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Captivating Malaeska: Reading The First Dime Novel As A Captivity Narrative

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Captivating *Malaeska*

The editors of *Beadle's Dime Novels* chose Ann Stephens' *Malaeska: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter* in 1860 to be the first ever dime novel in the new series. Dime novels are typically stories of either high adventure or dramatic romance, and Stephens' novel certainly fits the dramatic requirements of the genre. It is likely that *Malaeska* was chosen for both its melodrama as well as its timely nature. First published as a serial in the spring of 1839 in *Ladies' Companion* magazine, the novel is akin to some domestic fiction of the day. While there is a melodramatic romance plot that is so closely associated with the dime novel genre, *Malaeska* also shares conventions with the genre of captivity narrative. The novel can be read as such without much difficulty, adding a new dimension to the novel's categorization. *Malaeska*, however, has not been classified as a captivity narrative, but as a dime novel, a genre that at the time had no set definition. Scott Lyons claims that captivity narratives, "one of America's oldest literary genres, were enormously popular texts for white, reading Americans in a young nation: exciting Colonial tales of bravery and guile, savagery and civilization, godly triumph over pagan evil in a newfound, rapidly developing, Manifestly Destined 'white' society."[1] Despite the captivity narrative traditions interspersed in the novel, the fictional account may not have been suited to continue a genre based so deeply in factual captivity tales; rather it may have been more suitable to ground the novel in sentimentality, which came to be a large part of the dime novel genre. The vast majority of captivity narratives are non-fiction accounts of captivity, and so the melodrama of Stephen's novel would have seemed out of place, despite the almost comical depictions of the savagery of the Indian

[1] Scott Lyons, "A Captivity Narrative: Indians, Mixedbloods, and 'White' Academe," in *Outbursts in Academe: Multiculturalism and Other Sources of Conflict*, ed. Kathleen Dixon et al (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1998), 87.

in traditional captivity narratives. Gary Ebersole writes that "the theme of captivity was widely employed in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries in diverse literary genres because it represented a striking instance of sudden reversal of fortune, whether this was understood to be divine affliction or not . . . such empathetic emotional response by the reader was the goal of sentimental authors," which may explain why Stephens' novel is generally classified as a dime novel, as the theme of captivity could cross genres.[2]

By looking at the historical context of both the period in which *Malaeska* is set and the two publication dates of the novel, as well as looking at the life of Ann Sophia Stephens and her other works on Native Americans, it is possible to consider *Malaeska* a captivity narrative meant to evoke emotion from the novel's readers towards the Native American people. Stephens' domestic Native American romance is especially interesting when the 1839 version of *Malaeska* is compared to a recently discovered previous version, called "The Jockey Cap," published in 1836. This earlier version is a more war-driven frontier narrative, and the differences between the two tales are analyzed based on the historical and biographical context as well as content. The historical influences on both the novel and on Stephens as the author, taking into account her background as a writer and editor, also help the reader to understand what the place of *Malaeska* is in the canon of American literature.

The Story Thus Far

[2] Gary Ebersole, *Captured By Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 121.

Stephen's novel presents the story of Malaeska, a young Native American woman who is married to a white hunter, William Danforth, and the mother of his young son, also named William. The novel is set in pre-Revolutionary War New York, in the Hudson River Valley, where a settlement of whites lives alongside a tribe of presumably Mohawk Indians.[3] When a brave is murdered and scalped by a white hunter, the unidentified tribe goes to war against the whites. In the ensuing battle, Danforth and Malaeska's father, chief of the tribe, fight, and the father dies, leaving Danforth mortally wounded. As he dies, Danforth asks Malaeska to take their son to his own parents; he also says he wishes that he had taught her Christianity so they might meet again in heaven. Malaeska then sails down the river to Manhattan, where she and her son arrive at the home of Danforth's father, John Danforth. The grandfather takes the boy in, but forces Malaeska to remain only a servant in the household and deny any acknowledgement of being the mother of the boy. Malaeska manages this for a few years before she attempts to escape with her son back to her native people. They are caught in the attempt, she is evicted from their lives and is banished to live on the other side of the river, getting only glimpses of her son as he grows from a child into a young man.

After young William leaves for England in his teens or early twenties, Malaeska attempts to return to her people, but is branded a traitor and condemned to die by the chief's hand. However, because the new chief once loved her, he spares her life, and sends her away. Upon this rejection by her people, Malaeska converts to Christianity and moves to the old village near the white settlement. The result is Malaeska's friendship

[3] Based upon the geographical areas that certain tribes historically inhabited, the area described by Stephens would have been home to the Mohawk or Mahican tribes. A map listing the general boundaries of Early American tribes can be found at the University of Texas library website in the Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection under Historical Maps of the United States: www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/histus.html

with a young woman named Sarah Jones, who eventually goes to Manhattan and falls in love with young William, who has returned from Europe. Shortly before they marry, William learns about Malaeska, whom he believes only to have been his nurse. She informs him that she is actually his mother when they meet, and in despair William throws himself in the river and drowns. After his burial, Malaeska is found on his grave, dead of grief.

