Exploring Meal Chauvinism:
Multigenred Intertextual Feminist Critique through
Measure for Measure, Saint Ronan’s Well, and The Cook
and Housewife’s Manual

by

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My heartfelt thanks to my family, friends, and to my advisor, Professor Weiner. I could not have done this without you.
Introduction:

This thesis examines the multifaceted interconnections between three very different works of literature: a play by Shakespeare, a novel by Sir Walter Scott, and a “novel cookbook”¹ by Christine Isobel Johnstone. At first glance, the cookbook, *A Cook and Housewife’s Manual* (1826), resembles any other nineteenth-century culinary tome. The cover page features the title, a list of the types of recipes in the cookbook, and finally, the author: “By Mrs Margaret Dods, of the Cleikum Inn, St Ronan’s.” It is in this last, seemingly unassuming line that *The Cook and Housewife’s Manual* becomes one of the most singular cookbooks of all time.² The actual author of the cookbook was not Meg Dods, a fictional character created by Walter Scott, but Johnstone, an extraordinarily prolific Scottish novelist, journalist, and newspaper editor. Although we know little about Johnstone’s private life, her novels, children’s books, literary reviews, and editorials show that she was a staunch liberal feminist. In addition to the host of liberal causes Johnstone champions in her writings, such as the abolition of slavery, the repeal of the Corn Laws, and an end to the oppression of Irish peasants, Johnstone argues for the radical expansion of women’s rights.³ Her novels feature brilliant female characters with strong political opinions, and her later journalistic work demands social and political equality between the sexes.⁴ As this

¹ I borrow this term from the Perthshire Courier’s review, which writes that the book is equal parts “cooking novel” and “novel cookery book.” See n.a., “The Cook and Housewife’s Manual, &c.,” *Perthshire Courier*, June 1, 1826, The British Newspaper Archive.
³ Feminism was not a central tenet of liberalism in the early half of the nineteenth century. Andrew Monnickendam, *The Novels of Walter Scott and His Literary Relations: Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier and Christian Johnstone* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 101-104.
thesis will examine, her authorial attribution to Margaret Dods, the brash and beloved
landlady of Scott's novel *Saint Ronan's Well* (1824), allows the cookbook to serve a
similar feminist purpose.

*Saint Ronan's Well* is the only one of Scott’s novels to take place in the
nineteenth century and deviate from the historical fiction genre that he is widely
credited with inventing.\(^5\) Set in a fictional village in the Scottish Borderlands, the
novel begins as a comedic satire of contemporary bourgeois society but ultimately
becomes a tragic tale of a woman’s doomed quest for social and sexual agency. It is a
far cry from the tales of Scottish battles and courtly intrigue that audiences had come
to expect from Scott’s *Waverley Novels*,\(^6\) and to say that *Saint Ronan’s Well* received
mixed reviews would be something of an understatement. Months after the novel’s
publication, the *Perthshire Courier* neatly summarizes the contentious critical
reception of *Saint Ronan’s Well*, joking that attempting to review the novel would
only be to repeat what all the world is tired of hearing— that it is in the
opinion of many, the *very best*, and in the judgment of many more, the *very
worst*, of the Author’s works— while as usual, in the estimation of the “select
few,” it is neither one nor the other.\(^7\)

Among critics who disliked *Saint Ronan’s Well*, a few were English nationalists
whose reviews betray virulent anti-Scottish prejudice. Although they do not specify
why, something about *Saint Ronan’s Well* struck them as offensively Scottish.\(^8\)

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\(^6\) See The Walter Scott Digital Archive, “Works” for a complete list of the titles and summaries of *Waverley Novels* published before *Saint Ronan’s Well*.


\(^8\) See n.a., “On Reading ‘Saint Ronan’s Well,’” *The Examiner*, March 21, 1824, 188, The British Newspaper Archive for a scathing poem that calls *Saint Ronan’s Well* “cursedly Scotchy.” See also
Perhaps they did not take kindly to a novel that paints three of its four primary English characters in a negative light, one of whom is a fratricidal con man and near rapist. Perhaps these critics were especially insulted to find that this villain, Valentine Bulmer, shared their worst anti-Scottish sentiments. In the same letter in which he admits to shooting his brother and tricking Clara, the novel’s heroine, into a false marriage, Valentine writes:

Every point of national character is opposed to the pretensions of this luckless race… They are a shrewd people, indeed, but so destitute of ease, grace, pliability of manners, and insinuation of address… Then their pride heads them back at one turn, their poverty at another, their pedantry at a third, their mauvaise honté at a fourth… it is the grave folk in Old England who have to fear a Caledonian invasion… But assuredly Heaven did not form the Caledonian for the gay world; and his efforts at ease, grace, and gaiety, resemble only the clumsy gambols of the ass in the fable. Yet the Scot has his sphere too, (in his own country only,) where the character which he assumes is allowed to pass current.

This tirade captures many of the most common and often contradictory negative Scottish stereotypes of the nineteenth century. While there was no longer open violence between Scotland and England in the 1820s, many in England still feared and scorned their northern neighbors. They saw the Scottish as a separate and inherently inferior race, at once “luckless” and insidiously successful. It was only some sixty years earlier that the radical English politician John Wilkes published a weekly anti-Scottish newspaper, and in the 1820s, Scots and Scottish accents were

n.a., “Literary Notice,” Lancaster Gazette, January 10, 1824, The British Newspaper Archive for a review that excoriates the novel for being below the “taste of an English Gentleman” and approvingly quotes Blumer’s anti-Scottish tirade in full.

9 Jekyl, Binks, Bulmer, and Tyrrel are the novel’s four primary English characters. Jekyl, Bulmer’s fixer, has some sense of morality, but his close relationship with Bulmer renders him inherently suspicious; Binks is an aggressive, aristocratic idiot; and Bulmer is the novel’s contemptuous villain. Tyrrel, Clara’s former lover, is the only admirable character among them.

10 Walter Scott, St. Ronan’s Well. With Introductory Essay and Notes by Andrew Lang (Boston, MA: Estes and Lauriat, 1894), Project Gutenberg, 301.
still an impediment to acceptance in highborn London society.\textsuperscript{11} The runaway success
of Scott’s \textit{Waverly} (1814) and the subsequent books in the series helped soften anti-
Scottish prejudice amongst many highborn English readers, but the novels
commercialized a romanticized and occasionally fraudulent portrait of Highland
culture that philo-Scottish English aristocrats came to associate with the country as a
whole.\textsuperscript{12}

Scottish readers, on the other hand, enjoyed \textit{Saint Ronan’s Well} for the same
reasons that English critics despised it, finding it a joyous and accurate celebration of
Scottish identity. They embraced the Scots-speaking Meg Dods in particular, whom
Scott lovingly writes as an amalgamation of Scottish quirks and virtues. Throughout
the novel, Meg’s “tartness… goodness of heart… ungoverned eloquence… and
vigour of rebuke” present her as the embodied spirit of Scotland itself.\textsuperscript{13} Scott proudly
notes the differing national receptions in the preface to the Magnum Opus edition of
the novel (1832), writing that although “the voices were... against Saint Ronan's on
the southern side of the Tweed… In the author's own country, it was otherwise.”\textsuperscript{14}
The strong nationalist feelings the novel evoked make the more common complaint
against the novel — namely, that it is a work of domestic fiction and thus less
politically charged than Scott’s other works — highly ironic.

\textsuperscript{12} Herman, \textit{The Scottish Enlightenment}, 297-304. For a Lowlander’s frustration with the conflation of
“barbaric” Highland culture with Lowland culture, see n.a., “Your Highland Bagpipers,” \textit{The Scots Magazine}, June 1, 1826, The British Newspaper Archive.
\textsuperscript{13} Andrew Lang, “Editor's Introduction to St. Ronan’s Well,” in \textit{St. Ronan’s Well}, by Walter Scott
(Boston, MA: Estes and Lauriat, 1894), Project Gutenberg, xvi.
\textsuperscript{14} Walter Scott, “Introduction to St. Ronan’s Well,” February, 1832, in \textit{St. Ronan’s Well} (Boston, MA:
Estes and Lauriat, 1894), Project Gutenberg, xxi. The Tweed is the river separating the Scottish
Borders region from Northern England.
Indeed, on both sides of the Tweed, most critics were at least somewhat disappointed with the novel’s genre. Many of these commentators adhere to the contemporary understanding of a hierarchy between masculine and feminine readership and authorship. A mere nine years before the publication of Saint Ronan’s Well, the wild success of Waverly, Scott’s first work of historical fiction, had transformed novels from a feminine punchline into a respectable masculine pursuit.¹⁵ By the 1820s, literary audiences had learned to distinguish between so-called “male” and “female” novels.¹⁶ The latter belonged to the female-dominated genre of domestic fiction. These novels set stories of romantic love squarely in the here and now, apparently avoiding weighty philosophical, political, and historical issues.¹⁷ Male novels, on the other hand, were “romances” that were “invested… with the gravity of the Enlightenment sciences, foremost among which was history.”¹⁸ As such, many understood male novels as the more prestigious to read and write. A review of Saint Ronan’s Well in the Dorset County Chronicle writes that Scott’s historical novels were “chiefly valuable for their antiquarian lore, historical portraits, and political disquisition.” To appreciate them, a reader “must possess knowledge, and be desirous of instruction.” Saint Ronan’s Well, however, is “clear and level to the most ordinary novel-reading capacity” because “the dramatis personae are of a class with which every one is acquainted; no peculiar opinions, political, literary, or religious, are insinuated; no antiquarian and covenanting controversies, encumber narrative and clog

¹⁷ Ibid, xvi.
The clear implication is that masculine novels and male readers are more impressive and advanced than domestic fiction and its predominantly female audience. Although some female novels, such as those by Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth, enjoyed popular and positive reception, they were celebrated for their wit and capacity to please and not for their ability to challenge and broaden the mind. Meanwhile, the majority of female authors enjoyed no such fame and esteem but rather derisive condescension, and that is if they received attention from male critics at all. A review of *Saint Ronan’s Well* in *The British Critic* states:

we hope this will be his last career upon a beaten track where so many of his inferiors have figured with considerable success, and that he will no longer stray from that magic circle where none else can tread without failure. Our complaint is not that he [Scott] has shown any want of his accustomed powers, but that he has bestowed them upon inadequate materials, associated in our minds with the successful labour of a minor class of authors.

These critics belittle domestic fiction, the women who read it, and the female writers who dominate it. Other critics simply took issue with a man attempting an inherently feminine medium. They respected domestic fiction as a female genre and did not believe that a man could or should “possess the nice and discriminating tact which distinguishes the writings of those ladies” who could depict the “representation of every-day life, and of domestic scenes.” For these critics, Scott’s clumsy stab at the female novel proved the wisdom of the doctrine of separate spheres. Finally, others

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thought the plot contrived and the characters unoriginal.\textsuperscript{23} Despite the bad press, Scott’s literary celebrity ensured the novel’s commercial success. \textit{Saint Ronan’s Well} remained a household name throughout Great Britain for decades to come, inspiring continuous literary debates, numerous theatrical adaptations, and even an entire tourism industry in the town claiming to have been the real-world basis for the fictional village of St. Ronan’s.\textsuperscript{24}

Today, however, Scott’s celebrity is no longer what it once was. E.M. Forster’s seminal treatise on writing, \textit{Aspects of the Novel} (1927), excoriates Scott’s apparent predilection for overwrought grandiloquence and was among the first major works to argue that his works were no longer compatible with modern conceptions of good writing.\textsuperscript{25} Among Scott’s novels, \textit{Saint Ronan’s Well} is particularly at odds with today’s preference for clean, direct prose and cohesive narratives: Time loops around itself as the narrative wends between storylines that, for much of the text, seem only distantly related. The tone is similarly uneven, as the gay absurdity that characterizes much of the novel turns to raw pathos in the last two chapters. Even if major publishers had not stopped printing \textit{Saint Ronan’s Well}, the novel’s dense literary terrain would likely have prevented it from achieving any sort of canonical status.

