines one's moral character (situation), her use of the proverb, "actions speak louder than words" (strategy) suggests that Kirk's actions (treating Indians the same as any other people) represent the type of attitude she would like her readers to adopt towards Indians.

Yet Stephens' descriptions of Claude are riddled with stereotypes about Indians, particularly the equation of Indian with "savagery" and whiteness with civilization.

The raven hair of his [Indian] grandmother, but softer, finer, and glossy, fell in thick waves over his forehead. The tall, lithe form, erect and graceful, the eagle eye, the proud poise of the head, were splendid in their regal beauty; while the soft, olive-tinged skin, warmed by the flashing

blood of his transatlantic [French] father, the tender light that sometimes filled his eyes, the blush that flushed his pure forehead, were perfect in their blending of refined and savage beauty. Just enough of the wild grace and *insouciance* of his Indian ancestry had been mingled with the pure blood of the old French nobility to render this young man strikingly beautiful in person and most alluring in mind. (26)

While Claude's Indian qualities are complimentary, they fit the mold of the "noble savage" and contrast with the characteristics of the "civilized" man. Whites blush, Indians do not. One trait is contrasted with the other. For example, Stephens writes, "[a] more fearless horseman could not be found, even among his grandmother's tribe, yet, in the dance he was quiet and graceful" (26). Such a contrast suggests that Indians are not usually quiet and graceful in dancing and that whites rarely are fearless horsemen; that is, it uses stereotyped beliefs to establish Indians as savage, whites as civilized, even though all the traits exist in the mixed-blood character of Claude/Osse'o. However, by choosing positive traits to characterize Claude's Indian side, perhaps Stephens felt that she was promoting harmony between the races. Through Claude's admirable traits inherited from both sets of ancestors, Stephens discredits the common contemporary stereotype that interbreeding results in degeneration and the worst characteristics of both races.

Ironically, this intermingling of the races is what makes Claude the ideal hero for this novel in which Stephens tries to show that race (nature) is not the determining factor of a person's character. It is he who points out to the doubtful Esther that "there are black hearts among Indians and whites men alike" (90). And a few minutes later, as she is still debating whether or not to trust him because he is "an Indian and a stranger," he retorts in no uncertain terms, "I am

a MAN!" (91). Rarely does Stephens resort to capitalization for emphasis, indicating the significance of this declaration. He is a human being with all the virtues and foibles of any other man. Indian or white, he is the same person.

*Black Eagle and Elelu Thomas*

The comparison and contrast of Black Eagle and Elelu Thomas merits special attention because both are thoroughly evil; Stephens' pairing of them reiterates the theme that race is not an accurate predictor of behavior. Although Carol Carney suggests that this story represents "a blunt [anti-Mormon] prejudice embarrassing to the modern reader" (97),<sup>6</sup> being Mormon is not what makes Thomas depraved any more than being Indian makes Black Eagle immoral. Stephens accuses both of misleading their people, whom she considers "deluded" (19) and ignorant, but not base or immoral. Both Black Eagle and Thomas are revealed as "savage," as their encounters with a "good" man demonstrate – each acts more savagely than the last. When Osse'o has his back turned, Black Eagle pushes him off the edge of a cliff and assumes that Osse'o has died. However, Thomas sees the Indian hanging by a root from the precipice and shoots at the root, sending Osse'o tumbling into the abyss. Each of these acts is "savage" in the sense that each is unwarranted and unfair violence committed against another human being. When the two villains meet up, Thomas lies, telling Black Eagle that he saw the Indian hanging by a root "and was going to help him, when all of a sudden he fell, and was crushed at the foot of the rocks" (74). In a revealing passage the narrator continues:

Black Eagle could not well doubt the story, for, base as he was, the Indian would have scorned to leave his worst enemy in a situation so terrible.

The savage would have rescued him, even if an hour afterward he had sought his scalp, and therefore had no suspicion of the white man. (74)

In other words, Stephens complicates the picture by painting Thomas, in this instance, as even more "savage" than the Indian.

However, the most savage act of all is (almost) perpetrated by Black Eagle. In the final confrontation, when Black Eagle finally manages to kill the Mormon, even though he is bleeding profusely, he takes out his knife and attempts to scalp Thomas. The combined efforts of Kirk, Osse'o, and Waupee thwart his endeavor, but Kirk's words reveal the profundity of his savage act: "By the light of heaven, you shall not scalp him! A cussed, treacherous reptyle as he was, he was yet a white man, and shall not be butchered" (120). Apparently the savage acts that both committed against Osse'o, the mixed blood, including shooting down the defenseless man in an already precarious situation, do not equal the savagery and butchery of scalping a white man. Stephens' depiction of this incident exemplifies the difficulty that white writers of the nineteenth-century faced when they attempted to encourage readers to overcome their racial prejudice. Stephens posits that race does not determine moral character, but, simultaneously continues to employ stereotypes that mark Indians as "other," as "savage." The post-colonial writings of Linda Alcoff make these apparent contradictions more understandable. On the one hand, Stephens' inscriptions are based on her ideologies – in this case, the belief that race does not determine moral character. But, on the other, her position in society as credible author and the discursive context in which her representations of race occur necessitate using images of Indians with which her audience is familiar. If her

story loses a sense of veracity for readers, then Stephens' endeavor to curtail racial prejudice will be to no avail. By including certain stereotypical beliefs about Indians, she makes her story seem more realistic and thus is more likely to achieve her overall purpose.

### The Mahaska Trilogy

In this tale of female self-aggrandizement, it is sometimes difficult to separate race from gender. However, clues can be gathered from Stephens' other writings. She wrote a similar western tale of a white woman who also destroys her life by abandoning her feminine principles. Comparisons between the two help to unravel this entanglement of race and gender. In *Sybil Chase; or The Valley Ranch*, Dime Novel # 21, the eponymous character viciously seeks her own desires at all costs and, like Mahaska, crosses sexual boundaries and appears unredeemable. Consequently, although it might be easy to attribute Mahaska's blood-letting violence and her reliance on sexual attraction to accomplish her goals to race, Stephens portrays a fictional white woman's acts in a similar fashion. Although Sybil does not personally murder anyone, she is an accessory to such crimes, and she even purposely causes a duel. Furthermore, like Mahaska, she uses her sexuality to attract the attentions of a man already betrothed to another. Such inscriptions by Stephens suggest that the wrongs committed by Mahaska might be more accurately ascribed to the abandonment of womanly principles than to particular racial characteristics.

However, ambiguity still exists at the nexus of race and gender. While Mahaska personifies most negative racial stereotypes about Indians, the rejection of her white father provokes their manifestation. Her tale as Indian

queen in which she leads and men follow provides a thrilling adventure tale for women readers, but Katherine/Mahaska also exhibits many defective gender characteristics. As in *Esther*, Stephens uses comparison/contrast not only to highlight differences between the races but to stress similarities as well. But none of the whites in the *Mahaska* trilogy are truly admirable characters, whereas certain Indian characters, Chileli and Gi-en-gwa-tah, represent moral goodness. In this tale, Stephens' representations of race are complex, refuting yet simultaneously reinscribing prevailing stereotypes; however, by pointing out the differences between Indians as well as their similarities to whites, Stephens destabilizes notions that all Indians are alike and that they are the opposite of whites.

#### *Chileli and Ahmo*

Stephens contrasts two Indian women, Chileli and Ahmo, daughter and mother, respectively, to demonstrate that not all Indians are alike, nor can they be simply categorized as the opposite of whites. Chileli is patient, loving, and kind, despite the growing "repugnance" that her white husband Frontenac exhibits towards her (*Ahmo* 51, 52, 53). Even when she overhears Frontenac confess to a friend that he never loved her, she does not reproach him.

Sundquist, in her study of stereotypes of Indian women in American Literature, suggests that Chileli exhibits the traits of the Angel/Victim (113), including being "young, beautiful, frail, . . . weak, . . . shy, . . . self-effacing, . . . loyal, . . . [and] compassionate" (111). As is typical of Angel/Victims, themes associated with Chileli involve victimization, frustrated love, and death (111-2). Her meek and mild personality contrasts sharply with her mother's. Ahmo personifies Indianly



vengeance, befitting the stereotype of the ignoble savage woman. Sundquist categorizes Ahmo as a Fury – a character who is "noisy, forward, revengeful, cunning, cruel, lethal, and destructive" (67).

When Chileli dies from a consumptive illness, Ahmo believes that Frontenac has poisoned Chileli. In one sense she is correct, for once Chileli overhears Frontenac admit that he never loved her and that he prefers a pale-face, she takes on a cold chill that "never le[aves] her heart" (*Ahmo* 38). Although her white doctors believe "her constitution [to be] so much stronger and more vigorous than that of a white woman" (54), she continues to fade.<sup>7</sup>

The most explicit contrast between Chileli and Ahmo occurs at Chileli's death scene. Chileli is full of love and compassion for Frontenac, while Ahmo is full of hate and cunning. Chileli's last words are for Frontenac, who, as is typical of many melodramatic death scenes, arrives just as Chileli breathes her last. She whispers into his ear: "Chileli dies that her brave may be happy. . . . [and] that he may find the beautiful pale-face " (61). Thus, Chileli's thoughts are loving and selfless, but Ahmo's are "full of bitter hate and fell suspicion" (60). Ahmo had tricked Chileli into explaining the cause of her misery. Upon learning that Chileli is not first in Frontenac's heart, Ahmo begins to nurse "fury . . . in her heart like fire in some heathen shrine waiting for its victim since with her, revenge was an instinct of religion" (54). And she does not have to wait long to find a victim, for Frontenac soon marries his beloved pale face, and Ahmo plots to kill his new bride in retribution for the death of Chileli.