In Chains: Captivity Narrative Traditions

In order to read *Malaeska* through the lens of the captivity narrative genre, it is first necessary to be familiar with the general tropes/traditions that are typical of that genre. The traditional captivity narrative is written by a white, Christian female (or occasionally a male) author and is a nonfiction account of a forced captivity. Specific tropes that appear in the majority of captivity narratives include the forced journey, the return of the captive to a home society, the stigmatization of the redeemed captive, and the liminal state of the captive in society—a sort of social death, despite the continued health of the captive. However, there is no one narrative arc for the captivity narrative, no single representation that comes out of the genre; there are a variety of options. Additionally, as we can see in the surviving texts, "they have not evoked a single response, nor have they presented a consistent image of the Indian . . . in fact, the responses of readers to captivity narratives have been remarkably diverse, as have the representations."[4] The genre is wide, encompassing prison stories, Indian captivity narratives, and Barbary captivity narratives among others. At the beginning of her review essay on "Captivity, Liberty, and Early American Consciousness", Kathryn

[4] Ebersole, 2.

Zabelle Derounian-Stodola recounts an anecdote from the early 1990's when she and a colleague, James Levernier, were researching their book *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900.* She writes that he called her up and told her how he "'took time off this weekend . . . and watched some old films on television. But they were all captivity narratives . . . I'm beginning to see them everywhere' [Levernier] explained," remarking on the prevalence of parts of the traditional captivity narrative within other genres.[5] Derounian-Stodola goes on to ask the question of what significance the captivity narrative genre would have if anything could be considered as a part of the genre. As a way of avoiding the negative effects of too broad a genre, Derounian-Stodola advocates "a dual approach in which the captivity narrative itself forms a hub from which separate yet interrelated generic spokes fan out," such as hostage accounts, UFO abduction stories, POW stories and the like.[6] Several different aspects of the original Indian captivity narrative appear in *Malaeska* and it also offers an interesting comparison to the captivity narratives of the late Colonial period.

While some captivity narratives are fictitious accounts meant to capitalize on the market for captivity tales, these fictional narratives are not numerous; some even attempt to masquerade as true stories. An example of this latter category is the Barbary captivity narrative of Mrs. Eliza Bradley, as there is dispute regarding its authenticity based upon passages that are nearly word for word the same as another tale from the same area.[7] In the subcategory of fictional captivity narratives, the best known is *The Last of the Mohicans*, James Fennimore Cooper's classic tale. By no means the only fictional

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[5] Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola "Captivity, Liberty, and Early American Consciousness," *Early American Literature* 43, no. 3, (2008): 715-716.
[6] Derounian-Stodola, 716.
[7] Paul Michel Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 247.

accounts, these two sources provide a context for interpreting other fictional novels as captivity narratives.

Yet *Malaeska* manages to also combine two other narrative models in the tale to the benefit of its captivity undertones: the narrative of the "Indian Princess" who marries the white man, a variation of the "Noble Savage" tale, and slave narratives. Slaves were property, and as such could not claim their children as their own; the children belonged only to the masters, as a new generation of slaves. This narrative model can be seen especially in the Danforth's home, when Malaeska is not allowed to acknowledge her son as more than a member of the household; she is a servant and has no claim to the grandchild of her employer. It is interesting to look at the inclusion of tropes of the slave narrative as well as the noble savage, as *Malaeska* was published as a dime novel in the last year before the Civil War, when the problem of enslaving other groups of people for their perceived otherness was also on the minds of the public. With these two enormous social concerns regarding racism and anxiety in the United States, it comes as no surprise that the subjects made their way into popular literature, or that pieces of them would combine to create a truly compelling story that appealed to a wide range of audiences.

The Links of the Shackles: Aspects of the Captivity Narrative in *Malaeska*

Some aspects of the traditional captivity narrative are clearly evident in *Malaeska*, most notably, the stigma that marked so much of the genre, both of miscegenation and of "going native". Gary Ebersole gives an explanation of the latter stigma in his book, *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity*:

> There is also considerable evidence that returning to the white world after living with the Indians was easier said than done. Captives who had spent a considerable

> period of time with the Indians, especially those who had been abducted as children, frequently had taken on an Indian identity…for those who had truly gone native, Indian culture had been internalized in ways which were not easily shed.[8]

Danforth the hunter is considered to be worse than dead because of his marriage to, and then having a child by, Malaeska, and William chooses to commit suicide rather than live with the knowledge that he is half-Native American.

At first, only a few years after arriving at the Danforth home, Malaeska is confident that she will be able to return with her son, and spirits the young boy off into the forests, but John Danforth and a group of white men catch them and take William back to Manhattan. This is the catalyst for Malaeska being exiled from the Danforth house. Probably eight to ten years later, though this is never clearly explained, William is sent to England to continue his education, and Malaeska accepts that she must go alone to return to her native people. An aspect of this stigma is that return to her people after years away while trying to do right by William in accordance to Danforth's wishes. While it is possible for her to adorn herself in the manner of a Native, albeit a somewhat ragged figure after her internment at the Danforth home, she is shunned for giving her child, who should have been their chief, to the enemy and allowing him to be raised as a white. For this, she is branded a traitor, and, despite appearing to be a Native, has in fact become transculturated, or "gone native" to an extent, and cannot be readmitted to their society. In almost all other examples of the captivity narrative genre, this stigmatization and marginalization is present, although it can at times be overcome. Gary Ebersole asserts this in his introduction:

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[8] Ebersole, 5.