And while Scott is still widely celebrated as Scotland’s greatest novelist and the

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father of historical fiction, that reputation comfortably excludes his sole attempt at the
domestic novel. Thus, the novel that the *Dorset County Chronicle* once joked about
attempting to review when “every body who is any body” [sic] had already read it
remains virtually unknown.\(^\text{26}\)

Yet I believe *Saint Ronan’s Well* is fascinating and deserving of continued
study, precisely for the reasons critics disliked it. To begin, I do not think that the
“hackneyed” nature of the plot and the characters are unintentional.\(^\text{27}\) Scott was an
ardent fan of Shakespeare, and many of his novels bear distinct Shakespearean
parallels. In my first chapter, I show how the plot and characters of *Saint Ronan’s
Well* parallel and invert those of Shakespeare’s play *Measure for Measure*. I argue
that Scott deliberately rewrites the play and its cavalier treatment of female suffering
under patriarchy as an unequivocal tragedy. In doing so, he criticizes nineteenth-
century structures of male power and advocates the importance of respecting female
agency.

This feminist interpretation of *Saint Ronan’s Well* makes Scott’s choice of the
domestic fiction genre all the more interesting. Both Scott’s generic shift from
historical to domestic fiction and the story’s generic transformation from play to
domestic novel complement and endorse the novel’s critique of male social
dominance and affirmation of female autonomy and brilliance. Scott alludes to this
purpose in the preface to the Magnum Opus edition, in which he writes that the novel
was born of his respect for the genre of domestic fiction and the contemporary female

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\(^{26}\) Paul Didactic, “Saint Ronan’s Well.”

\(^{27}\) “St. Ronan’s Well,” *Aberdeen Press and Journal.*
novelists who had mastered it. He mentions by name Edgeworth, Austen, and Charlotte Smith, each of whom specializes in writing strong and intelligent female protagonists who navigate their social duties on their own terms. The introduction and the genre itself thus tacitly encourage the reader’s indignation at the social forces that limit and deny female agency.

My second chapter introduces *The Cook and Housewife’s Manual* as the third text and genre to this chain of feminist intertextual critique. Like *Saint Ronan’s Well*, the cookbook draws its themes and characters from a different literary universe to make a bold claim about the social role of women in nineteenth-century Britain. Unlike the novel, the cookbook’s borrowings are, of course, hardly subtle. The setting, most of the characters, and the ostensible author herself all hail directly from the pages of Scott’s novel. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Meg Dods models Johnstone’s vision of a more empowered social role for women and thus serves as the perfect frontwoman for a cookbook that invites men and women alike to recognize women’s cultural and political significance. I also examine how, like *Saint Ronan’s Well*, the genre of *A Cook and Housewife’s Manual* endorses its feminist message. The cookbook is a work of gastronomic literature, a genre that explores cookery through an aesthetic and intellectual, rather than strictly instructional, lens. Because gastronomic literature incorporates historical and scientific discourse, it remained a male-dominated genre well into the 20th century. In addressing a work of gastronomic literature to housewives, Johnstone playfully challenges popular nineteenth-century notions of masculinity and femininity. As Pamela Perkins writes,

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28 Scott, “Introduction to St. Ronan’s Well,” xxi.
“What she offers is a work that both appeals to a female readership and quietly mocks assumptions about the sort of work that might be expected to do so.”

Unlike *Saint Ronan’s Well*, critics embraced Johnstone’s gender-bending experiment, and the book was an immediate and beloved hit. It was so successful, in fact, that it made its way into Scott’s *Magnum Opus* edition of the novel. After a cheery description of the tourism in the Scottish Borders that his novel inspired, Scott’s final author’s note reads:

… Nay, Meg Dods has produced herself of late from obscurity as authoress of a work on Cookery, of which, in justice to a lady who makes so distinguished a figure as this excellent dame, we insert the title-page: “The Cook and Housewife's Manual: A Practical System of Modern Domestic Cookery and Family Management.... By Mistress Margaret Dods, of the Cleikum Inn, St. Ronan's.” Though it is rather unconnected with our immediate subject, we cannot help adding, that Mrs. Dods has preserved the recipes of certain excellent old dishes which we would be loath should fall into oblivion in our day; and in bearing this testimony, we protest that we are no way biassed by the receipt of two bottles of excellent sauce for cold meat, which were sent to us by the said Mrs. Dods, as a mark of her respect and regard, for which we return her our unfeigned thanks, having found them capital. (322)

This is more than a delightfully playful, metatextual advertisement (and it is quite delightful). The last sentence of *Saint Ronan’s Well* describes the town’s desolation and desertion after structures of male power have driven Clara Mowbray to an early death. Scott’s author’s note contradicts the bleakness of the ending with a simple “Nay.” Meg Dods, Scott tells us, has raised herself and her town from obscurity through her cookbook. Johnstone’s Meg Dods, a model and celebration of female agency, literally rewrites the ending of Scott’s tragedy.

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31 Tellingly, every critic in the articles cited above assume the author of the cookbook to be male.
We have here a chain of intertextual dialogue in which every successive literary link becomes a bolder critique of woman’s place in society and in which every change of genre implicitly endorses its feminist message. *Measure for Measure* denies women agency and ends happily. *Saint Ronan’s Well* borrows the play’s basic plot and characters and rewrites it as a tragic domestic novel, thereby illustrating the perils of male social dominance. Finally, *The Cook and Housewife’s Manual* borrows the novel’s characters and celebrates the presence and power of female agency in a medium that inherently undermines nineteenth-century gender stereotypes.
Chapter One: erusaeM rof erusaeM, The Novel
Rewriting Patriarchy as Tragedy in Saint Ronan’s Well

Saint Ronan’s Well brims with Shakespearean references. Many of its paratextual chapter openings contain whole Shakespearean quotations; the novel’s characters, including the narrator, make various references to Shakespearean characters and themes throughout; and a Shakespearean play, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, is staged at the novel’s exact midpoint. I argue that these explicit Shakespearean references function, in part, to keep Shakespeare at the forefront of the reader’s brain. As William Brewer writes of all of Scott’s Shakespearean allusions in his encyclopedic book Shakespearean Influences on Sir Walter Scott (1926), they invite analysis and comparison between the novel and the Shakespearean canon, thereby hinting towards more “disguised and artful” borrowings beneath the textual surface.¹

In this chapter, I argue that the most significant Shakespearean influence on Saint Ronan’s Well, the intertext with which the novel is in most direct conversation, is Measure for Measure. Such an argument may seem bold, especially given the fact that the novel’s only explicit reference to Measure for Measure is a paratextual quotation introducing Chapter XIV, “The Consultation,” and even this is misquoted.²

Upon a closer reading, however, not only does much of Saint Ronan’s Well echo

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¹ Wilmon Brewer, Shakespeare’s Influences on Sir Walter Scott (Boston, MA: Cornhill Publishing Company, 1925), viii.
Measure for Measure, but the places where the stories and characters diverge become significant in their own right. I first illustrate how the basic plot of the novel and that of the play are virtually identical before the play ends in comedy and the novel in tragedy: In stark contrast to the play’s resolution, which pairs its protagonists off and sends them to the marital altar, Scott’s novel ends with the heroine’s desperate flight from sexual danger and family rage into the Scottish wilderness, a desperate act that results in her death. I then examine the implications of the texts’ divergent endings, arguing that Saint Ronan’s Well deliberately rewrites the comedy of Measure for Measure in order to expose as inherently insidious and tragic the structures of male power that drive the conflict. Ultimately, I analyze the inversions and parallels between the novel and play that make Saint Ronan’s Well a stridently progressive exploration of female agency in a patriarchal society.

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To begin, I would like to offer the following distinction between plot and story. M.H Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham define story as the bare-bones listing of chronological events, a “first this happens, then that, then that…” recounting of a text. They argue that plot, on the other hand, concerns “how this is related to that, by causes and motivations, and in what ways all these matters are rendered, ordered, and organized so as to achieve their particular effects.” At the risk of oversimplification, plot is story plus cause and motivation. While the stories of Measure for Measure and Saint Ronan’s Well ultimately differ dramatically, their plots share crucial, artful, and

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intentional similarities, in part because four sets of parallel characters share similar motivations.

In both texts, a socially powerful man — Angelo in *Measure for Measure* and Valentine in *St. Ronan’s Well* — attempts to blackmail a sympathetic heroine for whom he feels a powerful and unreciprocated lust into a sexual relationship. The central conflict in both plots is therefore whether and how the heroine — Isabella and Clara, respectively — can continue rejecting these propositions without incurring further harm to herself. For both women, that harm is twofold: first, the violation of a self-avowed celibacy, and second, the violation of that celibacy to men they loathe. In both stories, the heroine’s brother — Claudio and John Mowbray — tries to convince her to give in to the antagonist’s advances so that he, the brother, might parry the antagonist’s threat. And lastly, in both texts, the heroine's chief ally in rejecting the antagonist’s advances — the Duke and Tyrrel — is a powerful man who is attracted to her himself.

The particular circumstances, the “story” that leads the characters to their decisions, are, of course, different. The aforementioned sexual relationship into which Angelo attempts to coerce Isabella is an illicit tryst, and the threat with which he tries to do so is the literal execution of her brother Claudio. In *Saint Ronan’s Well*, Valentine tries to force Clara into a socially advantageous marriage, threatening to murder her childhood sweetheart, Tyrrel, and to visit social “death” upon her and her brother (though the latter threat is trivial for Clara). Isabella is celibate because she is a novice, while the reasons behind Clara’s celibacy are more complex: in the novel’s backstory, she had a premarital sexual relationship with Tyrrell and underwent the
trauma of a sham marriage to Valentine. Yet all these characters’ overarching motivations — sinister and innocent lust, maintaining sexual autonomy and avoiding sexual trauma, and self-preservation — remain consistent in both texts, demonstrating a clear connection between Scott’s characters and their Shakespearean counterparts.

Just as the similarities between the plots of *Saint Ronan’s Well* and *Measure for Measure* demonstrate Scott’s deliberate linking of the two texts and serve as an implicit invitation to thematic comparison, so too do the stories’ divergent endings. For centuries, the play’s uneasy blend of comedy and tragedy have earned *Measure for Measure* the title of “problem play.” Angelo’s offer to Isabella — agree to be raped or see your brother hanged and tortured, and understand that no one will believe your word over mine — isn’t quite the stuff of comedy, and yet Shakespeare leaves ample room for humor and a seemingly happy ending. Shakespeare does not treat Angelo’s coercion as a punchline, but he makes light of other forms of male sexual violence. In the first scene of Act II, the malapropistic officer Elbow accuses a man of having raped his pregnant wife. Elbow asks the senior officer Escalus, “I beseech you, sir, ask him what this man did to my wife” (II.i.136-137). Were Elbow not an unwitting fool, this request could easily be construed as a tragic plea for justice. Instead, Elbow’s concern over the alleged rape of his wife becomes a source of humor. Pompey, the bawd at the brothel where Elbow believes the crime to have taken place, mocks Elbow’s malapropisms and further insults him by describing his

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wife as a sexually loose woman who might have invited unwanted advances. The audience never does learn what truly happened to Elbow’s wife.

The ending of the play can also read as a trivialization of male sexual coercion. Isabella’s fervid commitment to the Order of St. Clare implies that she is not interested in sex with anyone. For most of the play, the Duke appears to respect her sexual agency, using his privilege as a powerful man to help her, a disempowered woman, reject the sexual advances of another powerful man. But by the end of the play, he uses that privilege to force his own sexual advances onto her, this time through the socially sanctioned medium of a marriage proposal. This marriage would have obviously favorable consequences for both Isabella and Claudio, boosting their wealth and presumably undoing whatever damage Claudio’s sexual indiscretion has done to their family’s reputation. As Pascale Aebischer writes, “In both instances, the man masks his sexual coercion as a form of exchange of love for Claudios pardon; a substitution of Isabella’s maidenhead for her brother's head.” The Duke’s proposal, Aebischer argues, is a “sanitized equivalent” to Angelo’s proposed rape. Of the play’s “problems,” the most glaring for modern critics is the framing of the Duke’s proposal to Isabella and her subsequent silence as a comic resolution.