Not only does Ahmo personify the stereotypical Indian traits of vengeance and hatred of whites, she encourages these attributes in Mahaska. When Chileli

dies, Ahmo takes over the all-important role of motherhood, training Mahaska to be a proper Indian princess. Ahmo's success in this endeavor helps substantiate the notion that nurture plays a key role in character development. Chileli had originally named her child "Cherry Blossom," indicating more about Chileli than the child. But Ahmo renames her "Mahaska" and tells her that the name means "Avenger" and that she must live up to her name, to avenge her mother's spirit by killing the pale-face wife of Frontenac. Ahmo taunts Mahaska with the racial question that underlies all Mahaska's troubles:

Which does Mahaska love best, her white blood or the red stream that flowed in the stream of great chiefs? The whites call her Katherine, and would make of her a toy or plaything, shallow and idle as themselves; but the Indian name given by her grandame has a deeper meaning. (69)

But Mahaska is not yet ready to concede that her father does not love her and cannot bring herself to commit the crime, so Ahmo kills Frontenac's new wife. Ahmo continues to inculcate the young girl with traits that Ahmo believes will make Mahaska a great leader of the Indian nations. Ahmo has genuine love for her granddaughter, but it is "a ferocious affection that ha[s] something terrible in it" (70).

The contrast between the type of mother Chileli might have been and the type that Ahmo becomes demonstrates a significant difference between the two. Though they are mother and daughter, they are as different as night and day. Stephens thus posits that not all Indians, nor even all Indian women, are alike, destabilizing race as a discrete and reliable category. In this narrative, she insists that reductive racial stereotypes do not adequately describe individuals even as she employs those conventions to describe both Chileli and Ahmo. This

situation also demonstrates the interweaving of race and gender: does Ahmo's ferocious brand of motherhood generate from her Indianness or her unwomanliness? Such a conundrum is difficult to answer. However, by accentuating the differences between the two characters, Stephens takes a strong stand against judging a person solely on the basis of racial stereotypes.

### ***Mahaska and Adele***

Stephens employs a different strategy to discuss issues of race in the second novel of the trilogy, where the comparison/contrast of Katherine/Mahaska with her step-sister Adele takes center stage. Rather than emphasizing differences *within* the Indian race, Stephens' characterizations of these two young women primarily highlight differences *between* the races; however, at the same time Stephens dispels certain contemporary stereotypes about Indians. Katherine, bereft of her mother and neglected by her white father, feels jealous of the white girl whom her father obviously prefers. In hopes of gaining her father's love, Katherine forms a plan to "surpass" Adele in all her endeavors (*Princess* 12). In this depiction Stephens counters the idea that Indians are ignorant and unable to learn or to appreciate civilized culture. Katherine, eager to prove herself, absorbs all that she can about white history. Female leaders, such as "Boadicea, queen of the Britons," particularly fascinate her.<sup>8</sup> Adele is clearly not as intelligent as Katherine, as signaled by Katherine's superior scholastic abilities and Adele's own admission, "I feel so stupid" (25). By portraying Katherine as intelligent, Stephens refutes that the idea that whites are naturally superior to Indians in intelligence.

However, despite Katherine's intellect, Stephens forewarns readers that Frontenac's rejection of his Indian daughter could be disastrous. "Love for her father had been the one tender feeling in her nature, deprived of that, there was nothing to combat the fierce impulses which made such riot in her breast" (16). Under Ahmo's tutelage and her own father's rejection, Mahaska becomes more Indian-like, less identified with whites, and less womanly. These changes in her are not only exacerbated by Adele's presence but are also refracted in the mirror of Adele's white womanly perfection. The governor "center[s] all the affection" he had felt for his second wife upon her daughter Adele (15), but he approaches Katherine with "a faint shudder" and a "shrinking chill" (11). Quite naturally, Katherine resents this abandonment:

She knew well that the best blood of his proud heart was beating in her own veins; he was her father, her own, own father; she was his only child; what right had he to fold that young face to his bosom and kiss so tenderly the golden hair of another man's child? (15)

When Frontenac requests that the two girls become "pleasant companions for one another" (11), Adele honestly and openly befriends Katherine. However, Katherine, although her heart "seethe[s] and burn[s]" with "savage jealousy" (14), "with the wonderful dissimulation born in her nature, . . . conceal[s] every show of emotion" (11). In other words, in keeping with contemporary stereotypes of Indians, Katherine is dishonest and conniving, but the innocent Adele is not.

Ahmo tutors Katherine to restrain any indication of emotional excitement and enkindles a hatred of whites in her heart (*Ahmo* 71). Katherine learns these lessons well. When her white father demonstrates his preference for Adele, Katherine "cease[s] to show the slightest trace of feeling upon the subject, but no

victim to the tortures of her savage forefathers ever suffered keener agony than she endured without a visible sign or murmur" (15-6). These images of savagery in descriptions of Katherine's behavior link her with her Indian ancestry at the same time they connect her father's rejection to her inclination toward Indian ways.

Stephens uses Ahmo's racial hatred of whites as a method to explore the precarious position of mixed blood children. Ahmo's crucial question about which race Mahaska loves best proclaims a significant truth, whites do not accept people of mixed parentage. They are at best an exotic "toy or plaything." This depiction of the problems of self-alienation faced by children of mixed marriages underscores the guilt of white men who marry Indian women for selfish reasons but fail to accept the concomitant responsibilities – including loving their mixed blood children. But other whites do not accept Katherine either, as the incident of a classmate mocking her grandmother Ahmo shows. Although no one is allowed to disparage Katherine within the Frontenac estate, neither do they "speak of her parentage" (42). But it is her own father's neglect that determines her fate.

Katherine has already decided to live among the Indians when she meets and falls in love with Gaston de LaGuy, whose future marriage to Adele has already been arranged by the governor. His rejection seals her fate and sets up the rest of the tragedy. Katherine's passion for him and her "womanly ambition" cause her to forsake her usual caution about revealing her true emotions. Although Adele and Gaston obviously love one another, Katherine believes that because "de LaGuy was an ambitious man," he would welcome the opportunity to share her life and "rul[e] over the savage nations, instructing them in all the

arts of civilization" (51). However, when she tries to seduce him, "the repulsion which he had always felt toward her increased" (58). When he fends off her proposal with a cold rejoinder about how happy he will be "in the love and companionship of [his] little Adele" (61), Katherine's soliloquy reveals the depth of her anger and hatred as well as her contrast to "little Adele."

"He spurns and despises me. . . . Gaston de LaGuy, you have sealed your own death warrant as well as hers. Power, power, there is vengeance in it, if not love! . . . .

I believe I have been mad! I did think he might love me! Am I growing feeble? Am I a love-sick girl? No, no! Henceforth I am Mahaska, the Avenger! Tremble every white man of you all, you shall have need of aid at that name! I will make it a terror that shall blanch your cheeks to hear. The last link that bound me to that hated race is broken; I will leave their close cities forever, but I will leave behind me that which shall be the beginning of a new life." (62)

Katherine's thoughts contrast feminine behavior with Indianly demeanor, "Am I a love-sick girl? No, no! Henceforth I am Mahaska." Unlike Adele, who personifies the passive white woman, Katherine will not sit around and wait for others to save her from peril. She will act like the savage Indian of the white imagination – aggressively. She will actively pursue a course which will put her in power over others, and she will seek retribution from those she feels have wronged her. Such sentiments embody the stereotype of the vengeful Indian while they demonstrate her loss of womanly comportment.

#### *Gi-en-gwa-tah and Gaston*

Gi-en-gwa-tah, the Indian husband whom Mahaska is forced to accept to obtain the power she seeks, contrasts sharply with Gaston, who rejects her advances. Gi-en-gwa-tah is loving, accepting, and open, whereas Gaston is racially prejudiced. Although Gaston in true gentlemanly fashion does not reveal

his encounter with Katherine to Adele, he acknowledges that "it is [the Indian blood in her] which I so thoroughly detest" (62). While Katherine's attempted seduction gives him ample reason to distrust her, he couches his aversion in terms of race, not individual personality. On the other hand, Gi-en-gwa-tah loves Mahaska and never slights her for her mixed heritage. In other words, Gaston represents the policies of exclusion of Indians from white society, the very cause of Katherine going "savage," whereas Gi-en-gwa-tah signifies the openness of Indians towards whites.