> Returning captives often faced widespread prejudice and racism in white society. Many never found themselves completely accepted or fully reassimilated. Some returned captives left the white world out of a sense of disappointment, frustration or disgust and returned to their Indian families and friends. Others found a niche as cultural intermediaries of one sort or another—as Indian traders, interpreters, guides, and assistants to government agents—but they largely remained on the margins of American society.[9]

When the reintegration is not possible, as is the case in *Malaeska* but also in *The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, the captive often elects to remain with their captors rather than face the stigma of returning to their society. However, in Malaeska's case, this avenue is also not open to her, and she becomes a figure separate from all society. The chief of the tribe tells Malaeska, "the daughter of the Black Eagle forsook her tribe when the deathsong of her father was loud in the woods. She comes back when the corn is ripe, but there is no wigwam open to her. When a woman of the tribe goes off to the enemy, she returns only to die."[10] Unlike most white returning captives, who may be met with the stigmas associated with captivity but will largely be accepted back into their home society, Malaeska risks the forfeit of her life by returning to her tribe. She has been cast out by both cultures, and must then live outside them both because she is no longer a part of their world. It is only through the good will of the new chief that she escapes from the death sentence that has been passed on her because of her association with the traitorous whites, though she is still evicted from any culture she has known.

The traditional captivity narrative almost always includes a return to the home society, although sometimes that return is optional and the captive declines, as in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, when Mary Jemison decides she would rather stay with the society she now considers her own, after so many of her formative

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[9] Ebersole, 5.
[10] Ann S. Stephens, *Malaeska: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, (LaVergne: Dodo Press, 2009), 65-66.

years spent among them.[11] Malaeska's narrative departs from this paradigm because of her return—or rather, her attempt to return and the subsequent failure of that attempt. Unlike many white female captives who returned to their native societies despite the stigma associated with captivity, Malaeska's attempt to rejoin her tribe leads to further heartache on her part.

Her return does not unfold in the way she seems to have expected; she is branded as a traitor to her people. The chief of the tribe tells Malaeska, "the daughter of the Black Eagle forsook her tribe when the deathsong of her father was loud in the woods. She comes back when the corn is ripe, but there is no wigwam open to her. When a woman of the tribe goes off to the enemy, she returns only to die."[12] Unlike most white returning captives, who may be met with the stigmas associated with captivity but will largely be accepted back into their home society, Malaeska risks the forfeit of her life by returning to her tribe. She has been cast out by both cultures, and must then live outside them both because she is no longer a part of their world. It is only through the good will of the new chief that she escapes from the death sentence that has been passed on her because of her association with the traitorous whites, though she is still evicted from any culture she has known.

The existence of Malaeska on the margins of society (and even the margins of the narrative in the second half) is also a common theme in captivity narratives. The captive becomes a marginalized figure if they happen to return to their society, because of the same stigma that was discussed previously. Sarah Jones, who befriends Malaeska once she returns to the wigwam she shared with the elder William Danforth, becomes the main

[11] James E. Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison,* ed. June Namais, (Oklahoma City:University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).
[12] Stephens, 65-66.

focus of the story when she goes to Manhattan for finishing school. The fact that the proper, beautiful white young woman, takes over the focus of the story seems to be indicative of the very marginalization of the captive or "Other" figure; not only are they no longer a part of society, but they are no longer worthy of their narrative. Malaeska would be an example of that disregard in both her societies. While she is actually a Native American young woman, she cannot exist in either society, because of her associations with the other. Because she married a white man and allowed his child to be brought up white rather than keeping him within her culture, she can no longer live among her people, despite clinging to many aspects of that culture, from her clothing to the manner in which she makes her living. Because of her identity as a Native American woman, she cannot fit in with white society, despite the fact that she is educated enough to read, write, and speak with them. Upon being rejected by her people, she even converts to the religion of the whites. Malaeska also cannot create a third group to which she might belong; she has a friend in Sarah Jones, and a minimal acceptance by the residents of the settlement in which Sarah lives, but Malaeska is still too different, and there is no one else in her situation. This same liminality allows *Malaeska* to portray another tradition of the captivity narrative genre while separating the tale; no other narrative seems to express the problem of existing outside of both social groups.

