

Title: Конспирологический Детектив: Boris Akunin's Dandy, or a Century in Queer Profiles from London to Moscow

Author: Elizabeth Richmond-Garza, University of Texas at Austin

Email: emrg@austin.utexas.edu

From Beau Brummel's famous levées in the 1790s to Sherlock Holmes' black suits in the 1890s to Erast Petrivich Fandorin's life-saving corset in the 1990s, dandified attire and attitude are connected unexpectedly to an intellectual, nation-preserving masculinity. 007's nonchalance affirms the old-Etonian dandy as national protector. Thomas Carlyle's Sartor Resartus sees the dandy's appreciation as his actualization. The dandy lives to be observed and to observe. As Wilde quipped, "One must either be a work or Art, or wear a work of Art." Beyond aesthetic self-construction, however, lies a vision of ideal masculinity that is both visible and readable. In Boris Akunin's protagonist and his English predecessor, the dandy embodies a masculinized, controversial, and marked aesthetic as well as rationalism under threat and the policing (which is meant literally here) of both social and ideological deviance. Arthur Conan Doyle's preoccupation with Holmes' intimate domestic relationship with Dr. John Watson reprises the dandy's publication of his private self. Read in the context of Francis Galton's arrogant proto-eugenic composite portraits, the dandy detective claims to read internal ethics and criminal pre-dispositions based upon physiognomy. Such phenomenological over-confidence belies the need for real intimacy which underpins Holmes' own method. Akunin capitalizes on the implications for this dandiacal performative both in the fin de siècle and today. Akunin's dandy, and attentive interpreters of his fabrications, offers an alternative epistemology, which both subverts and lampoons the dominant desire to profile and define. A Georgian japanologist writes nostalgic detective stories in Russian under Putin's gaze, subversively deploying the archetype. Becoming dandiacal is an interstitial position, allowing hypermasculinity to become its other. As Holmes notes: "Once you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."