The two men also have many similarities. Both are handsome, intelligent, powerful leaders of their people. They also share the dubious honor of saving Adele when Indians working for Mahaska capture her. Both eventually see through Mahaska's duplicity, although each is temporarily blinded from it – Gaston because he hesitates to disturb Adele who loves Katherine and Gi-en-gwa-tah because he loves Mahaska. But, despite their resemblances, Gaston represents the intolerant attitudes of the white fathers, while Gi-en-gwa-tah signifies the more guileless, straightforward attitudes of Indians, quintessential traits of the "noble savage."

### **Representations of Gender**

#### **Esther: A Story of the Oregon Trail**

In this novel, issues of gender run secondary to issues of race. Stephens inverts stereotypes of the passive woman heroine of male-centered westerns to demonstrate how absurd such characters are. She places Esther's passivity in direct comparison to Waupee's more realistic active nature, emphasizing Esther's utter uselessness. Waupee, like Malaeska and Tahmeroo, though Indian, is the

heroine and intended role model. Stephens also examines men's roles and proposes that manly men can also be tender-hearted.

### *Waupee and Esther*

By comparing and contrasting Waupee and Esther, Stephens offers Waupee's active engagement with events as a more reasonable womanly ideal than the passivity of True Womanhood. Stephens' ridicule of the passive female so typical of male-centered westerns, shines brightest when, at his moment of crisis, Osse'o could use Esther's help, but she is completely ineffectual. Waupee must take care of the wounded and bleeding Osse'o, for although Esther wants to help, "the hand of the pale-face is like the aspen leaf in the breath of the storm, and her heart is faint as the dove" (122). While Waupee does all the work, stanching the flow of blood, gathering the required herbal remedies, and binding the wounds, Esther merely sits there, cradling his head in her lap. Stephens emphasizes Esther's lack of womanly ability to nurse when just a few paragraphs later, Kirk says, "Waal, it's woman's business to take care of the sick, I s'pose" (123). Esther has failed to fulfill her womanly duty. Although she does sit up and watch over him all night, had it been up to her, he might not have survived because she was unable to care properly for his wound. Furthermore, her obsession with Osse'o's race indicates her selfish, self-absorbed nature, a most unwomanly trait.

Not only does Esther fail to accomplish "woman's business," her passivity and weakness are held up to ridicule. First of all, they contribute to her capture. When Black Eagle appears before her "[h]e gathered her up from where she stood white as death and frozen with fear" (11). At critical moments, instead of



keeping her wits about her, she faints (71) or feels that she "is losing [her] mind" (89). When she does manage to slip away from her captors, she is described as a "feeble girl" who is led by her "noble steed," her "brave horse," rather than her leading him. In fact she is so weak, "[t]he bridle slipped from her grasp. . . . [and she was] powerless to hold it" (87), nor can she "retain her upright position, she crouches in the saddle" and "clings wildly" to the horse (88). Other than slipping away during a "sham" battle that the Mormon Thomas has concocted to make it seem as though he has rescued her from the Indians, Esther does nothing to help save herself. She completely relies on others – from Waupee to Osse'o.

On the other hand, Waupee personifies a much more active type of womanhood. She tracks down Esther in the wilderness to warn her of Black Eagle's plans; she provides the captive Esther with a weapon; and she treats Osse'o's wounds – all at great personal self-sacrifice. In the earlier events, she is risking her life, for she believes that Black Eagle might kill her for thwarting his intentions. In the latter, she tends to Osse'o, even though her heart is breaking because of Black Eagle's death. Waupee is anything but passive. She models the more active womanhood ideal that Stephens endorses – she is resourceful, self-reliant, and faithful.

Even though Waupee engages actively in the world about her, she retains her sense of proper womanly behavior; whereas Esther does not necessarily know the appropriate gender/womanly boundaries as demonstrated in the climactic battle between Black Eagle and the Mormon. Esther wants the men to break up the fight between her "mortal enemies," even though Kirk points out "Thar lives ain't of any more 'count that a sneakin' cayote" (118). But Waupee

knows better.

The Indian woman sat with bowed head. She knew well that the man she loved so passionately was engaged in a desperate encounter, but though there might have been something of that former love yet lingering around her heart, the education of a lifetime rendered it a duty to restrain her feelings. It was not for a woman to take part in the strife of warriors. (119)

Waupee, despite all her activity in opposing Black Eagle's plots for Esther, knows her place. A "true woman" (120) to the end, Waupee represents the more active ideal of womanhood that Stephens envisions. However, like all of Stephens' Indian women, a fatal flaw dooms her – she is too passionate. It is this fault which leads her to attempt murder and suicide; it also causes her death of a broken heart. Yet Stephens suggests that Waupee's womanliness overcomes her passion and saves her from murdering Black Eagle: "the pure womanly gold triumphed over the base alloy of passion" (98).<sup>9</sup> In other words, in this tale the Indian woman rather than the white woman represents Stephens' vision for a new ideal of womanhood. Waupee exhibits important characteristics – in particular self-reliance and resourcefulness – that Stephens sees as essential to women taking their rightful place in society. Esther does nothing worthy of emulation; she faints and cries and relies on others; when needed, she proves useless. Despite great trials and tribulations, Waupee maintains her wits, acts rather than reacts, and demonstrates her ability to deal with any crisis. Through her, Stephens suggests that such "womanly gold" can help other women "triumph" as well.

#### *Claude and Kirk*

Stephens uses her comparison and contrast of Claude and Kirk not only to make statements about manliness, but also to demonstrate men's ideas about

womanliness, as Kirk's comment about medicine being "woman's business" reveals. Claude, as the primary hero, exudes masculinity. Readers are told he "had become perfect in his manliness" (26). Furthermore, he knows how to treat a lady. He not only rescues Esther from Black Eagle, he provides her with food and shelter in accordance with what white society expects men to do for their womenfolk, even though Esther does not expect such a "gentle and respectful manner" from an Indian.

Kirk also knows how to treat a lady. After rescuing Waupee, he insists that she ride his horse while he walks alongside. When she suggests that she could walk, he retorts,

you're not a-goin' to walk, while I own a horse. I know the braves, as they call themselves in your tribe, make you go on foot while they strut off on thar horses all fiery-fired to death. But I don't and won't! Thar's no use a-talkin', its just what Kirk Waltermeyer would do for any woman. (107)

Although Waupee is an Indian, Kirk regards her as a human being who deserves to be treated as any other woman might be. But Kirk has his own perspective on women and their place in society. Osse'o may prepare food for Esther, indicating that he will take care of all her needs. But Kirk, although as a "daring frontiersman [he] makes a refined woman his idol – a creature to work for, fight for, and die for, if need be" (42), expects women to do all the food preparation. When he and Waupee meet up with Osse'o and Esther, Kirk commands, "Come, gals, stir about and let's have a little somethin' to eat" (115). In other words, even though he has "exulted Esther Morse to a paragon" (46), when it comes to gender roles, he demands that both "refined" women and Indian women stay within their appropriate boundaries. However, like Claude he radiates manliness.

He is "the very *beau ideal* of that pioneer race who, scorning the ease and fashionable fetters of city life, have laid the foundation of the new States in the unexplored regions of the giant West" (14). Though he can cross the trackless desert without water and escape the prairie fire, "he has a woman's heart about some things" (80). In other words, assured as he is of his manliness, he is not afraid to expose a more tender side.

### *Intermarriage*

The marriage between Esther and Claude/Osse'o does not occur until the end of the novel, and definitely not until Esther has determined that, although Claude may be one-quarter Indian, he was born and raised in white civilization. With Esther's love for him, "[h]is disgust for civilized life died a gentle death" (124). They marry, honeymoon in Europe (as befits wealthy Americans), and return to his "mansion," which Esther christens "HOME!" in the final word of the novel. Carney suggests that Esther's love has tamed his savage proclivities, "fully domesticating him" (46). Stephens may be suggesting that a woman's love has domesticating power. But, if Stephens is indeed ridiculing the passive heroine, perhaps a more fitting interpretation would be that Esther, "feeble girl" that she is, will never have to worry again, her man will take care of her. Unlike women of the real world, she has found and married her Prince Charming. Even a cursory glance at the circumstances of Esther's continual doubt of Osse'o because of his indeterminate race demonstrates that she has done nothing to earn his love. In fact, the narrator informs readers at one point that Osse'o reacts "[a]s if touched, insulted by her doubts" (91). Esther's marriage to Claude/Osse'o says less about intermarriage than it does about Esther, recapitulating her

undesirable superficiality. First of all, it only happens after Esther learns that he is "the same complexion as herself" (121); in other words, it is not really an intermarriage at all. Furthermore, Claude is not only white, he is wealthy; Esther need never outgrow her passive nature; her husband will provide for all her needs. In the "HOME" Claude provides, Esther can remain within the confines of domesticity, sheltered from the real world.

Much more fascinating than the marriage of Esther and Claude is the intimation that had Waupee lived, Kirk – that *beau ideal* frontiersman – might have married her. When he and Esther find Waupee lying dead of a broken heart upon the grave of Black Eagle, Kirk buries her,

and as the kind, tender-hearted frontiersman piled the last stone upon the rude monument to mark her grave, his eyes filled with tears and he hoarsely whispered:

"Poor woman! May she be happier in heaven than she ever was on earth. I didn't think I should ever have cried over a red-skin but thar's no denyin' it now, if she had lived . . . Waal, waal, she's at rest." (124)

Esther's motives in marrying Claude seem calculated and selfish. But Stephens leaves no doubt but that Kirk loved Waupee. He recognizes that, although they may have differences of skin color, they had more important qualities in common. Waupee's death prevents their possible marriage, but Kirk's love for her reiterates the theme that intermarriage should not be considered improper.