Many captivity narratives also involve religion, especially the supposed heathen nature of the Native Americans in relation to the taming Christianity of the whites. This is also a trope that is mentioned in *Malaeska,* although not to the same extent as the marginalization, liminality or stigma. As Danforth is extracting his promise about their son's care, Malaeska tells him she believes they shall meet in the great hunting lands

rather than heaven. That fact alone has left the dying Danforth in misery, because if she does not discover and convert to Christianity, she can never meet her husband again in the next life. Danforth, as he lies dying, bemoans that Malaeska continues to believe the wrong religion:

> A faint, sad smile flitted over the dying hunter's face, and his voice was choked with a pain which was not death. "My poor girl," he said, feebly drawing her kindling face to his lips, "there is no great hunting-ground as you dream. The whites have another faith, and—O God! I have taken away her trust, and have none to give in return!"[13]

Should she fail to convert, he believes, she will be damned, and he no longer has the chance to redeem her himself. In previous captivity narratives, religion is often all that the captive has to cling to in order to survive the ordeal. Religion is also often present in the very title, such as Mary Rowlandson's *Sovereignty and Goodness of God* or *Hannah Swanton, the Casco Captive: or, the Catholic Religion in Canada and its influence on the Indians in Maine*, probably as a marketing technique to show how the power of religion can overcome the evils of the heathen Indians or the vile Catholics.[14] The second example is another type of religious influence on the genre, deploring the idolatry of the Catholic religion in comparison to the Puritan Christianity of the colonists in America, and the colonists belief that many of the raids were influenced by Catholic influence on the Native Americans.

It was important to reinforce the idea that not all religions were created equal, despite the foundations of America being based on the idea of freedom of religion. Additionally, many captivity narratives were prefaced or bracketed by letters or sermons from religious leaders, as a form of asserting that religion can get someone through the

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[13] Stephens, 24.

[14] Hannah Swanton's narrative is largely a sermon on the evils of Catholicism by Cotton Mather, and letters and sermons by Increase Mather and her husband bracket Mary Rowlandson's narrative.

worst events in their life. Similar to many white captivity tales, Malaeska turns to religion, Christianity specifically, upon the end of her captivity. In a move of compassion for his old love, the young chief of her tribe sends a Christian missionary who sometimes visits his tribe after Malaeska. The missionary, finding himself bound to his duty to rescue lost souls, briefly tells Malaeska about Christianity. In her loneliness, "Malaeska listened with meek and grateful attention. No flower ever opened to the sunshine more sweetly than her soul received the holy revelations of that good man".[15] Religion continues to be a strong aspect in tales of captivity, and the conversion of Malaeska, though only briefly mentioned, perhaps makes her more acceptable to the audiences of Ann Stephens' time, but is also another way that she attempts to change herself so that she may once again be a part of a society.

Malaeska offers one of the images of a kind of racially-reversed captivity narrative, where instead of the white settler, it is the Native American who is the captive; this was a situation that did occur historically, such as in the case of Pocahontas or the male case of Squanto, but was more rare in narratives. The protagonist in these tales is usually a Native American maiden; the "captor" is a white male, but also white society and social norms. Typically the captive is taken from the society with whom the reader is meant to connect and sympathize, which is why they are usually white women, with the occasional male protagonist, that "star in" the popular captivity narratives. In the cases where there is a male protagonist, it is usually the case that he is in some way weakened, coming from a minority race or social rank, like a slave, or in some way involved with a member of the captor's society, as in the case of John Smith and Pocahontas. Stephens'

[15] Stephens, 68.

novel has as its sympathetic character the very race that is most degraded in traditional captivity narratives. The rare instances of Native American captivity by white society are usually suppressed or altered so that the captive becomes a vital part of white society, generally those who, after their release from captivity and attempted return to their home society, found the liminal nature of their existence lifted only by being useful to white society. Pauline Turner Strong claims that the captivity of

> "Savages" among the colonists subverts the dominant opposition in Anglo-American representations of captivity in the New World: the opposition between the Colonial Captive and the Captivating Savage. Like the hegemonic legends of Squanto and Pocahontas, the dominant Anglo-American representation of captivity evokes a form of communion between Indians and colonists, but one that is involuntary, achieved through violence and generally repudiated.[16]

Strong continues with the statement that it is "not only in the realm of popular legend that the captivity of indigenous peoples has been obscured…a counter-hegemonic history of the Indian Captive and the Captivating Colonist has only begun to be written."[17] Yet *Malaeska* offers an example of part of this counter-hegemonic history, albeit a fictional one. Strong's arguments center on much earlier captives, including Pocahontas and Squanto, but also earlier Wampanoag captives like Kalicho, who learned a little English and, dying of complications from a broken rib, said only "God save you" as he died. Squanto and Pocahontas are well known as friends to the settlers, but both were captives before they ever assisted the whites.