By contrast, Saint Ronan’s Well begins as a comedy, allowing the reader to consider the possibility of coexistence between gaiety and social forces that render women vulnerable and voiceless. Scott then wrenches away that possibility by rewriting the ambiguous ending of Measure for Measure as the beginning of the

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6 Measure for Measure, I.iv.3-5.
8 Ibid.
novel’s tragedy. Valentine, like the Duke, uses his privilege as a socially and economically powerful man to coerce the heroine into a socially and financially beneficial marriage. This marriage would save Clara’s brother from financial ruin and erase the stain of her youthful sexual indiscretion from her family’s honor. Unlike the Duke, however, Valentine is an unmistakable villain. His very name inverts the Duke’s apparent heroism: Geoffrey Chaucer first popularized the image of Saint Valentine as the patron saint of lovers in the late fourteenth century, and by the nineteenth century, the name “Valentine” commonly connoted romantic and sexual love. In naming his villain Valentine, Scott evokes the romantic courtly love that the Duke’s proposal outwardly resembles and exposes the sinister entitlement beneath its surface.

Just as the novel defines male villainy as a disregard for female agency, so too does it define male heroism as the willingness and ability to respect female agency, sexual and otherwise. Unlike Clara’s brother John, the hero Tyrrel does not judge Clara as a whore for enjoying a consensual sexual relationship with Tyrrel in their youth; he still loves her deeply and wishes to be with her. Unlike the Duke in Measure for Measure, he does not allow that love to override his respect for her agency. In the beginning of the novel, Clara rejects his advances, and for the remainder of the novel, he respects that rejection, fighting only to protect Clara from Valentine rather than to secure her for himself. Angelo, the Duke, Valentine, and

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10 Consider the following quotation, when Valentine explains his true feelings for Clara: “‘She is any thing but indifferent to me,’ said the Earl; ‘she becomes daily more interesting—for her dislike piques me... I have a kind of loving hatred—a sort of hating love for her; in short, thinking upon her is like trying to read a riddle, and makes one make quite as many blunders, and talk just as much nonsense. If ever I have the opportunity, I will make her pay for all her airs” (II.193). Valentine does not only disregard Clara’s disinterest; he finds it arousing.
Tyrrel are all socially powerful men who are motivated by romantic and sexual attraction to the heroine. The heroes and villains of both texts represent the abuse — and, in Tyrrel’s case, the responsible exercising — of social and sexual masculine power.

The brothers Claudio and John exercise masculine power that does not derive from sexual threats or economic leverage. They represent the fraternal abuse of masculine power — that is, the abuse of masculine power within a familial, rather than sexual, context. Claudio expects Isabella to sacrifice her sexual agency to save him because she is his sister. With John Mowbray, Scott takes that one negative characteristic and amplifies it to make a powerful statement on the nature of male chauvinism. Known also as “the Squire,” John is the Laird of St. Ronan’s and a man’s man through and through:

...the Squire's influence, as a man of family and property in the immediate neighbourhood, who actually kept greyhounds and pointers, and at least talked of hunters and of racers, ascertained him the support of the whole class of bucks, half and whole bred, from the three next counties; and if more inducements were wanting, he could grant his favourites the privilege of shooting over his moors, which is enough to turn the head of a young Scottishman at any time. (I.45)

To say that John Mowbray is the only man in the area to “actually” meet the minimum standards of the ideal sportsman is to suggest that John is seen as the apex of a particular kind of masculinity, and his cultivation of that reputation suggests that he enjoys seeing himself as such. This masculinity emphasizes confidence, confrontation, and competition, often to a fault, and has little patience for womanly concerns. Lest the reader mistake any of these traits for admirable qualities, Scott amplifies these characteristics in John’s plainly ridiculous male peers, Bingo Binks
and Captain Macturk. John and his friends make up a “faction,” of which he is the leader, that would rather the Fox Hotel cater to the masculine pursuits of gambling, hunting, and heavy drinking (I.47). Scott emphasizes that John’s masculine vices have gone unchecked due to the early death of his mother and his Clara’s illness. Clara is the only woman for whom he feels any sort of affection, and it is a patronizing and infantilizing affection that communicates occasional fondness but no respect.

Compare John’s introduction with that of Claudio: “arrested, and carried away” to prison (I.ii.66). A woman introduces Claudio to the audience, and not just any woman, but Mistress Overdone, the head of a brothel and thereby a woman of the lowest social standing. Her use of the passive voice unwittingly emphasizes Claudio’s submissiveness, and Claudio’s first words all but confirm that impression: “Fellow, why dost thou show me to the world? Bear me to prison, where I am committed” (I.ii.115-116). There is no indignation at his sentence, no pride to protect, only shame and resignation. His only chance of survival lies in begging his sister for help, and therein lies one of the play’s many layers of irony: the consequence of Claudio’s copulation with a woman is societal impotence — he loses all spirit, power, and privilege, forced to rely on a person with comparatively few privileges to begin with. Claudio’s own name means “lame” in Latin. And yet, the apparently neutered

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11 These men include Bingo Binks, whose needless aggression and impropriety goads even the gentle Tyrrel to anger, and Captain Macturk, a retired Highland commander whose fondness for violence earns him the ironic title, “Man of Peace” (I.50).
Claudio, who speaks little and spends the bulk of the show in prison, ends up happily married.

John, meanwhile, spends most of *Saint Ronan’s Well* indulging in every male vice except sex, and he ends up alone and emasculated, having lost his land, fortune, and Clara, the last of his immediate family. Just as Valentine’s name links him to his literary counterpart in *Measure for Measure* and speaks to the forces his character represents, so it is with John. “John” is one of the most common English names, and since at least the fourteenth century, it has been used to denote any man, what today’s speakers might call “your average Joe.”¹³ John Mowbray’s unhappy fate shows that generic masculinity is crippling and, ultimately, emasculating.

As we have seen, both *Measure for Measure* and *Saint Ronan’s Well* show men abusing their societal power and forcing female characters to contend with sexual coercion, emotional cruelty, and financial and social ruin. I now shift my focus to the women of the texts. The texts’ two heroines share personality traits and motivations, and both use the same strategy to achieve short-term successes within their patriarchal societies, a strategy which I call “weaponized performative femininity.” In contrast with common interpretations that deny these characters strength and cunning, I argue that Isabella and Clara’s adherence to codes of stereotypical feminine behavior are selective and deliberate. I owe much of this reading to Catherine Tosenberger’s methodology of fairytale analysis, which involves

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exploring a story’s subversive subtext. Tosenberger summarizes her interpretation of the notoriously dark Grimm’s fairytale “Fitcher’s Bird” as follows:

not only does the heroine defy cultural and narrative expectations of women, but the tale as a whole embeds the construction of the heroine’s virtue and her antagonist’s billing in a series of parodic exaggerations and overt transgressions of normative gender roles... She uses assumptions about normative femininity — in particular, the demands for women to be obedient, subservient, beautiful, and, especially, silent — to systematically unman the villain, thus destroying his power.¹⁴

As the above quote equally applies to Isabella and Clara, it serves as a useful structural and thematic framework for the following comparative character analysis. First, I explore how both characters “defy cultural and narrative expectations of women,” beginning with Isabella.

Heroines of Shakespearean comedies follow an almost universal pattern of meeting a man, falling in love (however gradually or reluctantly), and agreeing to marry him. Isabella has committed herself to monastic life and thereby defies this pattern from the start of the play. The audience first meets Isabella in an abbey as she prepares to become a nun in the Order of St. Clare. After inquiring into the Order’s level of austerity, Isabella clarifies, “I speak not as desiring more;/ But rather wishing a more strict restraint/ Upon the sisterhood, the votarists of Saint Clare” (I.iv.5).

Isabella’s first words in the play explicitly state that she wants to live a poor, chaste, and cloistered life as a nun. Many productions of Measure for Measure show Isabella and the Duke sharing increasingly obvious romantic feelings for one another, such that by the end of the play, Isabella’s silent reactions to the Duke’s proposals become

expressions of unbelieving joy and speechless, implied acceptance.  

Shakespeare’s plays invite creative and interpretative license, and the desire to tailor Measure for Measure to typical Shakespearean comedic structure — such as a mutually happy ending for the protagonists — is understandable if not expected. However, from a purely textual perspective, Isabella never verbally expresses anything remotely resembling romantic or sexual interest in the Duke, or any character, for that matter. At no point in the play does she “wish” for anything but the monastic life she so enjoys in her first scene, thereby defying not just narrative expectations of Shakespearean heroines but cultural expectations of early modern English women in general.

Then as now, however, the issue that most needles critics about Isabella’s character is not her general commitment to celibacy but for appearing to value her virtue over her brother’s life and Mariana’s virginity. I would like to propose an alternative reading of Isabella that frames her refusal to sleep with Angelo as an assertion of sexual autonomy and protection from sexual trauma. Of the fourteen times the word “virtue” appears in the play, Isabella speaks the word only once — and not in regard to her own virtue, but that of Angelo, when she rebukes him for his hypocrisy (II.iv.146-148). Isabella never describes sexual surrender to Angelo in terms of sin, but rather of “shame.” When Claudio suggests that she submit herself, she asks angrily, “Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?” (III.i.141). Many

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16 Kimberly Reigle, "Staging the Convent as Resistance in ‘The Jew of Malta’ and ‘Measure for Measure,’" Comparative Drama 46, no. 4 (2012), 499.
18 See II.iv.104 and III.i.120.
interpret the word “vice” here as the opposite of the “virtue” Claudio mentions just before (III.i.139). But the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists another definition in use during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: “A tool composed of two jaws, opened and closed by means of a screw, which firmly grip and hold a piece of work in position while it is being filed, sawn, or otherwise operated upon...”¹⁹ A vice is that which traps an object in place to allow for that object’s physical violation. With brilliant wordplay, Isabella reminds Claudio that his conception of virtue would in fact require her own violent objectification and forced violation.

Once we read Isabella as someone less concerned with disappointing God than with avoiding the trauma of sleeping with a man whom she hates and of understanding that no one will believe her word over his, her participation in the bed trick makes sense. Isabella’s issue with Angelo’s threat and Claudio’s suggestion that she have sex against her will is not that they require her to sin, but that they actively disregard her own agency and desire. Mariana, on the other hand, actually wishes to sleep with Angelo (IV.i.46-56). After recognizing Mariana’s consent and understanding that Angelo had actually promised himself to her, Isabella’s apparently sinister willingness to blindly aid a religious authority becomes instead a subversive celebration of female sexual agency.

Like Isabella, Clara defies narrative expectations of young, beautiful heroines by refusing to consent to the marital plotline that characters within the text would have her follow. Like Isabella, she defies cultural expectations of women through her

staunch commitment to the autonomous monastic lifestyle she envisions for herself. This interpretation goes against a long scholarly tradition of reading Clara as a tragic Ophelia figure and explaining the parallels between the characters as proof of Clara’s madness. However, while likening Clara to Ophelia hints broadly towards the roots of Clara’s anguish — that is, something pertaining to “problems in love” — the nature and expressions of these problems are entirely different for her. Up until the penultimate chapter, Clara is clearly not entirely well, but neither is she devoid of reason. And yet, because Scott twice mentions Ophelia in relation to Clara, because the characters in the novel believe her mad, and because Clara herself displays occasionally “mad” behavior in her disregard for social decorum, it is easy to reduce everything Clara does and everything she is to madness. That reduction, however unwittingly, denies her intelligence, wit, and agency.

