Breaking a Taboo: Female Critics in *The Ayrshire Legatees* and Their Challenge to the Male-Dominated Society of *Blackwood’s Magazine*

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*The Ayrshire Legatees* (1820), ‘the first of Blackwood’s really classic novels’,\(^1\) was serialised in *Blackwood’s Magazine* from June 1820 until February 1821. The serial was a success and won the author John Galt (1779-1839) a secure place as a recognised author. *Blackwood’s* received considerable benefit from this publication, which suited the conservative and romantic tone of the review. The representation of the King’s funeral, the religious references and above all the regionalism of Galt’s work were well-suited to *Blackwood’s*, showing that the Tory outlet could rise above invective to literary distinction.

One point, however, strikes a note of discord between *Blackwood’s* and this seemingly typical Blackwoodian text, *The Ayrshire Legatees*: the representation of female voices. *Blackwood’s* was a male-dominated society, with fewer than five percent of women contributors from 1817 to 1825.\(^2\) Female novelists were giving way to male ones as the novel was being granted literary status, with consequent re-gendering of the genre.\(^3\) Thus female voices were being suppressed in the literary world, especially in the Toryish *Blackwood’s*. However, Galt challenged the tradition by sneaking female critics into his text and giving them a chance to raise their voices.

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This essay seeks to revalue *The Ayrshire Legatees* as a challenge to the male society of *Blackwood’s*. The text used here is the original serialised version that appeared in *Blackwood’s*, not the book publication detached from its historical context. Putting the work back into the original historical context will make it possible to evince both the heterogeneity of the text in *Blackwood’s* and Galt’s skill in treating female voices.

1. The History of *Blackwood’s Magazine* before *The Ayrshire Legatees*

*Blackwood’s* was started by William Blackwood (1776-1834) with two editors, Thomas Pringle and James Cleghorn. It appeared first in April 1817 as *The Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*. It was supposed to be a Tory magazine, but the editors could not give strong political colour to the magazine as expected; for instance, its first issue included an article honouring Francis Horner, one of the founders of the Whig-supportive *Edinburgh Review*. Soon, branded as incompetents, those two editors were thrown out.

Under new editorship, the remodeled magazine *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* was launched in October 1817. The feature of the first issue of this renewed magazine was ‘The Chaldee Manuscript’ – ‘a quasi-Biblical text filled with allegorical reference’. Blackwood, who must have been irritated by the former editors’ indecisive political outlook, made clear the political stance of the new magazine in this article: the article aimed at ‘offending the members of the Whig camp and delighting unscrupulous Tories’. The purpose was achieved, but the magazine had to pay a heavy price: this ferocious invective was too radical to escape censure, and it gave rise to libel suits. After an apology from the editor, the issues with the offending text were replaced with new ones with two alternative articles.

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4. In this essay, the title of the work is italicised (*The Ayrshire Legatees*), but the quotations are all taken from the serialised version (‘The Ayrshire Legatees’).
The reputation of the magazine was damaged, and Blackwood was in a no-win situation. In this discouraging situation *Peter’s Letters to His Kinfork* (1819) by John Lockhart (1794-1854) appeared. It had two roles to play for both Blackwood and *Blackwood’s*: first, to bring financial success to Blackwood; and second, even though it did not appear in the magazine, to be an apologia for *Blackwood’s*.\(^7\) Being a study on the contemporary literary world in Edinburgh written in a rather mild tone, *Peter’s Letters* was favourably received by critics.

Now *Blackwood’s* needed to publish articles or serials that would restore its credit with readers. When Galt started to contribute to the magazine in the same year as *Peter’s Letters* Blackwood may have expected Galt to play the same role as Lockhart to gain money for Blackwood and, more importantly, to build up the reputation of *Blackwood’s* in literary circles as a counter-Whig magazine.\(^8\) Galt’s plan for *The Ayrshire Legatees* was sent to Blackwood in March 1820 and was accepted, appearing in the June issue. Its favourable reception saved the magazine from crisis, and was a stepping-stone for Galt to a writing career in *Blackwood’s*.

