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**Gardner, Abigail (2015) Review: Performing Englishness: Identity and Politics in a Contemporary Folk Resurgence by Trish Winter and Simon Keegan-Phipps . Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013. x +185 pp. ISBN 978-0-719-08539-0**  
**Nick Drake Dreaming England. By Nathan Wiseman-Trowse. London: Reaktion, 2013. 165 pp. ISBN 978-1-780-23176-1. Popular Music, 34 (1), 145 – 147.**

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*Performing Englishness: Identity and politics in a contemporary folk resurgence.* By Trish Winter and Simon Keegan-Phipps. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013, x +185pp. ISBN 978-0-7190-8539-0

*Nick Drake Dreaming England.* By Nathan Wiseman-Trowse. London: Reaktion, 2013, 165pp. ISBN 978-1-78023-176-1

In 2005, the Northumbrian folk singer Rachel Unthank and her band The Winterset covered Nick Drake's '*Riverman*'. Its opening lines '*Betty came by on her way, said she had a word to say, about things today and fallen leaves*' serve to underline the preoccupations of two books whose central theme is England and Englishness, both as a contemporary set of ideas and complexities and as something 'fallen'. Unthank makes an appearance in both Trish Winters and Simon Keegan-Phipps' study into the contemporary English folk resurgence and in Nathan Wiseman-Trowse's work on Nick Drake, which, although hugely different in remit and tone, are linked by an enquiry into how popular music might engage with and be representative of, national identity.

In this fascinating and meticulously researched study, Winters (writing from a Cultural Studies' perspective) and Keegan-Phipps (an ethnomusicologist) detail the current English folk scene's 'shift in profile and popularity' (p.1). The book begins with their claim that the resurgence in Englishness across contemporary folk music and dance cultures is in line with broader scholarly, social and political concerns over national identity. Noting the increase in folk festivals, awards, academic recognition (Newcastle University's 'folk degree') and the 'foregrounding [of] Englishness' (p.1) by participants and artists, they investigate grass roots practices, media involvement and folk's relationships to and intersections with national and regional identity and politics.

The book is structured into two sections, with Part 1 focusing on the specificities of the contemporary folk scene, its historical context, industry, representation and instrumentation. Part II broadens out the scope of enquiry to situate this 'folk resurgence' as part of a wider cultural and political shift towards conceptualising Englishness and the concomitant concerns over inclusion/ exclusion, ethnicity and the politics of the far-right.

This organisation works well as Part 1 offers a rich and in-depth account of a thriving music and dance culture. Chapter 1 maps this resurgence onto a continuum of folk revivals, continuing on from Cecil Sharp's early twentieth century vision of folk as a pure music of a rural England and the 1960s' revival which reconfigured it as the musical vehicle for working-class experience.

Chapter 2 offers a detailed description of the tensions at play around the contemporary folk industry. With its continued adherence to amateurism and authenticity, the authors highlight the potential disjuncture between contemporary folk's underlying principles as counterpoint and/or antidote to the perceived commercialisation of contemporary popular culture (p 39) and its position within a current industry that expects professionalism and commercialism.

Chapter 3 and 4 are case study driven, the first focusing on current folk artists' engagement with and representation by, the mainstream (such as Seth Lakeman, Jim Moray, The Demon Barber Roadshow and Morris Offspring). Chapter 4 continues the case study model, this time emphasising the musical styles, melodic structures and instrumental choices that might be construed as 'English'.

Part II positions the folk resurgence as part of a broader cultural and political enquiry into nation and belonging, with Chapter 5 investigating folk as part of a 'wider cultural interest in Englishness' (p.21), responses to which from within the folk scene, the authors clarify, can range from radical, or apolitical, to right wing. Chapter 6 concentrates on Englishness's position in the national imaginary as rural idyll, and folk music's role and response to that construct. A key feature in this analysis is that for many folk musicians the focus on locality (Devon, Northumberland, Essex) is far more significant than nation, a monolith seemingly intersected with distinct local narratives. What emerges from the author's research (interviews with members of the folk 'scene', musicians, producers and fans) is how contemporary folk music and dance is characterised by both rootedness and diversity, marked by inherent complexities and heterogeneities that herald 'multiple Englands' (p.130).