### The Mahaska Trilogy

Issues of gender are complex in the *Mahaska* trilogy, in part because of the difficulties of separating race and gender. Stephens' representations of race and gender, particularly in the central character of Katherine/Mahaska, but in others as well, reflect ambiguities that can be resolved using Burke's dramatic

analysis as a clarifying lens. Mahaska's unwomanliness tends to be overshadowed by Stephens' equation of Indianness with masculinity. Furthermore the theme that white male policies of exclusion are responsible for Mahaska's decline into savagery fades into obscurity in the last novel of the trilogy in which Mahaska takes her place as the Indian Queen. In this narrative, Stephens tries to show that if women abandon their womanly principles, their leadership can be as disastrous as men's. At the same time she creates a thrilling female adventure tale in which warriors and chiefs are not primary actors but ancillaries to the Indian Queen.

#### ***Mahaska and Adele***

The gender contrasts between Mahaska and Adele are stark, in part, because Mahaska steps far beyond the boundaries of appropriate behavior for women, even though that line is frequently difficult to pin down. Wherever it is, Adele never crosses it – she is gentle, kind, patient, selfless, a paragon of womanly virtue. Katherine, on the other hand, is harsh, conniving, reckless, self-centered – "almost 100 percent pure Siren" (Sundquist 68). Adele is asexual, "childish" (*Princess* 40), "child-like" (41), and "innocent" (41). She hesitates to do anything "unwomanly" (47). Katherine, by contrast, is a vamp, "passionate" (42), "irresistible" (59), and "dazzling" (45), whose "womanly vanity" (57) impels her beyond womanly propriety to use her sexual power to attempt to seduce Gaston. Later, she uses the same womanly wiles to keep Gi-en-gwa-tah in line.

Not that Stephens offers Adele as a proper role model for women readers; on the contrary, Stephens presents the insipid, passive, selfless Adele to satirize the pale pathetic heroines of male-centered border tales. Her inability to

decipher Katherine's true nature demonstrates just how foolish she really is. Captured by an Indian at Mahaska's behest, Adele thinks she is "saved" when she hears Katherine's voice in the encampment; it takes two pages of dialogue and Mahaska's threat to "tear [her] heart out" before the slow-witted girl realizes Katherine is not her friend (80). During their years as "sisters" and schoolmates, Adele showers genuine love and affection on Katherine, but as Stephens reports:

sweet, gentle Adele, how fruitlessly her young heart was flinging out its kindness! She might as well have charmed a hawk from the prey it swoops down upon as attempt to win affection from that mysterious creature, in whose heart rioted all the blood of antagonistic nations. (14)

In other words, Adele's womanly acts of kindness are futile, whereas Mahaska's unwomanly acts of revenge, such as having Adele kidnapped, are fruitful as well as dangerous. Unlike Adele, Katherine is never passive, but she continuously crosses the boundaries of propriety. Through comparison and contrast, Stephens manages to illustrate the inadvisability of both womanly passivity and manly aggression.

Unwomanly behavior is not dangerous just to Mahaska's foes, but to Mahaska herself. Once she leaves civilization to live among Indians, Mahaska must deal with the consequences of that decision. In order to become queen of the Indians, she must prove herself worthy and must eliminate her enemies. When Gaston makes a daring rescue of Adele, Mahaska tries to kill him with her tomahawk, but her arm is "paralyzed" by the love she still bears him (86). So she orders her warriors to kill them both. As she grows more "savage," she also becomes more masculinized.

The young savage – for she truly was such now – had reddened her conscience with a murderous revenge. The last trace of the old life was

swept aside forever. The stain of blood upon the woman's soul had fully roused the tiger within, which henceforth only warfare and desolation could appease. (90)

In other words, for Stephens, to step over the boundary of race is to step over the boundary of womanhood.

This critical act is imbued with indeterminate representations of race and gender that Burke's dramatism helps clarify. In this incident the act is attempted murder, the agent is Mahaska, the purpose is revenge, and the scene is the wilderness, far from the civilized world of whites. But the key element is agency – that is, Indians who are the means by which the act is accomplished – for Mahaska "ha[s] no strength to kill [Gaston] with her own hand" (86). Thus, the agent/agency ratio becomes critical to unraveling the ambiguity of Stephens' inscriptions of the limits of sex and race. Conflicting passages during this incident reveal that race and gender war against each other within Mahaska. On the one hand, she is "convulsed with passion . . . like . . . some wild animal" (84), but on the other, she is "paralyzed" and cannot "kill him with her own hand" (86). Her womanly love for Gaston overpowers her Indianly desire for revenge. As Stephens describes it:

Katherine whirled the tomahawk around her head. Its whiz went through her heart, turning its point. The last throb of love that ever swelled her bosom broke through her wrath and paralyzed her arm. . . . Spite of the hatred that burned so fiercely in her bosom, spite of the dread of escape which drove her almost mad, she had no strength to kill him with her own hand. (86)

The repeated reference to her "bosom," surely represents her womanliness, especially when "swelled" with love. Yet, her fierceness and hatred represent the stereotypical ignoble (male) "savage." Love and hatred commingle, as do her



womanly and Indianly traits. Stephens skillfully presents Katherine/Mahaska's bifurcated nature while demonstrating that no clear boundaries between race and gender exist; in this case, neither race nor gender operates as a metalanguage.

When Mahaska realizes she cannot do the deed herself, she attempts to murder him by proxy. She promises not only to wed the "chief" who kills Gaston, but also that she will be his "slave . . . [and] he shall be . . . her master!" (86). In other words, Mahaska is so disturbed by the warring factions within her that she momentarily forgets her ultimate goal of complete power over all the Indians. By having an Indian, a male Indian, commit the crime, and by insisting that Mahaska cannot do it because of love, Stephens suggests that only an Indian or a male would commit such an act. Yet, the narrative also clearly states that the Indians were initially reluctant to pursue the fugitives, especially since they were allied with the French. It also insists that Mahaska instigates the attack. Burke's explanation that each element of a ratio must be consistent with the other elucidates Stephens' motives through the agent/agency ratio. Mahaska the Indian seeks revenge, but Mahaska the woman cannot do the deed. At this point she has not enough Indian in her, so she adds to her own Indianness by employing external Indians to do the job for her. The agent/agency ratio reveals that Stephens believes a woman cannot/should not kill a man she loved, but that Indians "mad with ambition [and] wild with savage greed for blood" can kill even those who are supposedly their allies (86). However, once Mahaska commits this act, even by proxy, Stephens insists that she has become "savage" because she has crossed the borders of both race and gender. Once she has besmirched her "woman's soul" with the "stain of blood," she has passed the point of no

return. Furthermore, once stained with the blood of murder, she never again hesitates to slaughter others with her own hand.

Because motherhood held such important gendered notions in nineteenth-century ideology, Mahaska's maternity holds special import. When she has a son, Mahaska becomes the same type of mother that her role model, Ahmo, had been. Her love for her child, like Ahmo's love for her, is filled with "ferocity." and "selfishness" (*Queen* 51-2). She does not want to share him with anyone, including Gi-en-gwa-tah. She intends to raise the boy to be a great chief and to instill "hatred toward his [white] grandfather's race . . . [as] the only faith she impresse[s] on his soul" (51). Although "the blessing of maternity" does "soften" her "for a time" (51), it does not quench her thirst for bloodshed. As she reveals to Gi-en-gwa-tah shortly after the baby's birth, "before many moons the tribe will go out on the warpath . . . . This time Mahaska will lead them . . . . she is weary of leading the life of a squaw" (53). To prepare herself for the "arduous undertaking," she exercises for hours – "[n]o matter what the extreme of the cold – no matter how deep the snow lay upon the ground" (55-6). Even though Stephens portrays Mahaska as corrupt, the Indian woman nevertheless ably demonstrates that women can be physically active soon after giving birth.

The unholy love she bears her son manifests itself in the scene in which Mahaska arrests Gi-en-gwa-tah and taunts him with imminent death. Gi-en-gwa-tah asks, "Would the queen murder the father of her child?" but Mahaska retorts, "Mahaska's child is the gift of the Great Spirit! . . . he has no other father" (103). These few words reveal that Mahaska has lost touch with reality as well as the obsessive nature of her love for the boy. The statement equates her son with the

son of God, metaphorically making him a deity, thus making her the mother of God. Such blasphemy by a woman marks her for death in the conventions of nineteenth-century women's novels. Burke might suggest that this scene allegorizes the proverb "pride goeth before the fall." Indeed, Stephens explains that Mahaska was "too proud, too defiant, to yield," even when her machinations had obviously failed (109).