2. The Ideology of *Blackwood’s* and *The Ayrshire Legatees*

The similarities between *Peter’s Letters* and *The Ayrshire Legatees* are often pointed out: the epistolary form, observations on cities, people and manners, and so on. The similarity derives from the roles ascribed by William Blackwood in accordance with the trend he and his magazine were promoting. Galt himself was not a radical writer and sometimes resisted the strong political attitude of Blackwood,\(^9\) but *The Ayrshire Legatees* is a


\(^9\) ‘He [Galt] was himself never extreme in his politics, and had perhaps more Whig friends than Tories. Although he consistently called himself a Tory, he was never sufficiently partisan to be uncritical, and we several times find him reproaching Blackwood for letting *Maga* take too fierce or bitter a political tone.’ Jennie W. Aberdein, *John Galt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 99.
faithful embodiment of Blackwood’s literary preference. The main elements in The Ayrshire Legatees that must have pleased Blackwood and the readers of the magazine are: its political tone; its religious attitude; and its regionalism.

Blackwood’s was from the start meant to be an ideological magazine. Blackwood’s achieved ‘the construction of a thorough-going “Romantic ideology” to oppose the Edinburgh Review’s neo-Enlightenment liberalism’. In the 1819 September issue, Blackwood’s satirises the Whigs, parodying William Hazlitt’s Lectures on the English Poets: ‘Fear is “Whiggism” – hatred is “Whiggism” – contempt, jealousy, remorse, wonder, despair, or madness, are all “Whiggism.” [. . .] The vain, the ambitious, the proud, the choleric man – the coward, the beggar, all are “Whigs.”’ In this climate, Galt, himself a moderate Tory, created an Ultra-Tory character, Andrew, in the novel, though he denies that Andrew is his other self. Andrew was a convenient conveyor of Tory ideology. In one letter he shows a compassionate attitude about the King’s funeral:

The towers, like the vast spectres of departed ages, raised their embattled heads to the skies, monumental witnesses of the strength and antiquity of a great monarchy. A prodigious multitude filled the courts of that venerable edifice, surrounding on all sides a dark embossed structure, the sarcophagus, as it seemed to me at the moment, of the heroism of chivalry.

Other three members of the family, on the other hand, react rather coolly to the funeral. Mr Pringle says the sight was “edifying,” but other two women are more interested in other things such as their friends than the

funeral.\textsuperscript{14} Andrew’s presence as a passionate Tory must have pleased the readers as well as Blackwood himself.

The religious references and the description of faithful Christian believers in \textit{The Ayrshire Legatees} are also in line with the outlook of \textit{Blackwood’s}, which as an anti-Whig reviews was necessarily hostile toward Enlightenment thinkers, especially skeptics who challenged traditional religious belief. \textit{The Edinburgh Review} was, on the other hand, an active supporter of these philosophers, and \textit{Blackwood’s} held that ‘[m]uch misery have the Edinburgh Reviewers inflicted [. . .] on many meritorious and pious Christians’.\textsuperscript{15} \textit{The Ayrshire Legatees} portrays many meritorious and pious Christians: Mr Pringle and Mr Snodgrass are ministers of the parish and orthodox believers – they are rigid Presbyterians, who hold traditional religious belief and are true to Calvinist faith, unlike Moderates or Enlightenment thinkers; and Mr Craig, Mr Daff, and Mrs Glibbans are all strict adherents of religious dogma. Letters from the family and the replies to them abound in religious issues: the rights and wrongs of playing the harp on the Sabbath day, arguments on going to the theatre, the differences between the Anglican church and the Scottish kirk, and so on. The people in Garnock are unaware of the Enlightenment, at least on a conscious level. Far from the centre of the Kingdom, they remain exemplary Christians.

Regionalism, finally, is one of the most important features of \textit{Blackwood’s}. \textit{Blackwood’s} needed ‘comic and sentimental depiction of traditional, rural or small-town settings and manners’,\textsuperscript{16} which Galt amply provided for the magazine. Garnock people, who live far from the bustle of big cities, keep their innocence and make much ado about every single letter they receive from the Pringle family. They earnestly discuss the rights and wrongs of London manners, and the very earnestness arouses

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\textsuperscript{14} Galt, vol. 7, p. 472-73.
\textsuperscript{16} Duncan, p. 211.
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laughter from metropolitan readers of *Blackwood’s*. Galt played a crucial role as one of the members of the Blackwoodian group, in which it was necessary to comply with the readers’ taste for romance and their desire to enjoy Scottish peasants and the Scottish dialect.\(^{17}\) If it contained only the letters of the Pringle family, *The Ayrshire Legatees* would have portrayed only the big cities, Edinburgh and London. However, the inclusion of letter-readers in the countryside granted *Blackwood’s* readers a right to enjoy the reactions of village people toward the metropolis. This constitutes a big difference from *Peter’s Letters*, and is what makes *The Ayrshire Legatees* a superb ‘Scottish’ novel.