The final chapter highlights the struggles that many folk musicians have with nationalism and the spectre of fascism; where Englishness remains implicitly white (p.136). There is an acknowledgement that elements within contemporary folk music veer between celebration and guilt (p.144), and mention is given to 'folk against fascism', started in 2009, which was an attempt by bands such as Bellowhead to reclaim folk music from its appropriation by the far-right. It is with this spectre of the rise of political extremism across Europe that the book ends, stating how important it is to engage with these issues, however 'unpalatable' (p.167) they may be. And indeed it does feel like an important book, as its reach and scholarliness add greatly to an understanding of a current folk resurgence whose political ramifications are multiple and complex.

Wiseman-Trowse's monograph is a much more contained affair. It is an attempt to deconstruct Nick Drake's posthumous incarnation as shy, romantic troubadour by illustrating the memorialising processes that have marked him out as the introspective pastoral English artist. It is not helped in this respect by its cover, which shows a profile of Drake in a field of long grass with a tree in the background and its typeface, 'Dreaming England', in green. Wiseman-Trowse uses media accounts of his early releases, friends' recollections and discursive analyses of selected tracks to piece together an account that tries to inject into the Drake narrative something other than the tortured genius myth that has accumulated around him. In this respect, *Dreaming England* is an archaeological attempt to excavate Drake, focusing on contexts from which his music arose in order to re-present him as a musician whose work is about collisions; between modernity and tradition, town and city, Englishness and the Other.

Chapter 1 sets out to establish a working definition of Englishness against which Drake can be mapped. For such a key identifier, the pool from which Wiseman-Trowse draws seems a little small (Miller, 1995) as there are a number of seminal accounts of Englishness and (pop)

identity that would help shore up this foundational benchmark more (Hall, 1996; Cloonan, 1997; Aughey, 2005). But Wiseman-Trowse moves swiftly on to make his key intervention, which is that Drake 'represents a point of articulation or ambivalence between England and its 'others' that works to shape Englishness itself' (p.32). This is characterised by a sense of rootlessness and loss that is related to empire and Drake's placement within it (p.37). Much of the chapter is biographical, focusing on Drake's upper middle class background and education (Marlborough and Cambridge). How his music then comes to define nation is the subject of Chapter 2, which is where we start to see the problem that Wiseman-Trowse has. By his own admission, Drake's work is elusive, and attempts to configure him 'as' English are largely driven by posthumous 'iconographic framing' that ignore the 'lack of specificity' (p.39) within his work. What Wiseman-Trowse does is contextualise Drake within the 1960s, noting his diverse influences (modal jazz, US psychedelia and English liturgical works), to argue that he articulates latent tensions over what might be understood as Englishness, especially when there was a sense of an England 'passing away' (p.65), which we hear in his upper-middle class accent, so different to the American and Northern English intonations prevalent in popular music at the time. This offers us a richer context from which to understand Drake's contribution, but the subsequent argument that his three albums, *Five Leaves Left*, *Bryter Later* and *Pink Moon*, are sonic landscapes of the rural, the urban and the interior remain under theorised and unconvincing.

In Chapter 3 we are taken on a tour of the places Drake lived and invited to map out the relationship between place and sound, country and city to investigate how 'he represents moments of negotiation and conciliation between competing mythologies of English national character' (p.68) and between Romanticism and modernity, although it is still not clear how. Loss appears again in Chapter 4 where Drake's music is placed within a lineage of English melancholy traceable back through English art, music (Dowland and Britten) and literature to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Using Freud's 1917 *Mourning and Melancholia*, Wiseman-Trowse argues that the key to understanding Drake's on-going importance is how his music enables a reflection on loss in relation to national identity. Again this seems unsubstantiated and subjective, although potentially plausible.

The book ends with a discussion of Drake's 'posthumous popularity' (p.112). His music is now used to soundtrack British TV cooking and countryside shows in 'nationalistic or defensive' (p.120) ways. Documentaries on him have repeatedly fixated on his relationship with the English landscape, but at the same time UK, US and European film makers have used his music to convey 'intimacy, not nation' (p.123). Drake is therefore what we want him to be and despite my misgivings over his methodology, Wiseman-Trowse's book is a thoughtful account of the ways in which the accumulated media piled up over his grave, once levelled, leave little with which to work but much to dream of.