

THE OPENING: WRITING THE FIRST NOVEL

Rob Wallet's journey, key to the TotenSeries, begins prior to the book's opening sequence in a London basement. Toten Herzen are back thanks to Wallet's persuasion. We don't see the deal struck between him and the band, (we only have his blog accounts which end at the moment he meets them at their Southern German hideaway in Obergrau.) But throughout the novel Susan Bekker quizzes Wallet on what he hopes to get out of the band's comeback.

Her questions and suspicions should mirror those of the reader, but Wallet is shifty about his motives. He appears to be rebuilding his life following the collapse of his career as a music journalist, but he also talks about 'living on the other side,' being one of the observed, not one of the observers. It's a modern attitude to life with more and more ordinary people seeking fame either through talent shows, voyeuristic television or internet notoriety. Andy Warhol's observation regarding 15 minutes of fame begins to look like an underachievement in the modern age.

If reincarnation sits uneasily with Wallet's death in order to achieve a new life, his situation is aggravated by being parasitic. Bekker and Elaine Daley certainly think so. The novel overlooks his attempts to use the band's success to aid his own flagging career, but instead concentrates on others in the music business who attach themselves to artists: the record labels, the critics, the press, and ultimately the fans. All of them feeding off the comeback, each with their own agenda and ultimately projecting their own preconceptions and prejudices on the band.

The third player in the story is Patrick Wells, the nephew of the 'lost fifth member' of the band Peter Miles. Revenge is a powerful motive for coming back, but Wells's inclusion in the story is a vehicle to explore the myth and alongside Wallet's narrative pull Toten Herzen into the 21st century and set up various chaotic scenarios. Wells will not rest until he achieves justice for his missing relative, and through him we see how the band members were not always the victims of circumstances, but cruel perpetrators.

In one scene Wells is glimpsed by Daley in a bookshop, his accidental appearance on television returning like a ghost. The undead confronted by the living; not something that happens every day!

Part of Bekker's ambition is redemption for past mistakes and she sees the solving of Peter Miles's disappearance a crucial part of that process. But in asking Wallet to solve the mystery we are forced to wonder if she really wants to find the truth or is she paying lip service to the past. Comebacks can sometimes be a cover to hide darker intentions and when she insists that she is not a monster, we can't be sure she means it.

The comeback or return is a common theme in storytelling through the ages. The resulting dilemma usually falls into one of two scenarios: the protagonist's world has moved on producing discomfort or misunderstanding. Messianic figures – and devils – are created in these scenarios that can be as varied as Don Giovanni and Get Carter. The second outcome is that others have moved on in life not expecting the comeback of others; a marriage following death, suspicion of the imposter, the corpse bubbling up from the depths of the river. (The latter scenario will come about eventually in the TotenSeries. . . .)

Within We Are Toten Herzen there is the anecdote told by Marco Jongbloed to Tom Scavinio. He describes a book owned by Dee Vincent, written in the 13th century and telling the story of how the first European vampires came to be. Following a cataclysmic explosion in a valley near Garmisch,

the dead villagers begin to emerge from the lost valley after several weeks, resurrected by forces beyond the understanding of people living at that time.

The novel takes the familiar folklore tropes and transfers them to a scientific context by introducing Yves Sunier and Diana May Ronsons' theory of the Janome: the anti-matter version of every human being that lives on when the 'real' body dies; entering our universe as if coming back from the dead. With this device I hoped to lead the reader down a foggy road where fact and fiction blur into one and familiar mysteries take on a curious plausibility. Vampires, werewolves, ghosts, demons: could they exist, even outside the trickery of human consciousness, generated by weird sub-atomic particles and quantum strangeness?

One of the reasons for writing a novel about vampires was my desire to rehabilitate the genre. Battered and bastardised by the likes of *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, the vampire novel in my opinion needed bringing back to its European roots, away from middle-class American college campuses and set firmly in an adult world where the vampires were ambiguous in their intentions and unpredictable in their sense of dread and threat.

Whilst the *TotenSeries* is predominantly a dark comedy compared to the *Malandanti* and *Reflections* series, it's still intensely graphic when the violence starts, and also attempts to revitalise the Victorian Gothic fascination with the implied erotic and the use of the vampire's bite as a metaphor for illicit sexuality. Rob Wallet is still obsessed by the masochistic longing for Susan Bekker's agonising 'kiss.'

It's no accident that *Toten Herzen* and *Wallet* insist on the word comeback instead of reunion: they never split up, only went away, and those lost years from 1977 to 2013 add another dimension to the myth; the band's myth or *Wallet*'s version, for who knows if his account of things is true and accurate. The truth will only come at the end in *Come the Day of Revelation*, but for now we have to trust the facts and believe the comeback to be a comeback and not an elaborate illusion.