The text’s two mentions of Ophelia actually undermine any supposed parallels between Clara and Ophelia. The first Ophelia comparison comes from the narrator, who writes:

Her dress, her manners, and her ideas, were therefore very much her own; and though they became her wonderfully, yet, like Ophelia's garlands, and wild snatches of melody, they were calculated to excite compassion and melancholy, even while they amused the observer. (I.113)

Critics have been debating the degree to which Hamlet’s madness is genuine or performative for centuries because Shakespeare gives Hamlet agency, intelligence, and interiority. He denies Ophelia these gifts and, as such, the universal consensus

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about Ophelia argues for her genuine madness and complete emotional instability by the end of the play. In the above quotation, Scott alludes to a different understanding of Ophelia. Scott’s word “calculated” connotes not just awareness but cunning and intent and, in so doing, invites the reader to attribute these characteristics to both Clara and Ophelia— to consider that, like Hamlet, at least some of their apparent madness might be a performative means to an end.

The second mention of Ophelia arrives shortly after. After Lady Penelope patronizingly treats Clara like an emotionally fragile invalid — that is, like the popular interpretation of Ophelia — by urging her not to ride back to Shaws Castle lest it “agitate her nerves,” Clara responds:

“I shall be no Lady Clementina, to be the wonder and pity of the spring of St. Ronan’s—No Ophelia neither—though I will say with her, Good-night, ladies—Good night, sweet ladies!—and now—not my coach, my coach—but my horse, my horse!” (I.116)

The passage compares Clara and Ophelia, but it is a comparison of differentiation rather than equalizing or likening. Clara knows of the widespread tendency to characterize her as an Ophelia figure and reduce her to an object of pity. Here she explicitly rejects and refutes this characterization while playfully suggesting a different one: The words “my horse, my horse!” allude to King Richard III’s lines in the penultimate scene of Shakespeare’s *The Life and Death of Richard the Third.* Like Ophelia, Shakespeare’s Richard III has a medical condition that might lead others to doubt his capabilities and reduce him to an object of pity. Unlike Ophelia, he is shrewd, cruel, and highly independent. By alluding to Richard, Clara mocks the

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condescending, simplistic, and occasionally voyeuristic temptation to see her as entertainingly tragic. Furthermore, she subtextually tells the company at St. Ronan’s and the reader alike that if they must see her in such a light, they should at least allow her some intelligence and independence. In demanding her horse rather than her coach, she rejects the notion that she needs constant coddling and asserts her independence and ability to care for herself. Here and throughout the novel, Scott includes “disguised and artful” details that implicitly argue that Clara is far more than a conventional understanding of the Ophelia archetype while at the same time undermining the Ophelia archetype itself.23

Scott’s depiction of Clara’s odd behavior instead links her with her Isabella, with varying degrees of playfulness and humor, from the moment Clara enters the novel. Upon first seeing Clara enter the tea room, the kindly Widow Blower asks Dr. Quackleben, “‘Now, wha can that be, Doctor?... —and what for does she come wi' a habit and a beaver-hat, when we are a' (a glance at her own gown) in our silks and satins?’” (I.110). “Habit” in Scots can refer to general clothing or to the uniforms of clergy people, and it is likely that Widow Blower is referring to the former.24 Still, the choice of word inherently connotes religious clothing. Just as audiences first meet Isabella wearing a habit in an abbey, so too do readers first meet Clara wearing a habit in a different female-dominated environment, this time a tea room. Widow Blower further (hilariously) illustrates Clara’s singularly monastic behavior a few lines later after learning that she suffers from some sort of nervous condition:

23 Brewer, Shakespeare’s Influences on Sir Walter Scott, vii.
“But it's a shame to let her go loose, Doctor—she might hurt hersell, or somebody. See, she has ta'en the knife!—O, it's only to cut a shave of the diet-loaf. She winna let the powder-monkey of a boy help her. There's judgment in that though, Doctor, for she can cut thick or thin as she likes.—Dear me! she has not taken mair than a crumb, than ane would pit between the wires of a canary-bird's cage, after all.—I wish she would lift up that lang veil, or put off that riding-skirt, Doctor.” (I.110)

Lady Penelope is obsessed with appearing wealthy and cultured, and as such, presumably any tea party of hers would have an elaborate and plentiful spread of expensive pastries. But Clara, like her Shakespearean counterpart, does not enjoy elaborate “privileges.” Instead, she reaches for the “diet loaf,” a plain, light sponge cake whose very name suggests frugality and austerity, and she takes a minuscule portion. The widow’s mention of a veil further connotes a nun’s attire, and she also hints, albeit humorously, towards Clara’s capability and independence. Clara prefers to cut the cake herself rather than let the servant serve her, and, as her riding skirt suggests before she later verbally affirms it, she has ridden to the Well on her own.

Monastic allusions such as these follow Clara throughout the novel, further establishing her refusal to conform to social custom as well as the parallels between Isabella and Clara’s aspirations. Like Isabella, Clara is motivated by a desire to seclude herself from a hypocritical society that commodifies her body and demands her subjugation to a husband in favor of a life of hard work, study, and charity. While discussing the Mowbray family’s finances, the unscrupulous lawyer Meiklewham tells John that Clara has some “queer notions” of finance, including spending the majority of her income on “downright charity” (I.164-165). Throughout the novel,

25 Measure for Measure, I.iv.1-5.
Clara’s generosity and preference for simplicity speak to her general impatience with worldly goods, and her reclusive tendencies and disregard for social norms speak to her impatience with her world as a whole. For instance, she gives the following answer to John’s command that she change from her riding habit into something more suitable for a party:

I have made a fool of myself once this morning to oblige you, and for the rest of the day I am determined to appear in my own dress; that is, in one which shows I neither belong to the world, nor wish to have anything to do with its fashions. (II.47)

Not only does Clara not see herself as belonging to the “world,” that is, the society of Saint Ronan’s, she believes that to belong to that society renders one a “fool.” Clara states repeatedly that her ideal life would take her far away from high society to a simple, hardworking, contemplative life, what she later describes as “honest poverty” (II.253). By choosing to become not just a nun, but a votive of the famously hardworking and ascetic Order of St. Clare, Isabella inherently rejects the economic dependence and self-commodification that would have been the consequences of elite marriage in medieval Austria and, to a lesser but still significant extent, in nineteenth century Scotland.27 As a Protestant in nineteenth-century Scotland, Clara cannot escape to a convent, and so instead she asserts her impatience with and rejection of society by creating her own sort of monastic order at Mowbray Castle.

As in Measure for Measure, the world from which the heroine wishes to escape seeks to deny her the autonomous lifestyle she envisions for herself and to force upon her a sexual relationship with a man. Following Tosenbeger’s analysis of “Fitcher’s Bird,” I now turn to the issue of how Isabella and Clare assert their own

27 Reigle, "Staging the Convent as Resistance in ‘The Jew of Malta’ and ‘Measure for Measure,’” 499.
agency by using “assumptions about normative femininity—in particular, the
demands for women to be obedient, subservient, beautiful, and, especially, silent.”

Unlike “Fitcher’s Bird,” however, Isabella and Clara’s weaponization of performative femininity does not quite “systematically unman the villain, thus destroying his power.” Instead, it helps them to achieve only temporary, short term successes.

When Angelo tries to coerce Isabella into a sexual relationship, his vague terminology implies that he is uncomfortable with his hypocrisy and immorality: “I, now the voice of the recorded law,/ Pronounce a sentence on your brother's life:/ Might there not be a charity in sin/ To save this brother's life?” (II.iv.60-64). Isabella acts as though Angelo’s capacity for mercy is the charity in the “sin” of setting her brother free: “Please you to do't,/ I'll take it as a peril to my soul,/ It is no sin at all, but charity” (II.iv.65-66). Angelo tries again: “Pleased you to do't at peril of your soul,/ Were equal poise of sin and charity” (II.iv.67-68). Once again, Isabella appears not to understand the true meaning of Angelo’s words (II.iv.69-72). Exasperated, Angelo responds, “Nay, but hear me./ Your sense pursues not mine: either you are ignorant,/ Or seem so craftily; and that's not good” (II.iv.73-75). With this line, Shakespeare suggests that Isabella’s apparent ignorant innocence is in fact a display of cunning that forces Angelo to explicitly name and thus confront the sordid nature of his request.

While critics commonly read Clara as a composite of feminine weaknesses — innocence to the point of ignorance, emotional frailty, weak nerves, and excessive generosity — I argue that, like Isabella, she seems so craftily. In a chapter ironically

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28 Tosenberger, “‘Fitcher’s Bird’ and Gendered Virtue and Villainy,” 208.
titled “The Proposal,” John proposes that Clara consider marrying Valentine. Hoping to warm Clara to Valentine, John tells her that Valentine was one of the masked actors in an earlier production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Clara feigns cool indifference and does not indicate that she knows him in any way: “This annunciation, though made in what was meant to be an imposing tone, had no impression on Clara. ‘I hope he plays the peer better than the Fidalgo,’ she replied, carelessly” (II.61). When John does not respect that Clara is entirely uninterested in even speaking to Valentine, let alone marrying him, Clara responds angrily at first.

“I care not what days they are,” said Clara—“I tell you I will not see [him], or any one else, upon such preliminaries as you have stated—I cannot—I will not—and I ought not.—Had you meant me to receive him, which can be a matter of no consequence whatever, you should have left him on the footing of an ordinary visitor—as it is, I will not see him.”

“You *shall* see and hear him both,” said Mowbray; “you shall find me as obstinate as you are—as willing to forget I am a brother, as you to forget that you have one.”

“It is time, then,” replied Clara, “that this house, once our father's, should no longer hold us both. I can provide for myself, and may God bless you!” (II.65)

A far cry from a helpless Ophelia figure, Clara clearly asserts her wishes. When John does not respect them, she demonstrates that her independence is more important to her than familial bonds. She reprimands him for caring more about his economic interests than her happiness and tells him plainly that she is capable of caring for herself. John, the paragon of male chauvinism, does not take kindly to that response:

“You are mistaken, however,” said Mowbray, sternly, “if you hope to enjoy more freedom than I think you capable of making a good use of. The law authorizes, and reason, and even affection, require, that you should be put under restraint for your own safety, and that of your character. You roamed the woods a little too much in my father's time, if all stories be true.” (65)

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29 “Careless” here refers to not having a care, rather than behaving incautiously.
John does not know what happened between Clara and Tyrrel when he was away at university, and Clara wants to keep it that way, lest he fly into a violent rage against her and Tyrrel. Rather than continuing to argue with him, which is getting her nowhere, Clara begins to weep and portray herself as helpless:

“I did—I did indeed, Mowbray,” said Clara, weeping; “God pity me, and forgive you for upbraiding me with my state of mind—I know I cannot sometimes trust my own judgment; but is it for you to remind me of this?” (II.65)

She forgoes her former assertive and independent persona not, I argue, because she is weak, but because she is cunning. John is “at once softened and embarrassed” (II.66) and accepts that she will not accept Valentine’s proposal, asking only that she receive him. Clara accepts his terms and tells him that she will wear a muff for the meeting. When John reprimands her for choosing such an unfashionable and outdated piece of clothing, she responds:

No matter, John,” replied his sister; “when a woman wears a muff, especially a determined old maid like myself, it is a sign she has no intentions to scratch; and therefore the muff serves all the purposes of a white flag… (II.70)

Clara’s white flag, her apparent surrender, is in fact her weapon.

One of the most powerful ways in which Saint Ronan’s Well inverts the story of Measure for Measure as a means of social criticism is through showing women to be equally capable of perpetuating patriarchal oppression. Both the play and the novel show women negotiating, suffering, and outwitting abuses of masculine power, which are themselves symptoms of patriarchal societies that trivialize female social, sexual, and economic agency. For every woman suffering from one of Measure for Measure’s laundry list of injustices, there is another woman ready to help her.