Besides the three characteristics above, *The Ayrshire Legatees* contains some comments that would have satisfied *Blackwood’s* readers: Mr Snodgrass and Mr Craig talk about Malthusian theory, one of the topics often discussed in the magazine as was the Queen’s Trial; nor does Galt forget to flatter ‘Mr Blackwood, a civil and decent man in the bookselling line’.\(^{18}\) Galt knew what topics would be welcome in *Blackwood’s*, and Blackwood knew that Galt would represent the standpoint of the magazine. The serialisation of *The Ayrshire Legatees* was a win-win situation for the career-hungry Galt and the disgraced *Blackwood’s*. When discussing the work, the fact that it was serialised in *Blackwood’s* and expected to be supportive of its ideological stance must be taken into account.

### 3. *Blackwood’s Magazine* and Male-dominated Society

Toryism, anti-scepticism, nostalgic regionalism are three main principles that characterised *Blackwood’s*. Its conservative policies necessarily involve a traditionalist attitude toward gender. *Blackwood’s* was a typical

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male-dominated group,19 and in its history until the appearance of The Ayrshire Legatees women exercised little power. The editors were men, those who were personally targeted in ‘The Chaldee Manuscript’ were men, and, though not published in the magazine, Peter’s Letters mentioned exclusively male literati in Edinburgh. Few women had a say in the magazine.20

Niles argues that the magazine ‘utilize[d] “feminine” topics – fashion, beauty, the marriage market, women’s writing – as tropes to mediate the larger, masculinized concerns of the periodical project’.21 She contends that the magazine was a periodical for the bachelor, and placed women as a necessary component for the bonding between a male reader and author.22 That is, women were just means to create a male, particularly a bachelor, society. Yet, to complicate matters, women were not excluded outright from the magazine. As Nile says, Blackwood’s invited women in, but carefully placed them as women and put constraints on their participation.23

This tendency was not peculiar to Blackwood’s. The Edinburgh Review was another male-dominated magazine. Its first editor, Francis Jeffrey, held that ‘contributors should be “all gentlemen and no pay”’.24 While

19. Jessop insists that literary tastes of nineteenth-century Britain were formed by the periodicals and that a large proportion of the many periodical writers were women, but this remark mainly applies to Victorian periodicals. Christian Isobel Johnstone (1781-1857), whom Jessop mentions as an active female contributor before the Victorian era, first contributed to Blackwood’s in 1827: the 1810s was still the era of male periodical writers. See Ralph Jessop, ‘Viragos of the Periodical Press: Constance Gordon-Cumming, Charlotte Dempster, Margaret Oliphant, Christian Isobel Johnstone’, in A History of Scottish Women’s Writing, ed. by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 216-231 (pp. 216-224).
20. ‘For the early nineteenth century,’ Ferris argues, ‘literary (more broadly, critical) authority was invested in the male middle-class review.’ During the times when novels still did not establish its status, periodicals were anchorage of literary men. See Ina Ferris, ‘Re-Positioning the Novel: Waverley and the Gender of Fiction’, Studies in Romanticism, 28. 2 (1989), 291-301 (p. 292).
22. Niles, pp. 104-05.

It cannot be denied that *The Ayrshire Legatees* is a ‘male-conscious’ text. In the serialised version, Mr Gruel plays the role of a mediator between the people of Garnock and the editor of *Blackwood’s*. It is he who collects the letters of the Pringle family, listens to the responses from the villagers to the letters, and reports all this to the magazine. The editor merely introduces what Mr Gruel has sent to the magazine. Their roles are clearly divided: Mr Gruel as observer and reporter, the editor as introducer. The serialised version, which has both a reporter (observer) and an editor (introducer) is realistic, giving the story verisimilitude.