When she loses everything she has worked to achieve by arresting Gi-en-gwa-tah and challenging his authority in the council, she must also lose that one redeeming feature of her life – her son. When she discovers this,

Mahaska sunk upon a seat and gave way to her great grief. Ah, it was terrible to witness. Such grief could only come from the conscience-stricken, from the wretch conscious of his own debasement past all redemption. For over an hour she remained in her fearful agony – not over her wrecked fortunes, over her lost empire, over the detection of her true character, for all these things her fierce nature could bear; but that she was an outcast, scorned by the savage who had loved her like a Spartan, despised by the race among whom she had come as prophet and queen, and more than all, that she, a mother, was childless as well as a banished, disgraced wife – all these made her hour of agony one passing words to depict. That hour had one redeeming virtue – it proved that she was a woman, and taught us to know that beneath the fury of the most violent natures is a deep of humanity and purity which will assert itself at the propitious moment. (110-1)

The ambiguity of this scene in which the character "past all redemption" has "one redeeming virtue" bears further investigation.

Burke's concept of hierarchy illuminates these tensions. He believes that hierarchy leads to guilt because those who are higher feel guilt for not being lower and vice-versa (*LASA* 15). Mahaska has spent most of her life ruthlessly climbing to the top of the ladder. Consequently her guilt is even greater. In Burkean terms, she has "scapegoated," blamed others for her problems, and

used them to gain success in her relentless pursuit of power. But in her grief and agony upon losing everything, Mahaska "look[s] upon herself in her true light" and realizes how wrong she has been (110). Only when she begins the process of self-mortification can she purge herself of guilt. Burke believes that mortification "must come from within" (*RR* 190). So Mahaska's womanly "humanity and purity" deep within her reassert themselves as she faces the awful truth of her monstrous crimes. In other words, for Stephens, gender/ womanliness is the metalanguage that redeems Mahaska. She chose to become savage, but deep within her soul lay a womanly heart, which she had trained into subjection. However, faced with the enormity of her wickedness and the loss of her child, "the long pent-up, warped and perverted woman's nature asserted itself, [and] tears, so strange . . . welled up in her eyes and dropped upon her bosom" (110). This physical sign of purging represents a sure sign of redemption in nineteenth-century women's novels. But Stephens goes further and insists that "woman's nature" itself is redeeming.

#### *Gi-en-gwa-tah and Gaston*

Given Stephens' conviction that womanliness redeems, it is not surprising that both Gi-en-gwa-tah and Gaston are described as having hearts like women (*Queen* 15; *Princess* 59). Both are loving and tender-hearted toward their women. But they have different perceptions of women's place in society. When Katherine attempts to seduce Gaston by offering to share her power over the "savages" with him, Gaston is incredulous. He responds that it would be "impossible for a woman" to wield power over nations (*Princess* 60). He prefers the passive Adele, who relies totally upon him (59). In other words, Gaston

represents the white patriarchal status quo. He believes that men should govern and lead society and that women are incapable of such leadership. He views women as appendages or dependents of men.

On the other hand, Gi-en-gwa-tah feels "no jealousy of his wife for the supremacy she had gained over the people," a sentiment that Stephens emphasizes by repeating it numerous times (*Queen* 15). However, Gi-en-gwa-tah also believes that women are special beings. He is "shocked" when Mahaska "with her own hand" (15) tomahawks a warrior of the tribe who dared to stand "between her and the gratification of her unwomanly hate" (10). As Mahaska grows more unwomanly in her pursuit of revenge, Gi-en-gwa-tah becomes "perplexed" by her behavior (48). Gradually he learns "the uselessness of opposition" to her will (54). And eventually he suffers "the horrible grief and jealousy a civilized man might, when confronted with the first doubt in regard to the woman he loved arose" (72). The similarities between Gaston and Gi-en-gwa-tah reiterate the theme that race does not determine character. However, their different perceptions of women's place in society emphasize the theme that white patriarchy, by insisting on a narrow sphere for women, represses their potential.

### *Intermarriage*

The two intermarriages in the Mahaska trilogy are Mahaska's own and her mother's. Frontenac marries the young and beautiful Chileli under false pretenses. She falls in love with Frontenac while he is being treated for wounds by Chileli's mother, Ahmo. Frontenac had come to Canada in an attempt to forget that his betrothed had been stolen from him by his own brother. But, as he

admits, he believed that "in [Chileli's] genuine affection I might sometimes forget the trouble which had made me an outcast from a foreign land. Love was out of the question, but I was very lonely" (*Ahmo* 48). The governor soon regrets his "mad act" (49), but not before Chileli bears him a daughter. He admits that Chileli "must have mourned over my coldness and silence . . . , [but] she endures my mood with such patient submission that it tortures my very soul" (49).

Although he claims to be tortured by Chileli's goodness, such suffering in no way changes his feelings toward her. He still feels "repugnance" every time he touches her; "she had been swept completely out of the heart where she had always held so light a place" (52). In fact, within the castle, she has separate quarters from his. Her apartment is hung with furs according to her "savage taste" (53) and represents the vast distance between them.

Mahaska's marriage to Gi-en-gwa-tah is even more deceitful. Not only is love out of the question, "the idea of wedding the dusky chief struck her proud heart with abhorrence" (*Princess* 67). Prior to the marriage when Gi-en-gwa-tah looks at her with "wild love," she is "filled . . . with a sort of abhorrence, which, for a moment, made her forget her pride and all her hungry revenge, to feel the sharp pain of womanly suffering which throbbed in her heart" (76). However, her thirst for power and revenge are stronger than her disgust at marrying an Indian, even though "every feeling of her womanhood revolted against it" (95). What Stephens does not say is that it is not just Mahaska's womanhood, but her white womanhood that is revolted. Mahaska has learned that marriage with an Indian is unacceptable in white civilization. As half-Indian herself, the stigma against interracial marriage makes little sense because any marriage she enters would

be interracial. But Mahaska has acquired some of the sensibilities of the whites she claims to hate, proving, however circuitously, that Indians can be assimilated into white culture.

As Mahaska takes her place as an "Indian" among Indians, she gradually loses these last vestiges of womanhood. Her marriage to Gi-en-gwa-tah represents how low she has sunk, for she wanted desperately to maintain her independence. The chiefs have insisted that she must marry one of their braves if she is to be their queen. Although she is revolted at the idea of "marriage . . . [to an] unlettered savage" (66), she weds him because she desires power above all else. This allusion to prostitution should not go unnoticed. She is willing to sell her body in return for power, which has become the only narcotic that can ease the pain of the rejections she has received at the hands of white men. Nor does Gi-en-gwa-tah's noble nature and love ease that pain or change her loathing for him. She hates him even more, especially since she sees him as the only barrier to "her scheme to become sole chief" (*Queen* 22). However, recognizing that she still needs him, she continues to use her sexuality (body) to blind him to her ulterior motives (mind). In other words, their marriage will never be a marriage of the minds nor a partnership of equals but a duplicitous liaison, a means to selfish ends. Although neither of the intermarriages is successful, it is not race but racial prejudice and dishonest motives in marrying that cause them to fail.

## **Conclusion**

*Esther: A Story of the Oregon Trail* differs greatly from the *Mahaska* trilogy in terms of plot, but the two narratives have similar themes and methods of

development. By the time Stephens penned these stories, in the early 1860s, comparison and contrast, which she uses to great effect in both tales, had become one of her fortes. Orville Victor may have encouraged Stephens to "kill a few more Indians" in her western tales, yet she still manages to present pictures of Indians that question their inherent inferiority to whites. In *Esther* Stephens attempts to demonstrate that in the important issues of life, race is inconsequential. Whether Claude/Osse'o is red or white makes no difference in his character. He is a good man who risks his own life to rescue Esther, even though she constantly frets about his race. Similarly, Waupee's race makes no difference in her actions. As a good woman, she proves herself to be loyal, trustworthy, and resourceful. Kirk's intimation that he would have married her, albeit after a struggle with his own conscience, attests that race should not be a determining factor in judging character and that societal barriers to intermarriage are based on erroneous ideas about race. Considering that by the 1860s contemporary science insisted that Indians were inherently inferior to whites, such a stance was remarkable.

The *Mahaska* trilogy makes a different statement. While the theme that Indians are not inherently inferior to whites receives some attention, Stephens is more concerned with ruinous policies of exclusion in patriarchy that lead to violent clashes between the two cultures. She also posits that if women are to take their rightful places as active leaders in society, they must remain womanly or their policies may be as destructive as men's. Mahaska's duplicitous dealings with the British and her divisive administration nearly bring the tribe to ruin. Yet by placing Mahaska's leadership of men at the center of the last novel in the



trilogy in which men are ancillaries of a woman, awaiting her will and action, Stephens inverts the typical male-centered Western.

In both stories the boundaries of race and gender are called into question. Waupee demonstrates that a woman can be active in the world, yet remain womanly; whereas Mahaska's border crossings illustrate that the lines of gender and race are murky. Both narratives satirize the pathetic passive female heroine of the male-centered tradition and counter with more active examples of womanhood, although Mahaska is hardly an exemplary case. But more significantly, Stephens confronts the problems of racial prejudice and asserts through her characterizations of Osse'o and Mahaska that nurture, not nature, determines character. Through characters such as Waupee, who is much more exemplary than Esther, and Mahaska, who surpasses Adele in intellect, Stephens insists that Indians are not inherently inferior to whites. On the other hand, in keeping with her assimilationist beliefs, she suggests that environment can improve Indians, as her descriptions of Osse'o and Mahaska reveal.

