Fashioning Irish Masculinity: 
Dandyism and Athleticism in *Ulysses*

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I. Introduction

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Spivak’s answer to her own question is clear: “The subaltern cannot speak” (104). This succinct and definitive answer, whether we agree with her or not, involves rather convoluted arguments and invites some new speculation. The subaltern does not always know what s/he really wants in part because s/he has already internalized the logic of the colonizer. Spivak’s assertion has brought to the fore the complexity of colonial situations, suggesting that colonial subjectivity cannot be fully understood by the facile binary opposition of the colonizer and the colonized, the conqueror and the victim.

While a considerable amount of critical attention has been given to female subjectivity in *Ulysses*, masculinity remained a rather obscure area of study until recently. However, as Tracey Teets Schwarze points out, “Joyce’s *Ulysses* showcases the tension between [...] competing styles of masculinity [of Victorian England] and the confusion they caused among turn-of-the-century men, who
attempted to reproduce the Kingsleyan ethos and locate its externalized Others but who simultaneously feared to discover the locus of difference within the masculine body” (72). Indeed, Dublin men in *Ulysses* point to the interrelatedness of nationhood and manhood, the entangled relationship between imperialistic nationalism and defensive nationalism of the colonized, and the troubling location of the racial other among them. Similarly, while focusing on “the double-bind of Irish manhood”—the English construction of the Irish as feminine on the one hand and beastly on the other—Joseph Valente argues that “Joyce elaborates the problem of [...] the colonial predicament in general and the trauma of Irish manhood in particular” (112). According to Schwarze and Valente, even as the Irish men in “Cyclops” purport to dismantle the Victorian / Edwardian style of muscular manliness, they reinscribe it or reveal an anxiety over their own manliness at best. So the question is again “can the subaltern speak?” This question is particularly relevant to discussions of masculinity in *Ulysses* because, as Moonsook Kim appropriately notes, Joyce suggests an overcoming of subaltern consciousness as a key step toward breaking the mental paralysis of Dublin men (161).

In this essay, I hope to expand the aforementioned critics’ explorations of masculinity by examining the relationship between Victorian / Edwardian notions of masculinity and the construction of Irish manliness in *Ulysses*. While seeing masculinity as theatrical performance both in its nature and in its exertion, I focus on the ways in which dandies and muscular men in 1904 Dublin reproduce the ethos of the colonizer while importing English styles of masculinity. Joyce’s cultural criticism of Dublin is firmly grounded on the awareness of the predicament of the colonial that is often overlooked in the rhetoric of aggressive nationalists. *Ulysses* problematizes internalized colonialism while exploring possibilities and pitfalls of masculine self-fashioning in early-twentieth century Dublin.