Mariana, to whom Angelo had revoked his promise of marriage when she lost her fortune and brother at sea, still loves Angelo and, unlike Isabella, actually wants to
have sex with him. So the two women work together to devise a successful bed trick, and at the end of the play, both women continue to advocate for the other’s happiness. Marianna testifies to Isabella’s innocence and Angelo’s coercion, and Isabella, knowing that Mariana still loves Angelo, asks the Duke to spare his life (V.i.445-455). This theme of female camaraderie extends to more minor characters as well. When Claudio’s friend Lucio impregnates Kate Keepdown, a prostitute, and refuses to honor his promise of marriage or help her raise their child, Mistress Overdone, Kate’s bawd, not only allows her to continue working and thus maintain her livelihood but helps her take care of the child (III.ii.455-459). In Measure for Measure, women help one another brave the dangers of a patriarchal society, and men, and only men, are responsible for these dangers.

By contrast, Saint Ronan’s Well explores the ways in which women are equally culpable in perpetuating the tragic consequences of male social dominance. There is not a single mutual female friendship among the company at the Well. Lady Penelope constantly mocks Lady Binks for her sexual impropriety in chasing Sir Bingo as her husband, and Lady Binks insults Lady Penelope for her pedantic behavior and for being unmarried.30 Whereas the bedtrick in Measure for Measure is a celebration of female solidarity, the “bedtrick” in Saint Ronan’s Well is an occasion for the worst female treachery. Hannah Irwin, jealous of Clara’s beauty and happiness, helps Valentine arrange his deceitful marriage to Clara. In the original version of the novel, she also convinces Clara to sleep with Tyrrel.31 Though Clara

30 See Saint Ronan’s Well, 87-88, 92-93, 97-99, 117.
tries to create her own monastic order at Shaws Castle, the women at the Well are opposed to any form of sisterhood.

Even more radical is the novel’s argument for the possibility of innocent sexual love. Saint Ronan’s Well shifts from comedy to tragedy immediately after the performance of another Shakespearean comedy, A Midsummer Night’s Dream. The play tells the story of young lovers defying familial expectations of whom they should marry and escaping into the woods to be together, and it ends happily. Scott’s choice of this play highlights the hypocritical incongruity between the idyllic world of Shakespeare’s Athens, where youthful love and a defiance of societal expectations are celebrated, and the reality that, if discovered, Clara’s happy youthful relationship with Tyrrel would be her social downfall. The characters cannot even perform the play in its entirety, opting instead for a series of semi-improvised scenes that loosely follow the general storyline (II, Chapter 1, “Theatricals”). Their inability to execute the play implies that a world that condemns innocent sexual love is inherently incapable of arriving at a happy ending.

Clara’s very name is an allusion to Measure for Measure that argues for the possibility of innocent premarital sexual love. In her second line of dialogue, Isabella identifies herself as a votive of St. Clare (I.iv.5). That “Clara” and “Clare” are virtually identical names is no coincidence. Catholic tradition teaches that when St. Clare was fifteen — on the cusp of womanhood — she heard St. Francis of Assisi preaching and resolved to devote her life to his teachings.32 She defied her father, who would have her married to an economically and socially advantageous suitor,

32 Ramona Miller, In the Footsteps of St. Clare: A Pilgrim’s Guide Book (St. Bonaventure, New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2016), xv, 4-5.
and ran away from home to commit herself to a life of gospel poverty and seclusion in a Benedictine convent.\textsuperscript{33} Like St. Clare, a teenage Clara defies her father’s wishes in favor of giving herself entirely to a man she comes to love (II.95).\textsuperscript{34} That relationship leads her, albeit indirectly, to exchange a life of comfort and companionship for austerity, solitude, and charity. She later echoes this earlier defiance of her father and reaffirms her commitment to this monastic lifestyle when she repeatedly rejects John’s appeals that she marry Valentine. To further clarify the connection between Clara and the saint, Scott incorporates another parallel name, this time identical: Tyrrel’s first name is Francis, and Valentine even mockingly refers to him as “St. Francis” (II.298-300). Of course, unlike St. Clare, Clara’s youthful “giving” of herself does not take the form of chastity and austerity, but the opposite: She gives him her virginity. The religious parallels communicate that premarital sexual love between two noble people is not only innocent, but sacred.

Tyrrel’s first name thus further underscores the novel’s progressive definition of male heroism as the ability to respect female agency. Tyrrel does not see Clara in any sort of lesser light after the two have sex and still loves her ardently. It is not Clara and Tyrrel’s relationship that leads to the tragedy at the end of the novel. They are among the novel’s only noble characters along with the supporting figures of Meg Dods and, to some extent, Mr. Touchwood. It is the inability of the society at the Well to respect female sexual agency that drives Clara to her death at the novel’s tragic end.


\textsuperscript{34} Walter Scott, \textit{St. Ronan’s Well. With Introductory Essay and Notes by Andrew Lang} (Boston, MA: Estes and Lauriat, 1894), Project Gutenberg, II.95.
Chapter 2: Meg Dods and Pudding Woman in Charge of the Kitchen

Christian Isobel Johnstone published the first edition of *The Cook and Housewife’s Manual* in 1826. An immediate success, the genre-defying book, equal parts “cooking novel” and “novel cookery book,” became the most famous work of Johnstone’s extraordinarily prolific, fifty-year career as a novelist, journalist, and newspaper editor.¹ Borrowing from the literary universes of *Saint Ronan’s Well* and, to a lesser extent, Scottish novelist Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage* (1818), the cookbook’s premise is as follows: Peregrine Touchwood, the fastidious, good-natured, meddling guest of Meg Dods, feels depressed and defeated after Clara’s death and Tyrrel’s departure. To save himself from the grasp of the “blue devils,” he resolves to teach his “countrywomen” a new system of “rational practical cookery.”² He has not yet figured out how to do so when a rogue sow of Meg’s attacks Dr. Redgill, an English gourmand drawn from the pages of *Marriage*, who has come to the inn to compare the dinners to those at the Fox Hotel. The encounter brings Dr. Redgill into the Cleikum Inn for a bath and dinner, and his astonishment at having eaten “one of the most comfortable dinners” of his life leads to the idea of collecting the inn’s wonderful recipes (Johnstone, 24).

Gathered at the table are other characters from *Saint Ronan’s Well*: Henry Jekyll, an English soldier and the former confidant of Valentine, now deceased; Mr. Cargill, the soft-spoken minister of the parish; and Mr. Winterblossom, the literary

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coxcomb of the Well. After receiving Meg’s approval, Touchwood enlists Jekyll, Winterblossom, Meg, and Matthew Stechy, Meg’s servant, as members of the “Cleikum Club,” a culinary think-tank who, after six weeks of discussion and experimentation, compile their gastronomic findings into a cookbook which credits Meg as the sole author. The cookbook offers instructions in basic kitchen techniques, hundreds of recipes that draw mainly from Scottish, English, and French culinary traditions, and an almost equal number of humorous and witty footnotes expanding on the recipes’ historical, literary, or cultural significance, often in the form of a dialogue among the Club’s members.

This cursory sketch presents the cookbook in much the same way that enthusiastic reviewers described it in the newspapers: that is, as an amusing and useful compendium of culinary knowledge attributed to a beloved literary character. My aim in this chapter is not to detract from this charming and commercially successful characterization but to examine the political implications within and beneath the whimsy. I argue that the cookbook invites women to recognize, cultivate, and assert their presence in the public sphere as independent and educated human beings.

Johnstone underscores the importance of just such a goal in Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine, a liberal newspaper, in 1844; she had by then been the editor of the magazine for ten years.\(^3\) In her review of Marian Kirkland Reid’s feminist treatise, A Plea for Women (1843), Johnstone explains that the only way to truly involve women

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\(^3\) Andrew Monnickendam, *The Novels of Walter Scott and His Literary Relations: Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier and Christian Johnstone* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 104.
as equal participants in the public sphere is to elevate and recognize the significance of the vital labor that society traditionally dismisses as “woman’s work”:

A revolution of opinion which should make female labour as profitable and honourable as that of men; the exercise of female talents, ingenuity, and mechanical skill, commercial enterprise, or professional ability, a source of emolument and credit, and a recognised part of the social system, contains the only true principle of female emancipation. Give them by all means education, and put in the power of women of every rank the means of earning an independent subsistence by the exercise of their physical and mental powers, without encountering conventional scorn, or ignorant contempt; enable them to acquire property and consideration in the same unlimited field that men occupy—though it may be in very different lines of pursuit—and their emancipation is not distant.4

*The Cook and Housewife’s Manual* is a tool for achieving such a revolution of popular opinion, for it tells the story of a socially significant craft that depends on a woman’s talents, ingenuity, and commercial enterprise. The cookbook’s overall argument is that good cookery is a rational, practical, and politically consequential science that relies on female wisdom and thus, more broadly, that women deserve a place in all rational, practical, and politically consequential discourse. In this chapter, I explore conventional understandings of women’s social roles during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I then explain how the cookbook advocates a different answer to the Woman Question by legitimizing and popularizing a model of female economic and existential independence in Meg Dods. Next, I examine how the cookbook, like other contemporaneous works in the emerging genre of gastronomic literature, presents the kitchen as stimulating, enjoyable, and culturally vital; however, unlike the bulk of this male-dominated medium that denied or even denigrated women’s control of the kitchen, Johnstone celebrates it and honors female

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ingenuity. I finally turn to how Johnstone honors Scottish distinctiveness through two activities traditionally relegated to the female sphere—namely, domestic fiction and cookery—and show how, in so doing, she demonstrates the power and relevance of more feminine displays of patriotism. Ultimately, Johnstone’s cookbook invites people of all genders and classes to consider women and female labor as “recognized parts of the social system.”

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In this light, the cookbook comes into focus as a bold contribution to the shifting understanding of women’s proper place in British society that occurred in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau exemplified the traditional view of women’s social role that would shape discussions of the Woman Question throughout the nineteenth century. In his influential treatise *Emile* (1762), he argues that women are dependent on and inherently physically and intellectually weaker than men; as such, obeying and serving men is in their and society’s best interest. As Linda Colley explains in her seminal book *Britons: Forging the Nation* (2003), women who rejected this basic principle—women who “neglected their families for the outside world, who put their infants out to nurse, or worst of all, practised birth control” and women who “sought out public recognition of any kind”—dishonored their natures and endangered the state. According to Rousseau's doctrine of separate spheres, woman belonged firmly in the home, and man belonged in the public realm of politics and commerce.

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6 Ibid, 240.
Mary Wollstonecraft was among the first women to directly challenge Rousseau’s understanding of women’s political insignificance. Her feminist treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) calls Rousseau's belief that women are subservient and intellectually inferior “nonsense” and explains what she sees as a paradox in his overall argument: If, as Rousseau maintains, women’s ability to instill patriotic values in the members of their households carries direct political consequences, then surely women must have at least some claim to the public sphere. She attributes women’s general lack of morality and rationality not to nature, but to a patriarchal “false system of education” that denies women full humanity and is more interested in making them “alluring mistresses” than “rational wives” (1). With a few exceptions, she claims, women of her century are “only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect” (1). As such, they are vapid and vain, which hinders their ability to serve as supportive partners and raise moral, patriotic children. A proper education, Wollstonecraft explains, would enable women to become better mothers, wives, and caregivers who would foster a thriving and ethical society as active participants within it. She does not advocate dismantling the division between male and female roles; rather, she writes, “Let there be then no coercion established in society, and the common law of gravity prevailing, the sexes will fall into their proper places” (x). Free women from their states of perpetual childhood through a good education, she argues, and they will carry on their proper duties in the domestic sphere as moral and enlightened human beings.