The Responsive Notes in the serialised version also proves this work is male-conscious. This is a question-and-answer section, in which Galt answers letters from various regions in Britain, refuting many of them that cast doubt on the authenticity of the letters and the existence of Garnock people. When the presence of Mr Gruel is put in question, Galt insists, ‘To doubt the veracity of papers is no new species of skepticism, but to deny the being of a medical man [. . .] is, we do think, a flagrant example of the infidel tendencies of the present age.’\footnote{Galt, vol. 8, p. 11.} Galt repeatedly insists in this section that Mr Gruel is real, people in Garnock are real, and the letters are real. ‘Veracity’ is the keyword in this work, and when readers doubt it, Galt undertakes an emphatic refutation.

As these examples show, authenticity was an important concern to the work. But why was it so important for the work not to be fictitious? One of the reasons is the religious atmosphere in Scotland: religious inhibitions impeded the development of a self-respecting Scottish fiction.\footnote{David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 206.} To gain readers, novels had to pretend to be true to life.
However, an equally important reason was concern for conservative male readers. Conservative men, like religious people, did not approve of novels, and even those who tolerated novel-reading did not want themselves to be seen reading novels. Take *The Inheritance* by Susan Ferrier, for example. Here Uncle Adam, a misanthropic old man who leads a secluded life, has a romantic aspect, for he cannot forget his past love. He is not particularly religious; yet, he cannot admit that he indulges in reading a novel:

In a paroxysm of ennui one bad day he had taken up the first volume of ‘Guy Mannering,’ with little expectation of deriving either amusement or instruction from it; but, once fairly entered upon it, he found himself compelled, *nolens volens*, to proceed, which he did, however, in the most secret and stealthy manner. Uncle Adam had been no novel reader even in his younger days, and with him, as with many other excellent but, we must suppose, mistaken people, novels and mental imbecility were ideas inseparably united in his brain. Novel writers he had always conceived to be born idiots, and novel readers he considered as something still lower in the scale of intellect. [. . .] He read and re-read, and paused and pondered, and often turned back, but never looked forward even while experiencing the most intense anxiety as to the result. In short, Uncle Adam’s whole being was completely absorbed in this (to him) new creation; while, at the same time, he blushed even in private at his own weakness in filling his head with such idle havers, and indeed never could have held it up again if he had been detected with a volume in his hand.  

When he is caught reading a novel, he is totally at a loss:

‘You seem to be much interested in your studies,’ said Lady Rossville, as she stooped to pick it up for him.

Mr. Ramsay purpled with shame, as he tried to affect a tone of indifference, and said, ‘Oo – I – hem – it’s just a wheen idle havers there that I – just – hem! They maun ha’e little to do that tak’up their head writing sic nonsense.’

‘I never heard the author accused of idleness before,’ said Lady Rossville, with a smile; ‘and no one need be ashamed to own the interest excited by these wonderful works of genius.’

Note the different reactions the old man and the young woman have toward the novel. Uncle Adam says he does not care about the eyes of the world, but he seems to be extremely conscious of them when reading a novel.

The reason why The Ayrshire Legatees had to pretend to be factual, not fictitious, is now clear: the supposed readers of the magazine were men, and to appeal to those male readers, it had to be authentic. The appearance of Waverley (1814) raised the status of novels, but Waverley alone was not enough. Doubts about and hopes for fiction were still intermingled in this period. The Ayrshire Legatees had to be a male-conscious text.

4. Female Critics in The Ayrshire Legatees

Appearing in a male-dominated magazine, The Ayrshire Legatees is, as might be expected, male-conscious. However, this does not mean that the story develops around males. Female voices dominate the text, and

29. Ferrier, p. 615.
30. Ferrier, p. 163.
31. Ferris emphasises the importance of Waverley as a return to the novel of responsibility, rationality, and public concerns, but admits there was a clash of opinions about Waverley (See Ferris, ‘Re-Positioning’ pp. 298-99). Novels were still the target of male suspicion. In 1820, only six years after the publication of Waverley, the literary climate would be still hostile to novels.
32. In Blackwood’s, articles were usually anonymous. Periodicals were directed to educated readers and assumed a primarily male audience, so readers would have assumed primarily male authorship (See Joanne Wilkes, Women Reviewing Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Critical Reception of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronté and George Eliot (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 8). However, The Ayrshire Legatees preserves no anonymity of the characters, and readers know that most of the clever if biting criticism comes from women.
the Garnock world revolves around females. In the act of reading and criticising, women occupy a central position.