The image of the counter-hegemonic captivity in *Malaeska* is clearly different, as Malaeska is never physically taken captive. However, the dominant image of the white can be seen clearly in John Danforth: forcing Malaeska to submit to the role of servant in

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[16] Pauline Turner Strong, *Captive Selves, Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 20.
[17] Strong, 20.

order to even stay near her child, he is exercising the same involuntary communion between the Native American and the Anglo-American. The very idea that his son could have married a Native American woman is repulsive to him:

> "Yes, woman!" said [John Danforth], almost fiercely; "there is a thing worse than death –disgrace!"
> "Disgrace coupled with my son? You are his father, John. Do you slander him now that he is dead—before his mother, too." [Mrs. Danforth]
> . . .
> "Read, woman, read! Look on that accursed wretch and her child! They have enticed him into their savage haunts, and murdered him. Now they come to claim protection and reward for the foul deed."[18]

The disgrace of miscegenation is less the young white man's fault than it is that of the Native American woman and child, according to John Danforth. This does not seem to stop him from performing the dominant role of captor in regards to Malaeska, although his wife is more compassionate. The Danforths manage to agree on an acceptable reason to keep Malaeska in the house without advertising their son's "disgrace":

> "*He* loved her; —why should we send her back to her savage haunts? Read this letter once more, my husband. You can not refuse the dying request of our first-born."
> With gentle and persuasive words like these, the kind lady prevailed. Malaeska was allowed to remain in the house of her husband's father, but it was only as the nurse of her own son. She was not permitted to acknowledge herself as his mother; and it was given out that young Danforth had married in one of the new settlements—that the young couple had fallen victims to the savages.[19]

The demands upon her while serving the Danforths are the closest Malaeska comes to a physical captivity, but it is the emotional and social captivity that are truly crippling for the young woman. While there is no violence involved, her servitude at the Danforth home is in a manner that is unequal to the status she ought to have been given as the mother of the heir, but her race is what prevents that equality. While not entirely

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[18] Stephens, 34.
[19] Stephens, 35-36.

involuntary, Malaeska's presence is held to constraints that would not exist if she were a white woman; she stays for her son and his future, not for herself. In this way, Malaeska is captive to her own dedication to a promise she made to a dying man as much as she is captive to white society.

Authorial Freedom: Ann S Stephens

It is necessary to look at the life of Ann Sophia Stephens in order to fully comprehend the decisions she made regarding her novel, as well as her other career decisions, both editorial and written; without knowing who Stephens is, it is more difficult to understand why she portrays certain characters as she does. She was born Ann Sophia Winterbotham on March 30, 1810, in Connecticut.[20] She married Edward Stephens, a merchant and publisher, of Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1831, and the couple moved to Portland, Maine. There, Edward published *Portland Magazine*, for which she served as editor as well as made frequent contributions. It is in this magazine that Stephens' "The Jockey Cap" was published. Edward and Ann Stephens remained in Portland for seven years, and moved to New York City in 1837. In New York, Ann Stephens worked as an editor and/or contributor for many of the most popular periodicals for women, beginning with *Ladies' Companion* in 1837. It was for the *Ladies' Companion* that Stephens wrote two of her most well known stories, both categorized as Native American Romances: "Mary Derwent: A Tale of the Early Settlers" and "Malaeska". "By the late 1850s, her combination of magazine writing and editing, plus her books, had made Ann Stephens one of America's most popular writers," claimed one

[20] Sam Riley "Ann Sophia (Winterbotham) Stephens Biography," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Gale, 2006), accessed via Bookrags.com, 6.

biographical sketch; yet Stephens' is almost invisible in American literature's canon now.[21] After her husband's death in 1862, Ann Stephens "supported herself and her [two] children by writing fiction; twenty-seven novels appeared in the last twenty-four years of her life".[22] According to biographer, Jennifer Hynes, "Stephens was interested in a number of social causes and used her sentimental novels to raise readers' consciousness regarding such issues as prison reform, hospital conditions, orphan care, and better pay for working women."[23]. "As Paola Gemme points out," Madeline Stern, who wrote three versions of Stephens' biography, writes, "between the 1830s and the 1850s Stephens apparently altered her view of the future of American Indians from espousing assimilation to acknowledging the value of separatism."[24]

Despite the focus of her novels on women, Stephens was definitely not a feminist, and in fact "argued for the perfect compatibility of the nineteenth-century ideal of True Womanhood and authorship" wherein writing by women was "an 'honorable,' 'dignified' profession for women . . . one that would not interfere with their responsibilities as wives and mothers."[25] Stephens' "conservative, prefeminist attitude is ratified by comments she had made in 1834 in the opening address to readers of her *Portland Magazine*, in which she said that business and politics were the man's proper domain" while the domestic sphere, writing of fiction or poetry and the "lighter branches of the sciences" were a woman's.[26] Stephens wrote on women and women's issues

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[21] Jennifer Hynes "Ann Sophia (Winterbotham) Stephens Biography," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Gale, 2005), accessed via Bookrags.com, 11.
[22] Madeline Stern "Ann Sophia (Winterbotham) Stephens Biography," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Gale, 2006), accessed via Bookrags.com, 11.
[23] Hynes, 13.
[24] Stern, 9.
[25] Paola Gemme "Ann Sophia Winterbotham Stephens (1810-1886)" in *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 12, no. 1 (1995), 48-49.
[26] Hynes,12.

because they were what she knew, rather than to espouse a greater equality for women in America.