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7 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Dublin, UK: James Moore, 1793), 97.
Wollstonecraft’s dream of a society that recognized women as men’s social equals quickly fell out of favor, but her belief in the political power of the domestic sphere did not. Her reputation suffered six years after the publication of *A Vindication* when a posthumous biography shocked the nation with salacious details of her premarital sexual history. As Colley explains, it was none other than Hannah More, a Tory Bluestocking with political opinions vastly different from Wollstonecraft’s, who unwittingly carried much of Wollstonecraft’s call for the moral and intellectual education of women into the nineteenth century. More counseled women to gravitate towards learning that would “lift” them from “sensation to intellect.” Unlike Wollstonecraft, however, More operated under the assumption that women were the rightful spiritual, rather than social, equals of men. She argued that women should cultivate their feminine sensibilities to exert a gentle ethical influence over their surroundings rather than entertaining ridiculous notions of political equality. As More had little interest in expanding political power to men of poorer classes, her writings on appropriate female political engagement address women of the “superior class.”

More’s understanding of upper-class domestic influence as the proper form of female political engagement transcended political parties. Across the political aisle, most Whigs and liberals did not see a contradiction between valuing universal liberty and restricting political representation to men. In 1832, increasingly vocal demands

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8 Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, 274.
9 Ibid.
11 Clare Midgley, “Anti-Slavery and Feminism,” *Gender & History* 5, no. 3 (1993), 346.
12 Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, 274; More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 5. Although More encouraged women of all classes to better themselves, she defined influence as a “talent… of which women of the higher class will be peculiarly accountable” (*Strictures*, 1).
for expanded male suffrage led to the passage of the Reform Bill, which enfranchised a small portion of middle-class men and explicitly defined eligible voters as male.\textsuperscript{13} Most of the Reform Bill’s supporters had no issue with denying women suffrage, as they, like More, saw the ideal woman as a paradigm of modesty, morality, and raw sensibility. This woman had neither stomach nor stamina for the brutal world of politics.

Johnstone preached a radically different paradigm of femininity through the bold and assertive Meg Dods. To fully appreciate the degree to which Meg Dods’ and Johnstone’s understanding of woman’s proper social role differed from even the most liberal political circles of the day, I shall turn briefly to a fascinating story featured in an 1832 issue of \textit{Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine}, two years before Johnstone became the editor. Titled “The Ventilators. A Tale of the Last Session,” the story presents two contrasting models of female political engagement in the characters of Lady Georgiana Robert and her childhood friend Lady Margaret Clifford as they watch a Parliamentary debate.\textsuperscript{14} Although a law in 1778 barred women from attending Parliamentary meetings, a room behind the “ventilators” of the House of Lords, which the story calls the “Petticoat Parliament House,” allows the two women to watch from afar.\textsuperscript{15} Georgiana, a seasoned veteran of the Petticoat Parliament House,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Georgiana’s name, I would argue, is not an accident, but an allusion to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, who in the 1780s achieved national notoriety and faced widespread excoriation in the press for endorsing a politician to whom she was not related. Colley explains that it was acceptable for upper-class women to campaign on behalf of their male relatives because people understood their involvement to stem from the appropriately feminine motivation of familial loyalty. Georgiana’s foray into the political sphere was unusual because it stemmed from her ideological, rather than sentimental, affinity with the candidate (\textit{Britons}, 242-244).
\end{footnotes}
boasts loudly of her Tory political leanings and relishes, even eroticizes, the thrill of contentious partisanship. Unlike Georgiana, Margaret is unfamiliar with the world of politics, and her interest in the debate stems from her commitment to truth and “patriot feeling” (46). She finds that Mr. Talbot, a kind and reasonable Whig, embodies those values. Embarrassed for Georgiana’s sake, Margaret asks the woman sitting next to her, who happens to be none other than Talbot’s mother, whether she approves of women “interfering in public affairs” (50). Her answer perfectly paraphrases More’s: “When the influence of women in society is considered, how important often becomes the counsel, the interference, the indirect control, which it is only graceful and proper for them to employ… As we know very well they will interfere, I would rather they did so in an honest way” (51). Margaret, of course, embodies the “honest” way for a woman to interfere in politics: Her inner passion for the noble Whig agenda before her overwhelms her, and she faints. The root of her interest is deep-seated moral sensibility, and Talbot, attracted to the purity of her conviction, soon proposes marriage. The story’s ending lends the title new meaning. Margaret has learned that her role in the political world is one of honest, emotional influence over a noble and politically minded husband; her first session in Parliament is therefore also her “Last Session.”

On the one hand, the story shows how little had changed for women in the seventy years between the publication of Rousseau’s Emile and the passage of the

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16 When a Tory member mounts a series of ad hominem attacks against Talbot, Georgiana excitedly exclaims, “Exquisite creature! can Talbot survive this pounding?” (48). She then explains to Margaret that she is certain that Snapdragon, the Tory member in question, is acting especially aggressive because he is eager to impress the Tory women watching from above: “Snapdragon, I am certain, is aware of our presence. If eyes could penetrate plaster, he is the basilisk possesses those to do the feat.” The phallic language conveys to the reader that Georgiana’s exhibitionary political engagement is not simply immodest but specifically sexually immodest.
Reform Bill. Throughout that period, the doctrine of separate spheres—the idea that the ideal woman was modest, nurturing, and contented with her proscribed domestic role as helpmate and caregiver—transcended political parties and dominated public opinion. There was a general understanding that women were born to nurture, support, and obey the men in their lives, and a general acceptance that once women married, they became the legal wards of their husbands, stripped of property or independent personhood and thus could not, “by definition,” be citizens or hope to gain political representation. It was widely understood that women were not emotionally or physically equipped to engage in the public sphere on male terms.

Yet this period also saw an increasing acceptance of women entering the public sphere through traditional womanly virtues. Margaret’s appropriate demonstration of feminine political interest through modesty, sensibility, and morality ensures, rather than endangers, her ability to assume her proper societal role as wife; it is furthermore no coincidence that she receives sage guidance from a mother who, per the Rousseauian feminine ideal, has instilled within her son a sense of patriotism and justice. And although the model of appropriate female political engagement that More and “The Ventilators” advocate would not have been accessible to women who could not marry powerful men, a series of consumer boycotts and wars with France beginning in the 1790s opened doors for more democratic domestic political activity. In 1791, a group of male abolitionists organized a widespread boycott of West Indian sugar to protest the brutal enslavement of African workers in British Caribbean colonies. The campaign drew a

17 Colley, Britons, 238.
direct link between private household and colonial empire. Thousands of women participated in the boycott, and both male and female supporters explained women's involvement as a consequence of their natural capacity for compassion and sympathy.\(^\text{18}\) As Charlotte Sussman explains, "'Natural' feminine characteristics were appropriated as political tools"\(^\text{19}\); unlike influence over a politically powerful husband, these tools were not limited to gentlewomen. The mid-1820s saw a resurgence of the sugar boycotts, this time organized by female anti-slavery societies.\(^\text{20}\) Meanwhile, between 1791 and 1815, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars mobilized tens of thousands of women to raise money and sew clothing and blankets for the British army. Colley writes:

> By extending their solicitude to the nation's armed forces, men who were not in the main related to them by blood or marriage, women demonstrated that their domestic virtues possessed a public as well as a private relevance. Consciously or not, these female patriots were staking out a civic role for themselves. (Britons, 261)

While only wealthier women could organize fundraising committees, women of all classes could sew and repair clothing. Beginning in the 1790s and continuing throughout the early nineteenth century, Great Britain learned to not just accept, but even venerate, female engagement in the public sphere, provided it was channeled through appropriately charitable, modest, and motherly behavior, and certain modes of this behavior were available to women of all classes.

In attributing her cookbook to Meg Dods, Johnstone advocates an economically accessible model of women's social role that goes beyond the

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
\(^{20}\) Midgley, “Anti-Slavery and Feminism,” 344.
“maternalist activism” in the public sphere and instead begins to approach egalitarianism. On the one hand, Meg embodies certain domestic traits that would do Hannah More proud. Meg is the best cook in the area by far, and she takes great pride in maintaining a clean, Christian, and comfortable household. Unlike Rousseau’s feminine ideal, however, her domestic talents do not serve to please a husband or to nurture a morally upright family. Instead, they allow her renown and financial independence. Meg finds no issue in boasting of her abilities and carving out a public reputation for herself, and she lives unapologetically for her own sake. Like men, she justifies and asserts her presence in society according to her own convictions. In Saint Ronan’s Well, Meg is unmarried, and, lest the reader assume her a widow or simply unlucky in love, the first chapter emphasizes that several men proposed to her. She rejects them all: “Determined to ride the fore-horse herself, Meg would admit no helpmate who might soon assert the rights of a master...” The wording here is extremely important: Meg sees through the quasi-egalitarian veneer of so much marriage rhetoric, understanding that truly egalitarian marriages are few and far between. She will admit no “master” because she sees herself as one and enjoys asserting her rights as such:

and so, in single blessedness, and with the despotism of Queen Bess herself, she ruled all matters with a high hand, not only over her men-servants and maid-servants, but over the stranger within her gates, who, if he ventured to oppose Meg's sovereign will and pleasure, or desire to have either fare or accommodation different from that which she chose to provide for him, was instantly ejected with that answer which Erasmus tells us silenced all complaints in the German inns of his time, Quære aliud hospitium; or, as Meg expressed it, “Troop aff wi’ ye to another public.” (I.10)

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21 I borrow the term “maternalist activism” from Midgley, “Anti-Slavery and Feminism,” 346.
22 Walter Scott, St. Ronan’s Well. With Introductory Essay and Notes by Andrew Lang (Boston, MA: Estes and Lauriat, 1894), Project Gutenberg, I.9.
Although readers are meant to find humor in a humble landlady acting with such willful displays of power, that humor does not undercut the fact that Meg Dods, an unmarried woman, has transformed the domestic sphere from one of subservience to queendom. The word “public” is also significant. Though the immediate implication of the word in the above context is “public inn,” the lack of the word “inn” allows for an interesting interpretation. Meg’s wording transforms the domestic sphere into an extension of the public sphere, and the passage’s emphasis on her “sovereignty” over the former suggests that she sees herself as being on equal, if not superior, footing to men within the latter.

Here and throughout the novel, Meg turns domesticity on its head, transforming it from an instrument of patriarchy into one of female dominance and resistance. One notable example is her confrontation with Captain MacTurk in a chapter titled “The Challenge.” Although the title refers directly to Captain Macturk’s invitation to Tyrrel to duel against Sir Bingo Binks, it also allows another challenge, a different sort of duel, to come to the fore of the chapter. Eager to deliver the duel summons to Tyrrel, Captain Macturk hurries to the Cleikum Inn, only to find Meg at the doorstep. She refuses to let him in or share any information about Tyrrel. Predictably, the hotheaded, militaristic Macturk does not take the rejection well, and the ensuing battle makes for one of the most hilarious scenes of the novel.

“The woman is deleerit!” said Captain MacTurk; “but coom, coom—a gentleman is not to be misused in this way when he comes on a gentleman’s business; so make you a bit room on the door-stane, that I may pass by you, or I will make room for myself, by Cot! to your small pleasure.”

And so saying he assumed the air of a man who was about to make good his passage. But Meg, without deigning farther reply, flourished around her head the hearth-broom, which she had been employing to its more legitimate purpose, when disturbed in her housewifery by Captain MacTurk. (I.181)
The passage presents Macturk as the ultimate male chauvinist. In dismissing Meg as “the woman,” he shows his contempt for those who cannot participate in or appreciate “gentlemanly” business. Furthermore, his threat to “make room for myself… to your small pleasure” should she not let him through the “doorstane” to her private property echoes threats of sexual violence. In response, Meg Dods takes her hearth-broom, tool of Hestia’s sacred symbol of domestic femininity, and waves it as a weapon. When Macturk does not heed her warning, daring instead to accuse her of drunkenness, she begins to “use her weapon to fell purpose,” whacking him repeatedly over the head (I.182).

In Meg’s hands, domesticity becomes a means of confidently asserting herself beyond the doorstane, even against the most aggressively sexist men— a far cry from Margaret’s unwittingly seductive docility.