The focus is on letter-readers, not the four letter-writers of the Pringle family. Miss Mally Glencairn, Mrs Glibbans, Miss Isabella Todd, and Mr Snodgrass are the main talkers in the text, followed by Miss Becky Glibbans and Mrs Craig. The male characters, Mr Craig, Mr Michelwham, and Mr Daff, speak less. Mrs Glibbans, Miss Mally, and Mrs Craig, in particular, show the power of women in Garnock.

Mrs Glibbans is the most talkative of the letter-readers. Her absolute faith in religion makes her unafraid of expressing her candid opinions and her emotions after letters are read, so that she exercises power over her companions: ‘the countenance of Mrs Glibbans was evidently so darkened, that it daunted the company like an eclipse of the sun, under which all nature is saddened.’ Even men are daunted by her. With Mrs Mally Glencairn and Mrs Craig, she challenges the male authority of Andrew and Snodgrass.

Though the dominant female voice in the novel is that of Mrs Glibbans, the voice of Miss Mally Glencairn is piquant and influential. She does not talk as much as Mrs Glibbans, but her comments are to the point and therefore she has as much impact as Mrs Glibbans on people around her.

Miss Mally Glencairn is an educated woman; for she knows Latin:

> [T]he following letters were produced, and read, as Miss Mally said, ‘pro bono publico,’ and to satisfy all concerned in the family. Where Miss Mally learned her Latin, we know not, for at Moore’s school, neither in our time, nor in that of our senior, the right honourable David Boyle, Lord Justice Clerk, were any young women taught there in that tongue; and we doubt, if even such a thing was known, in the more ancient days of the worthy Mr Dickie.

Readers don’t know where she learned Latin, but women usually did not have knowledge of Latin then, so she is a relatively progressive woman. Blackwood’s emphasised the importance of Latin, saying, ‘The discontinuance of lecturing in Latin in our universities may have been favourable to the diffusion of knowledge, but it must be quite evident to every careful observer, that it has been very injurious to the cultivation of Latin.’

To Blackwood’s, the neglect of Latin education at Scottish universities in favour of other subjects was unforgivable. Scotland’s universities provided little Latin and less Greek, and Scottish students graduated in ‘happy ignorance’ of that ‘ancient and abstruse learning’. Blackwood’s classicism was also a criticism of modern Scotland’s educational system and shallow mental culture.

It is ironical that Miss Mally Glencairn, who belongs to a gender from which Blackwood’s disconnected itself, has the knowledge that Blackwood’s sought to promote. She is also a nuisance for Blackwood’s in that she is not a domestic woman. She challenges not only men, but also the marriage system itself. She told her former fiancé that education had only a tendency to promote the sale of books. This provoked her fiancé very much, for he had published a short tract which fell stillborn from the press. Because of this remark, they were never on speaking terms again. She does not hesitate to give her opinion whenever she wants, even if it leads to the collapse of her relationship with her fiancé and resultant exclusion from the traditional, secure sphere called ‘home.’ She says ‘marriage is like death – its what we are a’ to come to.’ She chooses to live by herself. She is the very woman Blackwood’s feared, for she challenges men and the patriarchal system.

The woman paid least attention to so far in the history of criticism of The Ayrshire Legatees is Mrs Craig. She was a servant of Mr Craig, but is soon

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35. ‘On a New and Improved Method of Teaching Latin’, Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, 5 (1819), 403-06 (p. 403).
‘promoted’ to being his wife. Before getting married, she has no chance to join the community of letter-reading; but after ascending the ladder to the status of wife of an elder, she never misses a chance to speak. She is a social climber. The big difference between men and women is that the men usually do not have such a means to move up to a high social status without money, whereas women, by marrying a rich man, can raise their status overnight. Mrs Craig would be a threat to those of high status. She even speaks on equal terms with Mr Snodgrass, not caring if she disturbs the community:

‘I was not speaking in a spiritual sense,’ interrupted the other [Mr Snodgrass], ‘but merely made the remark, as introductory to a letter, which I have received from Mr Andrew Pringle, respecting some of the ways of living in London.’ Mrs Craig, who had been so recently translated from the kitchen to the parlour, pricked up her ears at this, not doubting, that the letter would contain something very grand and wonderful, and exclaimed, ‘gude safe’s let’s hear’t – I am unco fond to ken about London, and the King and the Queen; but I believe they are baith dead noo.’