Before Captivity: "The Jockey Cap" as Prequel

Some scholars, like Colin Ramsey, have noted that the basis for Stephens' novel seems to have been adapted from her earlier work, "The Jockey Cap," published in the April 1, 1836 issue of *Portland Magazine*. Ramsey summarizes the work:

> The story takes place during the early eighteenth century and concerns Indians and European settlers who live on the Maine/New Hampshire border near a large hill called Jockey Cap… Stephens furnishes both a typical frontier story character, a hunter who understands Indian ways but whose allegiances ultimately lie with white European society, and a standard frontier story narrative structure, an immanent war between the settlers and the local Indians, a result of years of European encroachment on Native lands.[27]

This shorter work concludes with the death of the white hunter, and does not follow Malaeska's life further. In fact, "the war consumes much of the narrative, and a comparatively large amount of graphically violent description distinguishes "The Jockey Cap" version of the Malaeska story from Stephens' two later iterations".[28] Ramsey is comparing Stephens' story to a frontier narrative, rather than a captivity narrative, though the two could go hand in hand. He claims that "in Stephens' schema, then, Indian and white are completely incompatible; if Stephens has allowed for a sexual relationship between Indian and whites, the union is demonstrably untenable…in Stephens' tale, miscegenation seems to lead only to violence and suffering."[29] The reasons, according to

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[27] Colin Ramsey, "Ann Stephens's *Malaeska*: An Unknown Early Version and Some Thoughts on Dime Novels and the Gender of Readers" in *Dime Novel Roundup: A Magazine Devoted to the Collecting, Preservation and Study of Old-Time Dime and Nickel Novels, Popular Story Papers, Series Books, and Pulp Magazines* 75, no. 3 (2006), 69.
[28] Ramsey, 69.
[29] Ramsey, 70.

Ramsey, that Stephens has changed the focus of the story from the violence of the war to the domestic sphere is because that is a more "common setting for nineteenth-century 'sentimental' domestic novels", and will therefore appeal more to the readers of the *Ladies' Companion*.[30] However, in order to keep the same intensity, the novel had to alter, and instead of frontier narrative it now seems more like a captivity narrative.

The issue of sentimentality has been present in captivity narratives since the early eighteenth century, when captivity "was to be narratively cast in a different fashion and consumed to a different effect. The most significant development in terms of literary form was the emergence and tremendous popularity of the sentimental novel".[31] In fact, the popularity of the captivity narrative certainly comes from the emotional responses the genre evokes; "readers were drawn to captivity tales because of the power the very idea of captivity held over them—a power composed of a mixture of fascination and dread. In order to understand something of this elemental fascination with captivity, we need to reflect on the situation a captive faced and the imaginal possibilities this offered (and offers) people".[32] It was this binary of terror and excitement as well as the aspect of reality that made captivity narratives popular, drawing on the fear of the "savagery" of the Native Americans with the exciting lure of the forbidden of miscegenation. This may have been the same reason that people were so focused on Native Americans, especially in the time periods when Stephens wrote her Native American tales.

Historicizing *Malaeska*: The World Outside Stephens' Head

[30] Ramsey, 72.
[31] Ebersole, 98.
[32] Ebersole, 6.

Stephens' edits to and republication of *Malaeska* coincide with the later period of the nationwide conflict with the Native Americans and the problem of relocation. The original publication came a year after the Trail of Tears in 1838, and it is surprising that a novel that has as its central and titular character a Native American should be so popular in the midst of these events. With the focus of the nation split between condemnation of the tribes who were preventing the spread of white society and compassion for the Native Americans who were being forcibly relocated, "Native Americans were indeed topical in the late thirties: the Removal Act of 1830 had decreed that the tribes of the fertile Southeast would leave their lands and relocate west of the Mississippi, a measure that understandably found considerable opposition on the part of Native Americans," writes Paola Gemme, arguing that Stephens "was thus capitalizing on the contemporary public interest in Native Americans."[33] The Beadle reprinting of the novel was released in 1860, which was shortly after renewed interest in the Native Americans out west. "The westward expansion triggered by the territorial acquisitions that had followed the Mexican War made it necessary to remove Native Americans out of the very same lands that had been allocated to them in the 1830's," made the subject of Stephens' novel very appropriate as a choice for the first dime novel, a fact cited in the "Publishers' Notice" of the Beadle novel.[34]

It is the historical significance of both the time that *Malaeska* was first written and the time of the publication as a Beadle Dime Novel that is most interesting: it implies a sort of critique of white supremacy. It is significant that Malaeska is so affected by the poor decision of one white man, as it costs her first her husband and father, then her tribe,

[33] Paola Gemme, "Rewriting the Indian Tale: Science, Politics, and the Evolution of Ann S. Stephens's Indian Romances" in *Prospects: An Annual Journal of American Cultural Studies* 19 (1994), 376.
[34] Gemme, 376-377.

and eventually her son. The poor decisions of a nation of whites making decisions for the Native Americans could only cause greater havoc. "*Malaeska* mobilizes "the Indian question" to critique white supremacy and patriarchy simultaneously: it appeals to women's shared predicaments as wives, daughters, and mothers to expose the violence of white dominance and its destructive impact on both Native Americans and whites," Yu-Fang Cho argues, focusing intently on the ideology of racism by the whites that Stephens portrays in the novel.[35]

As for the publication of *Malaeska* in 1860, it places the novel in the midst of active Native American resistance to the ideals of separation between the two cultures. No longer was the issue expansion on the East, but control in the Western United States. America's Manifest Destiny seems to have no place for the Native Americans, and no sympathy for those who are simply fighting to retain their way of life.