Six years after the publication of the first edition of *The Cook and Housewife’s Manual*, Johnstone wields her own metaphorical broomstick in her review of Harriet Martineau's book *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832). She offers the following response to male critics who took issue with a woman concerning herself with the masculine subject of political economy:

> After all, we believe that there is something in the female mind which particularly fits it for elucidating, in a familiar matter, the intricacies of political economy. The economy of empires is only the economy of families and neighborhoods on a larger scale. Now woman is eminently the best family manager. Let procurance ones sneer if they please— we give it as our deliberate conviction that there never yet was a well regulated house in which the lady was not the master.23

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Like Wollstonecraft and Meg Dods, Johnstone argues that women’s socially ascribed primacy in the domestic sphere actively entitles them to greater respect and recognition beyond it. In placing Meg at the helm of the Cleikum Club, Johnstone promotes an understanding of female labor as a formidable force that can demand greater social representation, an idea she would advocate explicitly in her later journalism.

Of course, Johnstone’s decision to attribute her cookbook to Meg was a display of ingenious commercial savvy. Walter Scott was Scotland’s most popular novelist and maintained an international following.\(^\text{24}\) Even those reviewers who disliked *Saint Ronan’s Well* write exasperatedly of its relentless, if undeserved, popularity.\(^\text{25}\) Moreover, Johnstone’s authorial attribution to Meg Dods ensured that her cookbook would appeal even to those who did not enjoy the novel: Many critics who wrote negative reviews of *Saint Ronan’s Well* found a silver lining in Meg, finding her a more fully formed and original character within a book that they considered beneath the renowned author of *Waverley*.\(^\text{26}\) More broadly, though, Johnstone’s liberal political convictions and understanding of literature as an instrument of political reform suggest that choosing to frame her cookbook within the


universe of *Saint Ronan’s Well* and attribute it to Meg was also a means of achieving the gradual revolution of popular opinion that she describes in 1844.\(^{27}\)

Johnstone’s writings from 1815-1827 demonstrate that she believed in expanding female education and political representation at the time in which she wrote the first edition of *The Cook and Housewife’s Manual*. Andrew Monnickendam argues that Johnstone’s first novel,\(^{28}\) *Clan Albin* (1815), advocates “a complete reversal” of Rousseau’s understanding of men as the more rational of the sexes.\(^{29}\) Throughout the novel, Monnickendam explains, “It is men… who turn patriotism into a passion with fatal effects, in short, into war. \(^{30}\) The novel’s only truly rational male character is Norman, an orphaned Highlander who wholly embodies the teachings of the women who raised him. Johnstone writes:

> WOMAN was indeed the tutelary genius of Norman’s wayward fate… In every felicitous occurrence of his life, Norman could trace the agency of woman, — and through so enderead a medium every blessing was to him twice blessed.\(^{31}\)

Chief among the women who shape Norman’s fate is Lady Augusta, the novel’s wisest character by far. Monnickendam argues that she functions as a literary stand-in for Johnstone herself, as Johnstone echoes many of the character’s political opinions

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\(^{27}\) On Johnstone’s understanding of the political power of literature, see Perkins, *Women Writers of the Edinburgh Enlightenment*, 213.

\(^{28}\) *Clan Albin* is the first novel we know Johnstone to definitively have written. There is debate as to whether she wrote the satirical novel *The Saxon and the Gael* (1814); while its wit and emphasis on Scottish pride match much of Johnstone’s later works, she never claimed authorship over the novel, and several notable scholars doubt that she wrote it. See Perkins, *Women Writers of the Edinburgh Enlightenment*, 212.

\(^{29}\) Andrew Monnickendam, *The Novels of Walter Scott and His Literary Relations: Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier and Christian Johnstone* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 121.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

in her later journalism.\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Clan Albin} is thus strong evidence for Johnstone’s early feminism and use of literature as a political platform.

The success of \textit{Clan Albin} helped Johnstone secure her first journalism position as editor of the \textit{Inverness Courier}. William Blackwood, a prominent Tory publisher, admired the novel so much that he recommended her to the newspaper’s board.\textsuperscript{33} I believe the position allowed her to further hone her gift for the nimble feminist subversion that characterizes much of \textit{The Cook and Housewife’s Manual}. Although no major political party at the time believed in expanding political representation to women, there were some issues, such as the Queen Caroline Affair, that inspired widespread political involvement among Whiggish and liberal women;\textsuperscript{34} as such, the typical Tory reaction invoked the doctrine of separate spheres to argue against female political engagement. Given that the proprietors of the \textit{Inverness Courier} were Tories, it is not surprising that many articles that discuss women’s involvement in liberal political campaigns reflect this Tory response.\textsuperscript{35} I do not, however, believe these articles speak for Johnstone. \textit{Clan Albin} clearly argues that women deserve a voice in political discourse, and there are early hints of ideological friction between the Johnstones and Blackwood that would culminate in a bitter end to their professional relationship in 1831.\textsuperscript{36} Rather than attack these views outright and thus presumably endanger her position, I argue that Johnstone used her editorial power to implicitly undermine these patriarchal Tory narratives.

\textsuperscript{32} Monnickendam, \textit{The Novels of Walter Scott and His Literary Relations}, 121, 126.
\textsuperscript{33} Perkins, \textit{Women Writers of the Edinburgh Enlightenment}, 213.

\textsuperscript{34} Colley, \textit{Britons}, 265-266.
\textsuperscript{35} Perkins, \textit{Women Writers of the Edinburgh Enlightenment}, 213.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 214-215.
One notable example of this phenomenon occurs in an issue of The Inverness Courier from August 24, 1820, in which the paper published a letter Queen Caroline had released to the press stressing her innocence against King George’s charges of adultery. Immediately below the letter is a series of various newspapers’ responses to it. The Courier’s characteristic Royalist response, printed first, casts Queen Caroline as a manipulative adulteress whose open effort to rally people to her cause is a gross breach of the boundaries of the domestic sphere. Interestingly, someone, presumably the editor, follows this piece with articles from three other newspapers that sympathize with the Queen to varying degrees, thereby quietly eroding the force of the first response. Finally, there is an article titled “Argument on the Queen’s Case” that is attributed to no newspaper or author. Whereas the Queen’s letter and The Times cast Caroline as a helpless damsel and the Courier and Glasgow Chronicle dismiss the letter’s pathos as female histrionics, this article invokes no feminine stereotype to prove its point. Instead, it explains the entire crisis as petty male entitlement and hypocrisy: “We assert, fearlessly, that, in the present instance, the Queen’s divorce is, on the face of it, designed to the relief of the King, and not to the nation.” The author argues that the only reason the law forbids queenly adultery is to avoid a bastard heir, and as Caroline has not produced one, her continuation on the

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37 Caroline of Brunswick, “The Queen’s Letter to the King,” Inverness Courier, August 24, 1820, The British Newspaper Archive, The British Library. For a queen to commit adultery was high treason at the time. As such, a guilty verdict would have seen Queen Caroline dethroned and possibly killed (Colley, Britons, 265). Caroline’s letter presents her as a pathetic heroine who wants only to fulfill her duties as a wife and mother and the King as a heartless abuser of masculine political power; it is thus a fascinating example of a woman weaponizing performative femininity to secure political power.

38 “Opinions of the Newspaper’s on the Queen’s Letter,” Inverness Courier, August 24, 1820, The British Newspaper Archive, The British Library. These responses range from wholly buying into the Queen’s narrative of hapless victimhood to merely arguing against the King’s proposed hasty and biased judicial process.
throne will bear little national consequence. “Once more— the Queen is brought as a culprit before Parliament, not because of treasonable or unlawful acts, but for having been guilty of such as were scandalous, disgraceful, and of bad example.” Most strikingly, this anonymous author then questions the validity of treating Caroline’s alleged adultery as a scandal to begin with. Were the nation to truly treat adultery as a crime, then “one and all the profligate Kings who have hitherto sat (or may sit hereafter) on the throne of England ought not to have reigned a moment.” There is no way to prove that Johnstone wrote the article, but the text’s rejection of female stereotypes and witty condemnation of male hypocrisy aligns with much of her writing, as does the author’s style of nimble political critique. It seems likely that as the editor, Johnstone was at least the person responsible for including the article, if not its primary author. The three previous responses to the letter, each attributed to a newspaper, thus also serve to distance this subversive article from the official stance of The Inverness Courier and might help to explain how such a bold dissension was able to make it to print. Taken together, the collection and layout of the articles show Johnstone nimbly negotiating a complex political situation, wielding her editorial hand to quietly complicate the paper’s contentious partisanship.

As with her previous novels and editorial work, Johnstone does not explicitly argue for greater female political representation in The Cook and Housewife’s Manual. Rather, she uses subtle feminist subversion and humor to undermine male primacy in the public sphere and argue that women have a place within it. For

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example, it does not seem a coincidence that Johnstone’s cookbook opens with a
cockfight. Immediately after Dr. Redgill arrives at the Cleikum, he, Touchwood, and
the inn’s ostler watch two sparring roosters, “a spectacle in which all mankind takes
more or less interest.”

Though the word “mankind” refers to humanity as a whole, the animal’s phallic connotation as well as the fact that all the participants in the
spectacle are male seem to argue that men are uniquely susceptible to the thralls of
violent competition. The episode serves, like *Clan Albin*, to refute Rousseau's
argument that men are the more inherently rational sex.

A few pages later, Touchwood’s lecture serves the twofold purpose of
showing the broad socio-historical significance of cookery while simultaneously
mocking the male propensity to exclude women from anything of socio-historical
significance. Here, with characteristic flourish, Touchwood explains cookery as a
social science:

> “Gentlemen, — Man is a cooking animal; and in whatever situation he is
found, it may be assumed as an axiom, that his progress in civilization has
kept exact pace with the degree of refinement he has attained in the science of
gastronomy.” (32)

Interestingly, Touchwood’s phrasing implies that civilization is a product, rather than
a reflection, of refined cookery; thus, cookery literally shapes civilization. What
follows is a summary of Lord Kame’s popular Scottish Enlightenment theory of the
four stages of societal development told entirely through a culinary lens. Kame’s four
stages of social evolution, are, in order, the hunter-gatherer, pastoral-nomadic,

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42 “Cock, n.1,” *OED Online*, March 2019, Oxford University Press,
agricultural, and commercial. Touchwood begins with an indirect allusion to hunting gatherer stage: “First,” he explains, there is the “brutalized digger of roots… the fierce foul feeder, devouring his ensnared prey fat, blood, and muscle!” His next sentence explains the pastoral-nomadic stage in its culinary context:

“The next age of cookery, gentlemen, may be called the pastoral, as the last was that of the hunter. Here we have simple, mild broths, seasoned, perhaps, with herbs of the field; decoctions of pulse; barley-cake, and the kid seethed in milk.” (33)

The following description of the “chivalrous or feudal age of cookery” describes the agricultural stage of societal development, and the last, in which cookery becomes “a domestic art, contributing to the comfort and luxury of private life” echoes Adam Smith’s analysis of Kame’s commercial stage of society, in which capitalism allows private comforts to become widely available. Touchwood’s lecture presents cookery as nothing less than a driving force of Enlightenment civilization.

By framing cookery within the masculine discourse of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, Touchwood inadvertently demonstrates the inherent fluidity between political philosophy, a subject understood to be masculine, and the feminine domestic sphere. That fluidity then calls into question the validity of dividing those spheres in the first place. This reading aligns with Johnstone’s later feminist journalism: In her review of *A Plea for Woman*, Johnstone decries the “fallacies and injustices involved in the phrases ‘masculine,’ ‘women’s sphere,’ and other favorable expressions,“
condemning society’s masculinization of intellect in light of women’s equal intelligence. Touchwood’s lecture quietly pokes fun at these fallacies and injustices.