Miss Becky Glibbans gave a satirical keckle at this, and shewed her superior learning, by explaining to Mrs Craig the unbroken nature of the kingly office.\textsuperscript{40}

Her translation from the kitchen to the parlour is an act of cross-bordering realised by marriage. Bachelors in the \textit{Blackwood’s} world would be most afraid of this transgression. Since Mrs Craig’s entry to the community of letter-reading, she is the one who starts conversations: ‘There was a considerable diversity of opinion among the commentators on the epistle. Mrs Craig was the first who broke silence [. . .].’\textsuperscript{41} She has the nerve to challenge male authority, daring to question Mr Snodgrass: ‘When Mr

\textsuperscript{40} Galt, vol. 8, p. 260.
\textsuperscript{41} Galt, vol. 8, p. 263.
Snodgrass paused, and was folding up the letter, Mrs Craig, bending with her hands on her knees, said, emphatically, “Noo, Sir, what think you of that?” 42 He was not quite prepared to give an answer to a question so abruptly propounded. Mrs Craig is described as a disturber of the established community and of male authority.

The three women here all challenge to the hierarchy, but differ a lot from each other. Miss Mally Glencairn uses her knowledge about Latin and the Bible to challenge the male authority in Garnock, while Mrs Craig her boldness and vernacular speech. Also, their attitudes toward marriage are not unanimous. Mally thinks marriage is not worthwhile, which makes Miss Becky sneer. Their opinions and ways of breaking into the male community are not necessarily unanimous, but the diversity of their voices makes them more powerful in challenging the male society.

5. Female Influence over Men

The three women have power over the men in Garnock, especially over Andrew and Snodgrass, who as bachelors are representatives of the male society of Blackwood’s. Andrew is ‘a Tory of what he [Galt] calls the ultra type’, 43 and his letters are filled with talk of politics and concerned only with men. He observes people around him, especially celebrities of that time, judging them and generalising about them. Andrew’s letters show considerable similarities with Peter’s Letters, perhaps because at this time Galt was consciously trying to adopt the manner of the Blackwood circle in order to obtain its good graces. 44 Andrew belongs to the Blackwood school.

Andrew’s letters are the targets of criticism. One of his letters is so boring that one of the letter-reading circle falls asleep: ‘one of the Clyde skippers, who had fallen asleep, gave such an extravagant snore, followed

42. Galt, vol. 8, p. 262.
43. Aberdein, p. 99.
44. As to the similarities between Peter’s Letters and Andrew’s letters, see Erik Frykman, John Galt’s Scottish Stories, 1820-1823 (Uppsala: Lundequist’ska Bokhandeln, 1959), pp. 67-79.
by a groan, that it set the whole company a laughing, and interrupted the 
critical strictures which would otherwise have been made on Mr Andrew 
Pringle’s epistle.’ 45 In another incident, his quasi-Peter-Morris letter is 
openly criticised by Mrs Glibbans.

Mrs Glibbans, whose knowledge of the points of orthodoxy, had 
not their equal in the three adjacent parishes, roundly declared, 
that Mr Andrew Pringle’s letter was nothing but a peasemeal of 
clishmaclavers; that there was no sense in it; and that it was just like 
the writer, a canary idiot, a touch here and a touch there, without 
any thing in the shape of cordiality or satisfaction. Miss Isabella 
Todd answered this objection with that sweetness of manner and 
virgin diffidence which so well becomes a youthful female member of 
the establishment, controverting the dogmas of a stoop of the Relief 
persuasion, by saying, that she thought Mr Andrew had shown a 
fine sensibility. ‘What is sensibility without judgment,’ cried her 
adversary, ‘but a thrashing in the water, and a raising of bells – could 
na the fallow, without a’ his parleyvoos, have said, that such and such 
was the case, and that the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, but 
his clouds, and his spectres, and his visions of Job – O! an he could 
but think like Job! – O! an he would but think like the patient man! 
– and was obliged to claut his flesh with a bit of a broken crock or 
porringer, we might have some hope of a repentance unto life. But 
Andrew Pringle, he’s a gone dick; I never had comfort or expectation 
of the freethinker, since I heard that he was infected with the blue 
and yellow calamity of the Edinburgh Review; in the which, I am 
credibly told, it is set forth, that women have not souls, but only a 
gut, and a gaw, and a gizzard, like a pigeon-dove, or a raven-crow, or 
any other outcast and abominated quadruped.’

