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The British Pop Dandy: Masculinity, Popular Music and Culture

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Book Reviews

The British Pop Dandy: Masculinity, Popular Music and Culture

STAN HAWKINS

Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009

ISBN: 978-0-7546-5858-0, 244 pp., \$99.95 (cloth)

In *The British Pop Dandy*, Stan Hawkins examines two important questions in musical and cultural studies: In what ways is masculinity conceptualized in pop and performance? And how are these notions embodied by those artists whom Hawkins has labeled “pop dandies”? Hawkins’ definition of a pop dandy entails “a set of attitudes, norms, and conditions of self-aestheticization that lead to social elevation and commercial gain” (184). Building on the work of Charles Baudelaire, the nineteenth-century French poet who first formulated the theory of the dandy, Hawkins attributes dandyism to naivety, temperament, and performance. In this text, Hawkins further develops the image of the dandy as a manifestation of sexuality, music, and politics. The dandy acts as the bodily site of political and social conventions that he intentionally manipulates to transgress dominant discourses. Hawkins’ work is fascinating and insightful; readers will delight in finding a well-researched study that combines social and cultural theory, popular music and masculinity studies.

Hawkins uses a diverse range of British pop examples—David Bowie, Jarvis Cocker, Pete Doherty, Morrissey, Adam Ant, Robert Palmer, Robbie Williams, and even the unlikely Sid Vicious—to illustrate the varied personas of the pop dandy. A significant strength of this text is the interdisciplinary approach Hawkins employs to position the dandy within a social, historical, and political context: he draws comparisons and contrasts through dandified forbears W. H. Auden, Beau Brummell, Noël Coward, Quentin Crisp, Andy Warhol, and Oscar Wilde. Hawkins is careful to specify that the list of individuals he examines is by no means comprehensive; but, by limiting his scope, he is able to focus the reader fully on his argument as he examines each of his subjects’ dandyism.

Hawkins expertly establishes the stylistic vocal intonations, gestures, and mannerisms that are indicators of the pop dandy and that reflect a negotiated cultural and political space the dandy occupies. Hawkins states that “queering is an agent for social and cultural orders, prescribing difference at the same time as upholding dominant values” (105). This space further conveys the trends and behavior patterns that are linked to performance. It also serves to attract the audience, and allows fans to address the complexities of their own identities, sexualities, and desires. Hawkins considers the representation of dandies less as effeminate or homosexual, and more as a

type of masculine sensitivity and vulnerability. By circumventing the limitations of heteronormative and masculine representation, pop dandies demonstrate the availability of a negotiated and polymorphous identity. The dandy's queer performance accents gender and works as both compliance and resistance. This fluctuating and mutable identity creates an invaluable connection between performer and audience.

Hawkins' argument is of dual importance. First, it demonstrates the significance of popular culture by identifying the subjectivity of pop figures and demonstrating that "a national style is as much about creating bonds and boundaries as cultural capital" (52). The subjectivity of pop dandies is shrouded in music, which acts as a structuring tool for the artist. Subjectivity and musical performance become the expressions of hyperbolic display. Second, dandyism is the continual acknowledgment of the connection between gender display and musical expressivity, where every dominant code is scrutinized. The emergence of an intentional pop image, one centered on style, originality, and individualism, is the crux of the dandy, and here Hawkins counters the misconception that dandyism, and by extension pop music, are fixed and unmovable.

I was curious as to how Hawkins would approach the notion that pop music is the creation of producers or the media and dictated by market demand and economic value. Hawkins quickly acknowledges this concern and does not attempt to deny its relevance, but rather includes it in his larger argument. The music industries (which can also be considered quite "dandified") serve in part to heighten the intentionality of the pop dandy and to ensure that negotiated codes are regulated, as do the media, which construct the peculiarities of the dandy through publicized hype. The recorded voice, created at the hands of the producers, captures the listener's focus and establishes an idealized bond between performer and audience. The relationship between fan and pop dandy is deepened by the display of visual imagery such as music videos, the Internet, and live concerts. While these images act as the gateway to the pop dandy's "real" persona, the voice exposes vulnerability. The inner being of the artist, reflecting to the audience its own idealized image, provides corporeal intimacy between pop dandy and fan.

Since Hawkins places such emphasis on the notion of intentionality, it is surprising that he does not expand his consideration of pop dandies to their relationships with prominent female supermodels, such as Bowie and Iman, Jagger and Jeri Hall, Doherty and Kate Moss. It would be worthwhile to examine these relationships as extensions of the dandies' aesthetics and narcissism. Arguably, the pop dandies intentionally use these women as body and image adornments that serve to enhance the dandies' deliberate self-design.

It is also unfortunate that Hawkins did not expand his analysis of the dandies' bawdy and raucous lives. Regarding Hawkins' notion of the intentionality of pop dandies, the reader is left to wonder whether the socio-cultural emphasis on these individuals' boisterous lives works to align the viewer and fan with a highly coded standard of acceptable public behavior. Therefore, the pop dandy may be situated as an abject cultural figure rather than as an artist "with a talent to observe Britishness and the uncertainties of everyday life" (4). Also, the dandy's "bad-boy" behavior

would be especially interesting if compared to someone like Morrissey, who maintains a drug-free, vegetarian, and private lifestyle.

A musicologist by training, Hawkins uses theories of instrumentation and notation tonality to support his arguments surrounding performance and voice. However, *The British Pop Dandy* diverges from his previous studies because it is largely based on historic, cultural, and even anecdotal examples rather than on music theory. Hawkins meticulously describes every example, ensuring that all readers gain a base knowledge of the array of pop dandyism. To a music-theory purist this might come as a slight distraction, but it serves to open Hawkins' text to a wider audience. Hawkins does interject musical theory to support his ideas on the voice, and he juxtaposes these discussions with social and political commentary regarding the dandy. For those who lack formal training or familiarity with the musical selections, I recommend obtaining copies of the audio and video examples to ensure solid understandings of Hawkins' musical points, which he very carefully and artfully outlines. Included in *The British Pop Dandy* is a commendable discography organized by referenced albums and songs.

Hawkins' work expands not only the pop cultural canon but also the disciplines of cultural, gender, and sexuality studies. He validates pop music and culture as legitimate forms of art and entertainment while also challenging misconceptions regarding the authority and authenticity of pop music and artists. Works such as *The British Pop Dandy* demonstrate the need for a renewed focus on the study of masculinity. Hawkins introduces important and nuanced research to the field and undertakes the heady deconstruction of identity and the discourses surrounding body politics.

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The Death Proclamation of Generation X: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Goth, Grunge, and Heroin

MAXIM W. FUREK

New York: iUniverse, 2008, 231 pp., \$19.95 (paperback)

In *The Death Proclamation of Generation X*, Maxim Furek presents a balanced and sensitive portrait of a much-maligned generation. Furek tells his story in eleven chapters that consider youth subcultures ("The Culture of Goth"), music and film ("Hollywood on Dope"), events ("Woodstock Burning"), and icons (Kurt Cobain, Anna Nicole Smith), with each chapter including many useful, often shocking, and always credible statistics and profiles of iconic Gen X'ers (e.g. Andrew Wood, Marilyn Manson, River Phoenix).