



Margot Gayle Backus, *Scandal Work: James Joyce, the New Journalism, and the Home Rule Newspaper Wars*

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An engaged, communicative style and approach immediately mark out Margot Backus's study of the role of journalistic and political scandal in the work of James Joyce as a fresh and winning contribution to the critical debate. Several well-established elements of the Joyce story make this approach just right. Joyce's work centrally and repeatedly dramatises the political sex scandal that brought down Charles Stuart Parnell. His artist-hero Stephen Dedalus is especially sensitive to this scandal and the profound political rift which ensued. Joyce himself became embroiled in an angry dialogue about the supposedly shocking nature of his early collection of stories, *Dubliners*, which scandalously kept them out of print for a decade. However, a *succès de scandale* was eventually the making of *Ulysses* as the underground classic of literary modernism. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce returned to the theme of scandalous sex crime and the plethora of discursive activity that inevitably surrounds it. To approach this material anew in terms of scandal itself, and especially the ways in which political self-interest and the institutions of the new journalism deploy and manipulate scandal as a political weapon both then and now, is acute and engaging in a way that few academic studies of Joyce manage to be.

Joyce's writing is full of journalism and often about journalism, and it is a strength of this study that the ambivalences of its complex relation to its journalistic other and the centrality of this to Joyce's cultural empowerment are kept in view. Archival-flavoured, especially in its use of cartoon illustrations, the study might perhaps have promised exhaustive in-depth examination of the specific journalistic sources of Joyce's writing. As it is, the energetic line of attack works with some reasonably well-known but important material that is given a new edge in terms of its "scandalous" dimension: such as the scandal of Parnell and Oscar Wilde, and the presence of the Victorian campaigning journalist W. T. Stead in the "saving" of Stephen from Nighttown in "Circe," and even the scandalous elements in Shakespeare's life and plays.

Interestingly, the fresh approach of Backus's study reminds us that scandal-mongering journalism works by naming real people—just as Joyce "notoriously" does in his fiction. Highbrow and lowbrow forms of culture clash unsettlingly in the world of scandal and an ethics that can all too often merge into hypocrisy. We are reminded by the study throughout



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that scandal is a cultural-political weapon and that, although it hurt Joyce's career and his reputation in several ways, requiring him to construct a quasi-mythical image of the publicly hounded and betrayed artist, and perhaps contributing to the aloofness of the Dedalus persona and the difficulty of the later work, it might also have been a weapon which he could use and adapt for aesthetic ends.

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