Here Miss Mally Glencairn interposed her effectual mediation,

and said, ‘It is very true that Andrew deals in the diplomaticks of obscurity; but it is well known that he has a nerve for genius, and that in his own way, he kens the loan from the crown of the causeway, as well as the duck does the midden from the adle dib.’

Andrew is a bachelor, and his writing resembles that of Peter Morris. He belongs to Blackwood’s male-dominated society. This Andrew the women in Garnock reject. Garnock people, especially the female critics, judge his letter severely, and find Mrs Pringle’s letter to be superior to those of other writers including Andrew: ‘it was unanimously agreed, that Mrs Pringle gave a more full account of London, than either father, son, or daughter.’

Her spelling is incorrect, and she is not familiar with politics, but she can be regarded as so good a writer as to challenge and defeat Andrew. A recent critic, Aldrich, contests this: ‘Broadly sketched, Mrs Pringle is the least interesting of the travelers.’ This is the opinion of a professional, authoritative critic. It is ironic that such a difference in valuation of the same letters is found between a professional critic and the unauthoritative, marginal female critics whose judgment was never supposed to be public but was slipped into a male-dominated, authoritative, and conservative magazine. Behind Galt’s humour lies a tacit challenge to the male-dominated literary world: some male readers would find the unconventional remarks of the female critics in The Ayrshire Legatees audacious and provocative.

Castle says that eighteenth-century female critics ‘regularly gravitated to the more iconoclastic topics of the day – the power of original genius, the rejection of classical models, the superiority of fiction and drama over poetry. [. . .] Women critics were almost always on the side of the “Moderns” – in favour of novelty and experimentation, vernacular styles, and the

democratization of reading and writing’. This remark applies as well to the female critics in Garnock. They are not conservative, but ‘iconoclastic’ and ‘modern’ critics: they are not afraid of criticising males, which would be a dire threat to the male society of Blackwood’s.

Women’s criticism even reaches Snodgrass, the young minister. He is a bachelor, who belongs to the conservative world where to be seen reading *Ivanhoe* (1819) is a thing to be ashamed of. Like Andrew he belongs to the masculine world where factual authenticity is valued more highly than fiction.

He cannot, however, compete with any of the women in Garnock: Miss Mally, Mrs Glibbans, and Mrs Craig. In terms of learning, he falls behind Miss Mally:

‘What think you, Mr Snodgrass,’ said that spirit-stricken lady [Mrs Glibbans], ‘What think you of this dining on the Lord’s Day, – this playing on the harp; the carnal Mozarting of that ungodly family, with whom the corrupt human nature of our friends has been chambering.’ Mr Snodgrass was at some loss for an answer, and hesitated, but Miss Mally Glencairn relieved him from his embarrassment, by remarking, that ‘the harp was a holy instrument.’

Here Miss Mally Glencairn helps Mr Snodgrass answer the question Mrs Glibbans asks. While he cannot make a quick reply to the question, Miss Mally knows what to answer.

Mr Snodgrass himself knows that Miss Mally Glencairn is a smart woman:

‘It appears to us,’ said Mr Snodgrass, as he folded up the letter to return it to his pocket, ‘that the Londoners, with all their advantages

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of information, are neither purer nor better than their fellow-subjects
in the country.’ – ‘As to their betterness,’ replied Miss Mally, ‘I have
a notion that they are far waur; and I hope you do not think that
earthly knowledge of any sort has a tendency to make mankind, or
womankind either, any better; for was not Solomon, who had more
of it than any other man, a type and testification, that knowledge
without grace is but vanity.’ The young clergyman was somewhat
startled at this application of a remark on which he laid no particular
stress, and was thankful in his heart that Mrs Glibbans was not
present.51

He is at the same time surprised at Miss Mally’s remark and afraid of Mrs
Glibbans. Mrs Glibbans, who fires questions at him, is a nuisance to him.
The problem is that his status as a minister is always in danger of being
overturned by Mrs Glibbans. In front of her strictness of religious faith, he
has no chance to defeat her. It is evident that he tries to avoid being alone
with Mrs Glibbans:

‘ye maun let me go with you, and we can spiritualize on the road;
for I hae promis’t Mrs Craig to be wi’ her at the crying, to see the
upshot, so I hope you will come awa.’