These later narratives may rely more on stereotypical descriptions of Indians, but they clearly suggest that all human beings are equal. Although Paola Gemme contends that Stephens "depict[ed] Indian characters as unredeemably 'savage'" ("Rewriting" 378), this analysis demonstrates that Stephens believes that gender/womanliness redeems the savage. Both Waupee and Mahaska are saved by their womanliness. Gemme also suggests that Stephens' depictions of Indians indicate that they "could not be civilized" ("Profile" 53); whereas my analysis shows that in Stephens' view, whites, particularly men, would not accept Indians in "civilization."

By creating tales of intermarriage between Indians and whites, Stephens challenges prevailing prejudices and stereotypes about Indians. She "encompasses and confronts" the problem of racial prejudice, asserting that character is not determined by race and that whites are not necessarily superior to Indians. She employs strategies to encourage women to take a more active role in the world, while demonstrating the dangers of unwomanliness. And she also makes her stories woman-centered, not just by creating female protagonists, but by inverting staples of male-centered stories, placing women in roles where they control their own destinies.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gi-en-gwa-tah's name appears on a list of Indian words and their translations, handwritten by Stephens, among her papers in the New York Public Library. Although she had used the name before, she may have used it here for authenticity, since she was aware, probably through Lossing's history, that Gi-en-gwa-tah was a real Seneca chief.

<sup>2</sup> Burke explains the difference between what he calls "sheer motion" and motivated or "symbolic action." Motion represents the "extra-symbolic or non-symbolic operations of nature" ("Dramatism" 447), such as biological functions, which can be reduced to their physical components. Only motivated action has symbolic meaning, for it cannot be reduced to sheer motion. Using a ratio to help distinguish the difference Burke observes, "'Action' is to 'motion' as 'mind' is to 'brain.' . . . Empirically, that is, though there can be a brain without a mind, there cannot be a mind without a brain" (RR 39). In other words, action has symbolic meaning because it involves freedom of choice and purpose; thus, only motivated action is subject to symbolic interpretation.

<sup>3</sup> Stephens directly cites Shakespeare, using quotation marks to emphasize the allusion to his line about "a woman scorned" in the *Indian Princess*, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> Homi Bhabha explains that this attraction for the racial "other" by the dominant race is a repeated theme in the discourses of the colonizer (Childs and Williams 126). Although typically it is the woman who is sexualized, Stephens inverts this convention as well. Bhabha believes that this convention arises from the psychological need to make the "other" knowable by discovering similarities as well as differences.

<sup>5</sup> See especially *The Deerslayer*, in which this idea is reiterated *ad nauseam*.

<sup>6</sup> In 1857, Mormons allied with Indians attacked a wagon train of settlers heading west, resulting in 130 deaths. This event became known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre (Carney 98). Thus, typical of many of her western stories, Stephens uses a real event to provide her story with verisimilitude.

<sup>7</sup> Here Stephens counters the stereotype that Indian women are necessarily physically stronger than white women, who are frequently portrayed as frail in male-centered westerns.

<sup>8</sup> Unlike many of the classical subjects that were considered too difficult or unnecessary for women, history was deemed an acceptable subject for them to study. As early as 1741, David Hume was recommending history "as an occupation, above all others, the best suited both to their sex and education" (cited in Kerber, *Women* 246). By the time these novels were published several anthologies on women's contributions to history had been published (Kerber 260). Stephens appeals to women's knowledge of history, particularly to their knowledge of great women leaders in history, in this and many other narratives.

<sup>9</sup> Many of Stephens' novels use passionate women, both white and red, including several analyzed in this study, to warn women of the dangers of obsessive love for some (usually unworthy) man. See for example, *Fashion and Famine*, *Married in Haste*, *Sybil Chase*; or *The Valley Rancho*.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION: PLACING STEPHENS' INDIAN STORIES IN THE AMERICAN TRADITION OF FRONTIER FICTION

Ann Stephens believed that authorship carried with it a duty to do "good," but she also felt that it conveyed special blessings to the writer ("To Sigourney" 16 May 1839). As she explains in her letter to Lydia Sigourney of 16 May 1839, the very time she was probably writing "Malaeska, "I think that I never truly (sic) felt the goodness and beauty of our Savior's character till I was called upon to write a little essay 'Cana of Galilee.'"<sup>1</sup> While this statement is phrased in terms of nineteenth-century Christian sensibilities, it suggests, as Stephens herself later explained in greater detail, that authors should use their God-given talents to "convey images of truth and beauty from the heart of the writer to the heart of the reader" ("Women of Genius" 89). Given this conviction, she developed stories that presented the moral dilemmas of the day using strategies that led readers toward her conception of the most ethical resolution. Thus, in her Indian stories Stephens presents carefully crafted pictures of native life that clearly demonstrate the ill effects of racial prejudice. She simultaneously creates stories that illustrate how patriarchal limitations deter women from resolving or ameliorating the social problems that Stephens suggests frequently originate in male policies of hierarchy and exclusion.

In her stories of the American frontier, Stephens "encompasses and confronts" questions regarding the place of women and Native Americans in American society. In other words, as Burke might say, she describes typical

situations of racial and gender prejudice, strategically inscribes them in her fiction, and names allies and enemies to lead readers to develop an attitude consistent with her purpose: that is, expanded roles for women and acceptance of Native Americans within white culture. This is not to suggest that Stephens had the sensibilities of the twenty-first century. On the contrary, her assimilationist beliefs were based on the conviction that whites were superior and that Indians would be improved by contact with whites, and her ideas about expanded roles for women were generally couched in terms of her conception of "woman's nature." Neither of these ideologies would be acceptable today. However, despite what some recent critics have suggested, Stephens was neither "racist" nor "conservative" on gender issues in the context of her own time. The historical and discursive contexts in which she wrote complicate analyses of her representations of race and gender yet must be taken into consideration to elicit a faithful interpretation. Burkean approaches to analyzing literature help unravel the ambiguities that have made it difficult for critics to situate Stephens among other nineteenth-century authors who wrote novels about the American frontier and/or Indians.

### **Representations of Race**

Certainly Stephens was influenced by her literary foremothers, particularly Catharine Sedgwick, Lydia Maria Child, and Lydia Sigourney, all of whom wrote sympathetic tales of American Indians prior to Stephens' first venture into the genre.<sup>2</sup> A unique feature of Stephens' Indian stories is that so many incorporate intermarriage into the plots. Such a preponderance of marriages between Indians and whites indicates that Stephens, despite her great fear of being

considered unwomanly, probably felt that neither stigma nor impropriety was or should be attached to these alliances, or at least not to writing about them. By the 1860s when her later frontier tales were penned, she had almost 25 years of experience as a published author and editor and had befriended many politically powerful people; perhaps she felt well enough established to return to a theme that had given her national recognition. After all, her original serialized version of "Mary Derwent" had won a prize and was later republished when the circulation of *Ladies Companion*, largely through her efforts as editor, had increased tremendously. These successes led directly to her employment at *Graham's Magazine*, where she garnered a national audience. Perhaps the republication of *Malaeska* and *Mary Derwent*, both of which required extensive revision, reminded her of the popularity of Indian stories and inspired her, once again, to take advantage of that vogue.

Regardless of her reasons for returning to the topic, Stephens' Indian tales bear certain similarities to Child's and particularly to Sedgwick's, but they also differ in many respects. As did her predecessors, Stephens racially and/or sexually inverts many of the staples of male-centered myth of the frontier. In some of her stories, she follows the lead of these literary foremothers and creates strong white women characters that counter the passive creatures presented in male-centered fiction. But she also advances beyond that strategy to satirize such "frail flowers" by contrasting them with strong, vibrant Indian women. Like Sedgwick's Magawisca, some of Stephens' Indian women characters are presented as noble, intelligent mediators between whites and Indians – especially *Malaeska*, Tahmeroo, and Waupee. But in *Malaeska*

Stephens goes beyond Sedgwick's conception of Indians' position in American society by placing Malaeska at the center of the story and making her the protagonist, even though the outcome – that the prejudices of patriarchy prevent the assimilation of Indians into white culture – remains the same. The serialized and British dime novel versions of *Mary Derwent* make an even greater leap – Tahmeroo is allowed to assimilate into white culture, albeit beyond the borders of the United States. And finally in *Esther*, Esther and Claude/Osse'o are admitted into white culture, within the boundaries of the United States, in St. Louis, where "Indian blood . . . was no bar to . . . reception in society . . . for an intermarriage with the Indians had been no uncommon thing with the first settlers" (*Esther* 24-5). Nor is St. Louis just an outpost of civilization, for as Stephens recounts, it "has its villas and palaces now crowding out the log-cabins of thirty years ago" (24).<sup>3</sup> This assimilation represents a material advance in how authors dealt with the "Indian problem." Yet, to maintain verisimilitude in both assimilationist tales, Stephens acknowledges that many Americans remain prejudiced against Indians. For example in *Esther*, she observes that "new-comers [to St. Louis] . . . had begun to bring their prejudices beyond the great river" (25). Admittedly, Stephens does suggest that most St. Louis residents had "forgotten" Claude's mother's "savage blood" (25), but in terms of assimilationists' beliefs, such forgetfulness only proves their objective – that Indians can be successfully integrated into white society.