The ultimate irony of Touchwood’s lecture is that he claims an activity that is virtually synonymous with feminine domesticity as an exclusively masculine concern. Johnstone subtly mocks the gendered linguistic conventions that allow Touchwood to say that “Man is a cooking animal” without so much as blinking. At no point does he mention that women most likely did the bulk of the root-digging in the hunting age and the preparing of “milk broths” and “barley-cake” in the pastoral age. He does not once think to include Meg, the person with the greatest culinary knowledge and thereby the keys to the historical epic he describes, in the conversation. In fact, he actively excludes her, continually addressing only the “gentlemen” in the room. When Meg briefly interjects to support his argument, he orders her to “Hush!” before immediately continuing with the words, “the science, as we noted, gentleman….”

(34). Meg is the most well versed in the very subject Touchwood describes, but, presumably because she is not a “gentleman” and because the art she has mastered has become, for the purposes of Touchwood’s lecture, a masculinized “science,” she is not welcome. The inherent ridiculousness of Touchwood politicizing the domestic sphere only to deny the one woman at the table access to it invites the reader to even briefly consider the inherent logical fallacies of excluding women from the political sphere.

Touchwood’s lecture reads as a parody of contemporaneous gastronomic treatises that sought to masculinize cookery by framing it within a high falutin

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45 Johnstone, “Mrs. Hugo Reid’s Plea for Woman,” 426.
scientific and philosophical lens and, in so doing, minimized or mocked the culinary contributions of women. Dr. Kitchener’s tremendously popular cookbook *The Cook’s Oracle* was among the first English cookbooks to discuss cookery in this vein, expounding on the historical and cultural significance of the recipes with vivid, witty prose.⁴⁶ Kitchener explains in the preface why an educated physician such as himself might find himself in the kitchen, comparing cookery to a medical science and providing a list of historical men who were similarly interested in culinary philosophy. The preface contains the following dialogue from James Boswell’s biography of Samuel Johnson:

Johnson.—“I could write a better Book of Cookery than has ever yet been written;—it should be a book on philosophical principles.—I would tell what is the best Butcher’s Meat, the proper seasons of different Vegetables,—and then, how to roast, and boil, and to compound.”

Dilly.—“Mrs. Glasse's Cookery, which is the best, was written by Dr. Hill.”

Johnson.—“Well, Sir—this shows how much better the subject of Cookery may be treated by a Philosopher;—but you shall see what a book of Cookery I shall make, and shall agree with Mr. Dilly for the Copyright.”

Miss Seward.—“That would be Hercules with the distaff indeed!”—

Johnson.—“No, Madam; Women can spin very well,—but they cannot make a good book of Cookery.”⁴⁷

Johnson denies Hannah Glasse primacy as a culinary writer and women in general culinary mastery because they approach cookery as a task to be completed rather than as a philosophical subject to be contemplated and consumed.⁴⁸ Kitchener supports Johnson’s conclusion with a footnote on the word “Philosopher”: “The best Books of Cookery have been written by Physicians,” he writes, before offering a list of


⁴⁸ Interestingly, Johnson’s explanation of his proposed philosophical cookbook contains nothing inherently philosophical or that female-authored cookbooks lacked.
cookbooks by (male) physicians (9). By claiming cookery as a science and
philosophy, Kitchener attempts to transform the kitchen, or at least the table, into a
male-dominated sphere.

Whereas Kitchener’s cookbook asserts male primacy in culinary philosophy,
an article in Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine goes a step further and asserts
women’s inferiority in the kitchen. Its complete title is nothing but a list of female-
authored cookbooks that the author proceeds to excoriate. The beginning of the
article explains cookery as the most “honorable” and “ancient” science and so closely
parallels Touchwood’s lecture in its analysis of social history through a culinary lens
that the article seems likely to have been the primary target of Johnstone’s parody.
Compare, for example, the following quotation with the aforementioned first
paragraph of Touchwood’s lecture:

There is no nation so utterly barbarous as to devour their food without some
previous decoration, and the appellation of a “cooking animal” may be truly
considered as forming the most accurate definition of the human race… The
progress of cookery is, in fact, the progress of civilization; and it is impossible
to trace the improvement of the one, without having our attention perpetually
called to the gradations of the other. (301)

Having framed cookery through Scottish Enlightenment discourse and thus claimed it
as a thoroughly masculine activity, the author then moves to minimizing and deriding
women who approach it through a domestic lens. He attributes “the greatest triumph
of human genius” in cookery to a male chef, the “chief cook of Louis the Fourteenth”
(302). Later, he lambasts Hannah Glasse and Susanna MacIver, authors of two of the

49 Caroline Lieffers, “‘The Present Time Is Eminently Scientific’: The Science of Cookery in
50 “Le Cuisinier Imperial,” Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, December, 1817, HathiTrust Digital
Library, 300.
most popular cookbooks in the early nineteenth century, for using “extremely unscientific” measurements and imprecise spelling (304). But it is his comment about herbal remedies in female-authored cookbooks that most strongly demonstrates his contempt for the feminized kitchen:

It is a propensity peculiar to our culinary Blue Stockings, to be eternal dabblers in physic. We are assaulted in almost every page with some such recipe as the following: “A certain Remedy for a Consumption” — “A Cure for Wind in the Stomach” — “A Speedy Care for the Gripes.” (304)

Female members of Elizabeth Monatgu’s “Blue-Stocking Society,” a literary discussion group originating in the 1750s, introduced proudly intelligent women to the public through their mutually energetic and enjoyable correspondence with the society’s male members and through their prolific philosophical, literary, scientific, and morally didactic publications.\(^5\) The Bluestockings made the cultivation of female intellect increasingly common, if not always fashionable, and by the end of the eighteenth century, the word “Bluestocking” had taken on a life of its own. To some, it was simply a term for any well educated woman; to others, it connoted laughably ambitious women who had dishonored their female nature in favor of public recognition.\(^2\) Few would have ascribed the term to female cookbook authors, as cookery and home medicine were commonly understood as domestic and thus feminine activities. The author of the article, however, so aggressively claims cookery and home medicine as masculine concerns that he accuses women who dare to assert


mastery over either of overstepping the boundary between the male and female spheres.

In Touchwood’s lecture and throughout her cookbook, Johnstone turns the tables, so to speak, on traditional Bluestocking humor, showing men to be equally if not more guilty of overzealous and arrogant intellectual grandstanding. By undermining the social regard for male genius, she mocks men’s refusal to recognize or even permit female ingenuity and, in so doing, she invites women to pick up their slack. She folds one of her most biting critiques of the supposed masculine monopoly over brilliance into a footnote about turtle soup:

We give no receipt for dressing Turtle, an affair on which a volume might be written, so complicated and various are the processes. ROUSSEAU tells of a German who composed a whole volume on the zest of a lemon. What then might not be said on that which comprehends all zests, — "the Sovereign of Savouriness," the Olio compounded "of every creature's best?" As none but thorough-bred men of science are ever entrusted with dressing a Turtle, the Cleikum Club did not presume to instruct them, and thought the receipts found in cookery books for this article merely so many make-bulks. Female cooks are good enough in their own way, but no woman ever yet succeeded in writing an Epic or dressing a Turtle. (82)

It is no coincidence that “ROUSSEAU” is the only word that is entirely capitalized or that “men” is the only word to appear in italics. In a passage ostensibly about the culinary merits of turtle, Johnstone in fact upends Rousseau’s notion of male intellectual superiority, amplifying the philosopher and so many “men of sciences’s” needless grandiosity and sexism such that they becomes parodies of themselves. Readers of Ferrier’s novel Marriage might notice an added layer of intertextual irony in the footnote, for it recalls the character Dr. Redgill’s sexist statement, “‘To talk
sense to a woman is like feeding chickens upon turtle soup.” Johnstone exposes the absurdity, even desperation, behind elite men’s flexings of philosophical muscle, and the reader, whom she codes as a middle class woman, is meant to laugh. The irony of the footnote’s last line is especially humorous when one considers that Johnstone had not only published a multi-volume historical epic, *Clan Albin*, eleven years earlier, but that she was also almost certainly in the process of writing her second historical epic, *Elizabeth de Bruce* (1827), while writing *The Cook and Housewife’s Manual*. Johnstone teaches the reader to not just question, but dismiss, the social mores that disregard female genius.

One of the most poignant and original ways in which Johnstone argues for women’s political significance is by showing domestic fiction and cookery, two traditionally feminine pursuits, to be powerful and complimentary mediums through which to assert Scottish national pride. Of the two novels that build the cookbook’s literary universe, *Saint Ronan’s Well* is both the primary builder and a more obvious celebration of Scottish identity: The villain is an Englishman who harbors aggressively anti-Scottish sentiments, and Meg Dods, the novel’s most memorable and likable character, is a paragon of Scottishness. But although Ferrier’s novel *Marriage* is not the primary framework through which Johnstone “narrates” her cookbook, Dr. Redgill plays a crucial role. In the novel *Marriage*, Dr. Redgill is an English nationalist. About midway through the novel, he proudly voices his anti-Scottish prejudice at the breakfast table: “The people I give up—they are dirty and

54 For a clear definition of the cookbook’s intended audience, see Johnstone, *A Cook and Housewife’s Manual*, 7-10.
greedy—the country, too, is a perfect mass of rubbish, and the dinners not fit for dogs—the cookery, I mean." The very premise of Johnstone’s cookbook thus becomes politically subversive, as it tells the story of Scotland (that is, Meg Dods) showing England the ways in which she is superior. Scotland’s victory does not take the form of a violent conquest, however. It is not technically a conquest at all. Johnstone emphasizes cultural exchange over conquest, and presents the kitchen as a perfect platform for such diplomacy. In doing so, she embodies Monnickendam’s analysis of heroinism in *Clan Albin*

The framework of *Saint Ronan’s Well*, Dr. Redgill’s initially combative Englishness, and the quintessential Scottishness of Meg Dods are indispensable tools with which Johnstone is able to hone, as Henry Notaker writes in his exhaustive survey of the history of cookbooks, “a consciousness of national identity through national dishes and national cuisine.” Throughout the cookbook, Johnstone toys with the relationship between literary and literal “taste,” demonstrating how food and literature can work together to cultivate and celebrate a sense of national identity. Scottish food had long held a reputation of sacrificing taste and elegance for economy, and by the 1820s, some in England were beginning to grow impatient with what they saw as a Scottish monopoly over the literature business. Johnstone turns

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55 Ferrier, Marriage, II.iv.
56 For just a few examples of Johnstone’s assertions of Scottish culinary primacy, see her description of Dr. Redgill’s impression of his first dinner at the Cleikum (23-25) and her notes on potatoes (154) and cheese (343).
these negative stereotypes into admirable virtues. Her cookbook honors affordable Scottish dishes, presenting prudence as its own form of elegance (9), and it celebrates the ubiquity of Scottish literature as proof of its accessibility to all classes. She writes in the introduction to her subchapter on potatoes:

Some humorous writer pities those people who lived before the publication of the Scottish Novels, and the introduction of potatoes, — that root of superlative excellence and unbounded utility, which takes its honoured place on every dining stool or table in the three kingdoms, and goes far to equalise the dining enjoyments of every grade of society. (154)

Johnstone sees the affordable “deliciousness” of both Scottish literature and food as crucial ingredients in her quest for extending social equality to all classes. Her Scottish nationalism is part and parcel of her liberal ideology.

We can thus understand Meg Dods as a culmination of the cookbook’s political interests. Johnstone’s attribution of authorship to Meg Dods, a Scots-speaking, self-made, middle-class woman, is a trifold celebration of female, Scottish, and middle-class brilliance. At one point in the cookbook, Winterblossom tries to explain Scotland’s excellent soup recipes as the product of French influence and economic scarcity under English invasion. Johnstone’s description of Meg’s response epitomizes her role as a model of feminist, Scottish nationalist, and middle-class pride: “‘Little or muckle,’ put in Mrs Dods, a true bred border Scot, who would not yield an inch of the kitchen floor to France or England, ‘we mak* a gude use o' what little skill is accorded to us its like’” (65). That a female character is able to make

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such a statement against a company of wealthy men further speaks to women’s, and not just aristocratic women’s, place in the political and economic sphere.
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