It would be impossible in us to suppose, that Mr Snodgrass had
any objections to spiritualize with Mrs Glibbans on the road between
Irvine and Garnock; but notwithstanding her urgency, he excused
himself from going with her.52

Mrs Glibbans does not seem to care whether Mr Snodgrass feels comfortable
with her or not, but Mr Snodgrass does. The presence of intelligent and
religious women is troublesome to him, and the oncoming of Mrs Craig adds to
his inclination to throw up his hands over the women in the parish.

‘THE Doctor,’ said Mrs Glibbans, as the schoolmaster concluded, ‘is there like himself – a true orthodox Christian, standing up for the word, and overflowing with charity even for the sinner. But, Mr Snodgrass, I did not ken before that the Bishops had a hand in the making of the Acts of the Parliament; I think, Mr Snodgrass, if that be the case, there should be some doubt in Scotland about obeying them. However that may be, sure am I that the Queen, though she was a perfect Deliah [sic], she has nothing to fear from them; for have we not read in the Book Martyrs, and other church histories, of their concubines and indulgences, in the papist times, to all manner of carnal iniquity. But if she be that noghty woman that they say’ – ‘Gude safe’s,’ cried Mrs Craig, ‘if she be a noghty woman, awa’ wi’ her, awa’ wi’ her – wha kens the cantrips she may play us!’ Here Miss Mally Glencairn interposed, and informed Mrs Craig, that a noghty woman was not, as she seemed to think, a witch wife. ‘I am sure,’ said Miss Becky Glibbans, ‘that Mrs Craig might have known that’ – ‘O ye’re a spiteful deevil,’ whispered Miss Mally, with a smile to her; and turning in the same moment to Miss Isabella Todd, begged her to read Miss Pringle’s letter – a motion which Mr Snodgrass seconded chiefly to abridge the conversation, during which, though he wore a serene countenance, Mr M’Gruel informs us he often suffered much. Indeed, says our worthy Kilwinning correspondent, when I saw him after that meeting, he said very earnestly, that he hoped he had committed no sin so bad as to require such an expiation, as to dree penance as the pastor for life of the parish of Garnock.53

This scene has a climactic effect and is quite important when thinking of the women-versus-men relation in *The Ayrshire Legatees*. Women keep talking and talking, criticising and criticising. Snodgrass has no chance to speak and even says he no longer wants to be in this parish as a pastor. This could be his declaration of defeat in the women-dominated society of

criticism. He cannot win the game against women. What is shown in the scene is that Galt made narrative authority available to non-elite first-person narrators, some of whom are figures from the margins of society.\textsuperscript{54}

Female readers’ critical voices were usually not heard, for they were not professional critics, but just amateur readers, who had no chance to have their opinions written down. However, in the male-dominated society of \textit{Blackwood’s}, Galt made a place available for subaltern female readers to give their opinions. Galt reveals in his work that the female criticism that was never written down also constitutes an important part of literary criticism.\textsuperscript{55} Galt’s achievement in \textit{The Ayrshire Legatees} is that he challenges the male society of \textit{Blackwood’s} by bringing the voices of non-professional female critics into it.

However, their voices disappear at the end of the story. Mrs Craig dies, and her voice cannot be heard any more. Mrs Glibbans marries Mr Craig, losing her role as a disturber of the established patriarchal society. Galt suppresses female voices in the end. This text, as a result, can be read both as a traditional male-dominated text fitted to the taste of \textit{Blackwood’s Magazine} and as a subversive text filled with female voices. This ambiguity enabled the work to appear in the conservative \textit{Blackwood’s Magazine}.

\textit{The Ayrshire Legatees} brought another challenge to Galt as a novel writer. He wrote \textit{The Spinster, or the Autobiography of Miss Mally Glencairn}, based on a fictitious character in \textit{The Ayrshire Legatees}, though unfortunately the manuscript was left unfinished.\textsuperscript{56} Here, he attempted to place a female voice at the centre of the text – an unusual but ambitious step for a writer whose previous works featured mainly male protagonists. If it had been finished, it would have shown a new aspect of Galt as a writer. In any case, Galt’s first novel was a challenging work both for \textit{Blackwood’s} and for Galt.

\textsuperscript{54} Duncan, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{55} Discussing eighteenth-century female criticism, Castle insists that some of the most important female criticism in the period was never written down at all (See Castle, p. 444). This remark may also apply to nineteenth-century Scottish female criticism.