Today we recognize the racist implications of such a policy, as it also suggests that whites are superior to Indians. However, this method of dealing with the Indian problem does not suggest that Indians are subhuman as did the



doctrine of separate species, which gained greater currency in the 1860s when Stephens was writing these later Indian tales. In fact, as Stephens' elegy at the beginning of *Esther* implies by its insistence that all are equal in the grave, assimilationist ideals are based upon the common humanity of all peoples. Moreover, assimilation is a nonviolent settlement. It represents a more peaceful solution than that of the male tradition, which typically posited that only wars of extermination could end the Indian problem. In other words, in making the either-or choice between civilization or extinction that Maddox asserts all authors of the period had to resolve, Stephens belongs on the civilization side (8).

On the other hand, Kolodny's argument that nineteenth-century women writers "tended toward amelioration [of social problems] rather than solution" (163) also describes Stephens' position on the Indian problem. Stephens envisions no radical changes in the status quo for Native Americans; she does not suggest, for instance, any massive programs to help assimilate American Indians into white culture. Rather she points out that the prejudice of whites against Indians is immoral and counterproductive. Stephens' stories document that Indians can be as intelligent, ethical, and honest as whites (more so in some cases), and that, given the opportunity, Indians are uplifted by contact with white civilization. She seeks not so much to change the scene as to change agents – readers who are moved to compassion for the plight of Native Americans and thereby lose their prejudice against the original inhabitants so that when the two cultures do meet, whites' understanding (agency) will promote harmony rather than discord. Such amelioration of the problem absolves Stephens from charges of "unwomanly intervention" into the male sphere of politics. At the same time,

she uses her fiction to present sympathetic portraits of Indian women that facilitate her (mostly female) readers' identification with her fictional characters who were daughters, wives, and mothers, emphasizing the similarities between reader and character. In other words, Stephens has "designs on her readers." While she was reluctant to propose a change of scene, which could have been interpreted as a political solution, she believed that by helping readers view the Indian problem vicariously through her Indian women characters, she could, to paraphrase Burke, "identify Indian ways with her readers' ways." That is, she persuades readers that racial prejudice is an absurd contradiction by demonstrating the similarities (consubstantiality in Burke's terms) between Indians and whites.

Such a project was not easy. To create realistic characters, Stephens also had to portray her fictional Indians in accordance with her readers' "knowledge" of Indians, which probably came primarily from mass-produced sources that, for the most part, vilified Indians. This meant that Stephens also had to characterize her fictional Indians to coincide with the stereotypes with which they were generally described in the popular press. To achieve her ultimate purpose of improving racial relations, her portrayals of Indians had to seem authentic or the story would lack the verisimilitude necessary to convince readers of the genuine need for changes in attitude. Given such discursive contexts, Stephens employs stereotypes to describe Indians even as she deconstructs such racial classifications.<sup>4</sup> The ambiguities resulting from these conflicting exigencies of the writing situation are clarified by Burke's approaches

to literary analysis, which help elucidate authorial motives underlying her fictional dramas.

Even in the *Mahaska* trilogy, which contains more stereotypically racist descriptions of Indians than any of her other Indian stories, Stephens' representations of Indians, both good and bad, demonstrate that not all Indians are alike, destabilizing the very notion of race upon which the entire project of racial prejudice rests. Moreover, she provides mitigating factors to explain Mahaska's savagery – most prominently white men's prejudice and policies of exclusion. In this narrative, as in *Malaeska*, Stephens suggests that if white men were more accepting of Indians, much of the tragedy, violence, and death involving Indians could be avoided. In all of her Indian stories, despite widely divergent plots, Stephens posits that racial prejudice is immoral and must be curtailed.

Though some of her Indian tales, particularly *Malaeska*, reveal a certain ambivalence about the nurture/nature debate so central to discourses on race in the mid-nineteenth century, most of her stories and representations of race indicate that nurture, not nature, determines moral character. Mahaska, the most "savage" of Stephens' Indian women characters, is trained to be that way by Ahmo, her Indian grandmother. Bereft of her tender-hearted mother at an early age and neglected, even avoided, by her white father, Mahaska is unduly influenced by Ahmo, who teaches her to repress her natural feelings, to hate whites – in other words, how to be "savage." On the other hand, descriptions of Claude/Osse'o demonstrate the civilizing effects of growing up in white society. Such representations accord with Stephens' assimilationist approach to the

Indian problem. Ultimately, even though she describes both good and bad Indians in stereotypical terms, Stephens' narratives represent racial prejudice as counterproductive because it prevents the peaceful integration of Indians into white society.

### **Representations of Gender**

Like most of her literary foremothers, Stephens also writes to advocate expanded roles for women in American society. In her Indian tales, she primarily resorts to Indian women to represent women's active participation in the world because, ironically, Indian women were not restricted to the same standards as white women. Although white women do occupy leadership roles in *Mary Derwent*, both are "fallen" women who have already crossed the boundaries of womanliness and are thus freed from the restraints that bind most white women. In female-centered myths of the frontier, Stephens proposes that if women were allowed a more active role in society and had more influence on men in power, less dissension between cultures would exist. For example, in *Malaeska*, had women been allowed to speak their minds freely and had men heeded their words when they did speak, much, if not all, of the tragedy might have been averted.

While these protofeminist themes that Stephens develops resemble those of her contemporaries, her subversions/inversions of the male myth of the frontier are provocative. For example, Baym points out that in male-authored frontier stories the "possibility . . . that American Indians might assimilate into a dominant Euroculture . . . was often imagined but always dismissed, chiefly through Indian characters who themselves reject this option" (*Feminism* 21). But Stephens'

stories suggest that it is white men's racial prejudice that precludes such a possibility. And, contrary to Kolodny's suggestion that nineteenth-century women writers "continued to concern themselves with the consequences rather than the underlying causes" of social problems (163), Stephens' frontier novels, while they do dwell primarily on the consequences of racial prejudice, pointedly indict patriarchal policies as an "underlying cause." In other words, Stephens depicts white men not as the heroes they appear in the typical male-centered frontier story, but as antagonists who create the unhappy circumstances in which women and Indians must live.

But her larger-than-life female characters constitute her most creative inversion of the male-centered myth. Malaeska's "superhuman strength" and indomitable fortitude make her an ideal role model for white women readers. Malaeska's only fault is her overly passionate nature, which is a common stereotype of Indians in white fiction of the period. However, since Stephens created white women with that same fatal flaw, including Catherine in *Mary Derwent*, these characterizations may be a warning to women readers against allowing emotion to overrule reason. Despite having this fault, Catherine, white chief of the Shawnee, fires the imagination. As leader of her people, she represents the pinnacle of worldly power. Her story graphically documents that people need not fear women in positions of authority, for under her governance, the Shawnee flourish. Likewise the courageous Tahmeroo (*Mary Derwent*) illustrates how women, if they are not weighed down by uncontrollable passion, can lead people toward a new, more rewarding life. Though Waupee (*Esther*) represents a more typical woman, even she exhibits characteristics worth

emulating, especially her resourcefulness and equanimity in the face of turmoil. Ironically, Mahaska, the antihero, may be Stephens' most memorable mythologized female figure. Although her tale symbolizes the caveat that women must remain womanly to accomplish their goals, her monstrous hatred, her colossal deviousness, and her calculated callousness nearly succeed in ruining the happiness of Gaston and Adele. For several years she reigns supreme over the Seneca, proving women's administrative abilities. These characters not only focus the drama on women as active agents in the world, but insist that women have untapped capabilities that could, if used properly, substantially improve society.

### **Intermarriage**

The sheer number of intermarriages that Stephens inscribes in her frontier novels deserves closer examination. While both Sedgwick and Child had used intermarriage to challenge white male perspectives that declared it was "worse than a thousand deaths," Stephens uses it so often, it is almost as if she were trying to normalize it. Her mention in *Esther* that intermarriage "had been no uncommon thing" in St. Louis, at the borders of the United States and Indian lands where people from the two cultures were more likely to meet, supports this notion. Not all of the marriages Stephens depicts are successful. In the marriages that are happy and successful she stresses how the partners were just that, partners, because both entered into the marriage with true love and fidelity or because they learned through the trial of fire that honesty and fidelity are essential to a good marriage. Unsuccessful marriages break apart because one or both partners did not enter the alliance honestly. Race is a factor in these

ruptures only in the sense that the primary duplicity of one of the partners centers on racial prejudice. Some marriages are more ambiguous, such as Catherine's marriage to Gi-en-gwa-tah in *Mary Derwent*.<sup>5</sup> Lasting at least fifteen years but breaking apart when Gi-en-gwa-tah understands that Catherine's true motive for marrying him was to save Murray, it can hardly be considered unsuccessful, especially since Stephens alludes to their former happiness.