Critics have suggested that the novel was written simply to capitalize on the topical nature of Native Americans during the time period. Yet that explanation fails to account for "The Jockey Cap," published in April of 1836. No major events involving Native Americans seem to have taken place in New England at that time, though 1836 was the year that the Senate approved the Cherokee Removal Treaty.[36] One must also wonder why the events in the novels are not the current events of the time if Stephens was truly writing to capitalize on public interest. A novel about the Trail of Tears experience would perhaps have been too much, while a novel featuring a sympathetic Native American princess is not. There are various ways to interpret the novel, but the

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[35] Yu-Fang Cho, "A Romance of (Miscege)Nations: Ann Sophia Stephens' *Malaeska: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter (1839, 1860)* in *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 63, no. 1 (2007), 2.

[36] Information gained from the American Indian History Time Line compiled by the North Carolina Museum of History; ncmuseumofhistory.org.

central nature remains: white involvement can only lead to tragedy for everyone involved.

Unlike the period in which it was written, either initially or for reprint, *Malaeska* is set in the eighteenth century, prior to the American Revolution, and is set in the Catskills, along the Hudson River. This makes it most likely that the tribe of Native Americans that Malaeska belongs to is the Mahicans, or Mohicans, the same tribe as in James Fennimore Cooper's famous *Last of the Mohicans*. In Cooper's introduction to that novel, he writes:

> The Mohicans were the possessors of the country first occupied by the Europeans in this portion of the continent. They were, consequently, the first dispossessed; and the seemingly inevitable fate of all these people, who disappear before the advances, or it might be termed the inroads, of civilization, as the verdure of their native forests falls before the nipping frosts, is represented as having already befallen them.[37]

Cooper's tale is set during the French-Indian wars, but even then the issue of the dispossession of the Native Americans was clear. Most of the traditional captivity narratives were set in the historical context of King Phillip's War, of 1675, or the French-Indian War between about 1754-1763, when Native American raids and the capture of white settlers were higher because of the conflicts between the whites and the Native Americans. *Malaeska* does not mention any battles or raids other than the one on the small settlement at the beginning of the novel, so it is possible that the action of the novel is not meant to take place in between times of high conflict between the settlers and the Native Americans. Charles Frey speculates, "Malaeska is set in the early to mid 1700's after the British had defeated the Dutch throughout New York. The Catskill settlement is vaguely Dutch in character and Dutch terms are still applied, for instance, to geographical

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[37] James Fennimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 6-7.

areas about the settlement", but Stephens herself does not give the reader much information to corroborate this.[38] It is not entirely clear if that "first settlement of the whites" is meant to be only in the area or in the New World generally, but either would indicate an earlier setting, somewhere in the early to mid 1600s, the 1700s at the latest.[39] The very setting implies that an acknowledgement of the prevalence of captivity must exist in the reader, and influences readings in that vein.

Where Are They Now: *Malaeska* in Contemporary Literature

Not much has been written about *Malaeska* or Ann Stephens, and what information does exist seems to follow particular arguments: the politics and social aspect of writing a Native American romance in the years surrounding the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the discovery of "The Jockey Cap". *Malaeska* is cursorily mentioned in several articles and essays about the dime novel genre, yet even there the later examples of the genre, like Buffalo Bill and Deadwood Dick's Western tales, takes precedence in the discussion. While there have been several versions of Ann Stephens' biography, the few discussions of her works often focus on *Mary Derwent* or her contemporary novel *Jonathan Slick.* According to Madeline Stern,

> critical opinion about Stephens through the first two-thirds of the twentieth century focused either on her financial success as a professional writer or on her importance as the author of the first Beadle Dime Novel . . . present critical opinion, however, has turned to focus more closely on Stephens' work apart from the 1860 reprint of *Malaeska; the Indian Wife of the White Hunter*.[40]

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[38] Charles Frey, "For(e)knowledge of Youth: *Malaeska: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter*". *The ALAN Review*, 28, no. 3 (2001), 19.
[39] Stephens, 3.
[40] Stern, 12.

Stephens may be best known for the first dime novel, but there is very little knowledge of her or her work in the current academic conversation, despite Stern's claim of a focus on Stephens' other work, including *Jonathan Slick* or *Fashion and Famine*.[41] *Malaeska* has been "dismissed as formulaic, superficial, conservative, and therefore unworthy of scholarly attention," however the novel has a great deal left to teach readers and scholars about popular events, popular appeal, and even the perceived role of women in Antebellum America.[42]

Stephens herself may have espoused a conservative view of women's roles in society, believing they should remain in the domestic sphere almost entirely, yet she was certainly more successful than her husband before his death, both financially and socially.[43] Stephens created strongly sympathetic female characters that may have initially appeared to conform to society's strict guidelines. Simply examining the female characters of *Malaeska* through a feminist critical approach, one can see how Stephens gave an example of a nonconformist female role. The secondary character of Sarah Jones in *Malaeska* would have never made friends with Malaeska if she had followed society's norms, nor would she have met and become engaged to William Danforth if she had been the proper young lady she should have been. Malaeska's race precluded her from being the model of womanhood for the time period, and yet she is the main character, and the character the reader sympathizes with to the fullest extent. In her own life, Stephens supported her children and herself after her husband's death by writing, which she considered an acceptable sphere for women. However, the critics of the day would

[41] Other sources consulted were largely focused on *Malaeska* or *Mary Derwent*, though Nina Baym's essay focuses on *Fashion and Famine* and Beatrice Jacobson's article focuses on *Jonathan Slick*. For source information, see Bibliography.
[42] Cho, 1.
[43] Hynes, 11.

consider her interactions still distinctly independent for a woman, and her profits from her work would be given to her husband, as women could not own property separate from their husbands until 1848.[44] Still, feminists would certainly critique Stephens as being too conservative, despite her successes.

Stephens and her writings may not be as distinctly nuanced or as deep at first glance, but a closer reading of her life and her works makes an analysis much more than "superficial," in any way the reader chooses to explore it, from an early feminist critical approach to supporting the relocation of the Native Americans. Much like captivity narratives as a whole, there is no one right interpretation. "As a best-seller and a watershed publication in the history of the mass-marketing of literature, *Malaeska* has long had a place as at least a footnote in American literary history," but perhaps it is time that the novel and its author are viewed as more than a footnote.[45]

Coming to Terms

Gary Ebersole discusses the change in captivity narratives once the actuality of Native American captivity was no longer:

> The captivity topos continues to be employed as a means of imaginatively reflecting on the possibility of identity transformation and going native, while the wilderness and the Indian-as-Other remain important imaginative constructs through which we project our fears, fantasies and nostalgias onto the world. Some captivity tales critique aspects of the modern world; others press environmental concerns or theological or ideological agendas.[46]

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[44] The Married Women's Property Law gave women this right at the early part of the Women's Rights Movement; New York's law was passed in 1848, the same year as the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls. memory.loc.gov

[45] "From the Periodical Archives: Ann S. Stephens's 'The Jockey Cap'—The First Version of 'Malaeska'" in *American Periodicals A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 18, no. 1 (2008), 102.

[46] Ebersole, 239.

Despite the end of actual captivity of settlers by Native Americans, Ebersole is claiming, the use of the tropes, traditions and ideas of captivity narratives persist into the twentieth century as a way to express other constructs. Stephens' novel is expressing a number of different concerns, agendas and aspects, all of which come back to the all important "Indian-as-Other" construct that began the captivity narrative tradition. With the incorporation of the tropes and traditions of the captivity narrative genre, Stephens engaged with the criticism of the modern times as well as engaging with the idea of rampant anti-Native American sentiment in America, while still exploring different captivities than the physical, forced captivity. Malaeska is captive to others' ideas and expectations of her, as well as to her own ability to change the way she is being controlled by those ideas and expectations. This is the true extent of her captivity, not being physically forced to act or say anything but to attempt to adhere to the sometimes conflicting demands of the world in which she tries to exist peacefully.

Considering Stephens' background, it seems likely that she was deliberately engaging with the historical context, as she understood it. Though there is no way to know if Stephens was prompted to write on certain issues, the quantity of her Native American romances indicates that it was likely what she chose to write. While Stephens' work would have been very timely, it is difficult to believe that she would write such sympathetic characters if she were being told to produce stories on a specific topic, no matter how formulaic her work has been accused of being. On the other hand, the timely nature of her work does make the reissue of it nearly twenty years later more understandable, as Beadle was reaching back nearly two decades in order to launch the new line of dime novels. Unfortunately there is no record available to show how the

launch of *Beadle's Dime Novels* was advertised, but as *Malaeska* sold at least three hundred thousand copies, Mrs. Stephens' novel was hugely popular no matter what the advertising campaign may have been.

Regardless of the genre under which *Malaeska* was marketed, the cross-genre tropes and lessons can be seen which mark the novel as one that has been influenced by captivity narratives. Perhaps more so because of the subtle way it has been integrated into popular culture, the heritage of the Native American captivity tale remains even after physical Indian captivity has ceased, providing readers with a multilayered reading which asks them to think about the events of the time in which the story was written as well as the time in which the story is set, while critiquing the white supremacist standard that the Native American is the Other, and should be considered threatening or frightening, a being without equal rights simply because of cultural or racial differences. Far from being a footnote of American literature, *Malaeska* is a novel that forces the reader to engage in varied conversations with history and literature, from what was happening in the United States to what the author was reading that influenced how they wrote about the world.

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