Other than brief scenes, readers see little of the domestic life of these couples. In marriages based on deceit, Stephens emphasizes discord by showing separate living quarters (Frontenac-Chileli in *Mary Derwent*), by emphasizing the borderlands between two worlds (Malaeska-Danforth in *Malaeska*), or by dramatizing scenes of duplicity (Mahaska-Gi-en-gwa-tah in the *Mahaska* trilogy). Those couples who are assimilated into white society are depicted, in the denouements, as totally acclimated to civilization. On the other hand, of the white marriage partners only Queen Esther (*Mary Derwent*), who is masculinized and thoroughly depraved, completely assimilates into native culture. Although Catherine Montour (*Mary Derwent*) is assimilated during the years before the story opens, she gradually moves away from native culture. These inscriptions are consistent with Stephens' belief that whites are superior, that native culture is primitive, and that Indians can be elevated through contact with whites. At the same time, they suggest that both race and gender are unstable categories and that the borderlines separating one sex or race from another are ever-shifting because individuals cross the supposed lines of demarcation in both directions.

Stephens also strategically presents the situation of mixed-blood children born into these alliances to enlist readers' sympathy for those born of two worlds, belonging to neither. While they are accepted among Indians, as Tahmeroo (*Mary Derwent*) and Mahaska demonstrate, whites are not so open-minded. Mixed-blood characters William Danforth (*Malaeska*) and Claude La Clide (*Esther*) are accepted in white society, but William's Indian identity remains secret and Claude's has been forgotten. The problems of the mixed-blood child are pivotal in both *Malaeska* and the *Mahaska* trilogy. The young William Danforth, not only because he has learned to hate Indians, but because he believes Indians are inferior, would rather die than live as an Indian. Mahaska aspires to be loved and accepted by whites, but when they reject her, she finds solace, not so much amongst Indians as in seeking retribution against whites. Tahmeroo (*Mary Derwent*) is the only mixed-blood character raised in Indian culture. She finds happiness in both white and red society, but that white society is far removed from the United States, in Britain, where "Indian blood . . . [is] no reproach" (104).

Intermarriages in Stephens' frontier fiction also bear no reproach, as long as the marriage is based on love and fidelity. Instead of disparaging marriage itself between whites and Indians, Stephens condemns white males who enter such alliances falsely. She also castigates the prejudice of whites who will not accept Indians and the children of intermarriages into white society. Consistent with her assimilationist beliefs, Stephens suggests that whites cannot successfully live in Indian society because to do so requires degeneration of



character. On the other hand, she posits that Indians can be assimilated into white culture if whites change their attitudes towards them.

### **Placing Stephens' Indian Stories in the American Tradition of Frontier Fiction**

Stephens' Indian tales add new dimensions to our understanding of how nineteenth-century authors dealt with the "Indian problem" as well as the question of women's place in society. While her stories thematically resemble those of recovered writers like Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Sedgwick, her inscriptions move beyond their resolutions to suggest that Indians can, indeed, be successfully integrated into white society if whites will be more accepting of them. That Stephens adhered to this belief during the 1860s, as scientific thought moved more toward the separate (inferior) species doctrine and as male writers such as Beadle's Edward Ellis continued to write stories befitting that ideology, suggests she seriously "encompasses and confronts" a major cultural and political issue of the day. In her portrayal of the American frontier, Stephens posits peaceful, alternative resolutions to the "Indian problem." Furthermore, her themes, though they rely on women characters who have already crossed or are not bound by the gender restraints of white society, posit women's leadership potential. They provide women readers with thrilling adventure tales and assert that women are indeed capable of more significant roles in society. They also anticipate later women's inscriptions of more autonomous and socially active white women, such as Perley Kelso in *The Silent Partner* (1871) by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Christie in *Work* (1877) by Louisa May Alcott. Because Stephens is a product of her times and no modern-day feminist, she stresses,

through her fictional characters, that women must retain their womanliness if they are to be truly effective leaders. But her use of Indian women as ideal characters moves beyond that of her predecessors and anticipates later works such as *Ramona* (1884) by Helen Hunt Jackson.

As feminist literary critics have insisted, nineteenth-century women's literature requires different rubrics for assessing its inherent worth because women not only wrote from different perspectives than men, their writing situation, given the anomalous position of women writers at that time, differed as well. For example, although Stephens uses elements of the romance to depict her Indian characters and to develop her mythological heroines, her purposes are antipodal to typical male inscriptions. Whereas the male romantic hero often must escape civilization, Stephens' romantic heroines substantiate the need for women's more active involvement in civilization.

Although Stephens' contradictory descriptions of Indians and her use of Indian women as protagonists have resulted in confusion about her views and the place of her fiction in the American tradition, feminist literary critic Susan K. Harris explains that such antithetical messages were necessary to meet the exigencies of the market. "For the novels to be published and favorably reviewed, they had to conform to the strictures [about women's place in society] . . . ; for them to achieve their 'subversive' objects, they had to find a form that would embody these dual, and often contradictory ideas" ("Good?" 270). Stephens chose stereotypes to describe Indians, even as she attempted to break down the biases on which such descriptions rested because the discursive contexts of her writing situation (not to mention her own ideological positions

regarding Native Americans) require a sense of verisimilitude if her "subversive" purpose is to be achieved. Similarly, Indian women and women beyond the pale of "true womanhood" subversively enact Stephens' vision for a more active form of womanhood because they do not represent a direct challenge to the status quo, yet they ably demonstrate the underlying message that women can/should be active participants in society.

In her influential Introduction to *Sentimental Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*, Jane Tompkins asserts that literature should be read as "powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions that shape a particular historical moment" (xi). Read in this light, Stephens' work provides critics and teachers of American literature a wider range of views on how mid-nineteenth-century Americans thought and felt about the Indian problem and about women's roles in society and, therefore, expands our understandings of this period. Analysis using Burke's rhetorical approaches to literature demonstrates that Stephens' inscriptions of these social situations both draw from the literature and ideologies of her day and move beyond them.

Stephens' Indian stories, while they do contain elements of the sentimental novel, might more aptly be considered female adventure novels, or as Bube calls them "women's border tales." They represent a new genre for women writers and readers. Bube sees "women's western adventure tales as a subgenre of volatile hybridity" which she argues "elucidates the complexities and historical value, the multiple ways in which they complicate both literary history and the history of the construction of gender" (6). I would argue they also

elucidate and complicate our understandings of how nineteenth-century authors represented Indians in literature, revealing significant disparities in ways women authors constructed race from the ways it is constructed in the male tradition.

Though mass-market popularity was once considered reason enough to devalue a piece of fiction, cultural studies' perspectives have demonstrated the profound effects of popular culture on so-called "great" literature as well as on the shaping of ideologies. Stephens' Indian stories, all of which appeared as dime novels, obtained wide audiences and thus may have had greater impact than some of the canonical male-authored stories and those of recovered women. As Tompkins, Karcher, Jameson, Burke and many others have proven, literature is a response to the situation in which it arises. Stephens' responses to the Indian problem and women's place in society are worthy of study because, while they participate in the ideologies of her time, they also offer new perspectives on these important social issues and anticipate themes of future American authors.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This essay suggests that people would do well to reflect upon the "character of our Saviour" (*Ladies Companion* 9 (1838): 54).

<sup>2</sup> Lydia Sigourney wrote *Sketch of Connecticut* (1824), which incorporates themes of female leadership and illustrates white's deleterious effects on Indian life. Though less well known to scholars today than Child's and Sedgwick's works, Stephens, especially considering her close friendship with Sigourney, was probably especially mindful of it as she wrote her own Indian stories.

<sup>3</sup> Actually, St. Louis was founded in 1763 by the French trader Pierre La Clède Ligest, commonly referred to as "La Clède." The similarity between the historical name "La Clède" and Stephens' fictional "La Clide" is probably not coincidental, given her practice of loosely using history in her fiction. By 1840, when the novel is set, the population of St. Louis was 16,469 and by 1860, near the time when Stephens wrote the novel it had grown tenfold to 160,733 ("Physical Growth"). Since it was incorporated as a city by 1822, Stephens' statement about the "log-cabins of thirty years ago" is more of a romantic image than a reflection of actual history.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to suggest that Stephens was free of prejudice, nor to excuse her stereotyped representations of Indians, but rather to explain why those representations are so ambivalent on matters of race.

<sup>5</sup> Keeping the various characters in Stephens' novels straight is made more difficult in that the name "Gi-en-gwa-tah" is used in two different novels. In *Mary Derwent*, he has a long and relatively successful marriage with Catharine, spelled with a "C." In the *Mahaska* narrative, a character by the same name marries Mahaska/Katherine with a "K." Part of Stephens' reason for doing this may have to do with her desire to use recorded history to create verisimilitude. Gi-en-gwa-tah was an actual person, a Seneca leader. Katherine/Catharine Montour was also a real person and, according to some nineteenth-century sources, a daughter of Governor Frontenac. See fn.3, Chapter 4 for more detail.

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