



Jan 30, 2015 00:00 GMT

Can a famous artist truly vanish?

A PhD student has launched a new book exploring whether a famous artist can truly vanish – attracting comparisons to the disappearance of Manic Street Preachers guitarist, Richey Edwards, twenty years ago.

How I Left the National Grid is a post-punk novel written by Guy Mankowski, a Creative Writing PhD student at Northumbria University, Newcastle. Released to the public in February, reviewers have already speculated that the novel has been influenced by Edwards' tragic disappearance on 1 February 1995.

“A couple of people who reviewed the book have commented that there are

echoes of Richey Edwards and Ian Curtis (of Joy Division) in the main character,” Mankowski explains, “It is, in essence, a story that explores how a protagonist can feel trapped in an environment, and how they process that creatively.”

Set in 1980s Manchester, the book tells the story of fictional frontman Robert Wardner who mysteriously vanished a year after his post-punk band ‘The National Grid’ found fame overnight. Twenty-five years later – after rumours that Wardner was murdered by an obsessed young fan - word spreads that the singer is alive and planning to re-emerge. Sam, a journalist who helped publicise the band in the early days, is commissioned to find Wardner and give him the chance to tell his story for a book. The book is the culmination of Mankowski’s PhD, where he focussed his research on the post-punk scene in Manchester, landing meetings with bands and artists including Savages and Gazelle Twin. He said: “I sent a tweet to Jehnny Beth from Savages and was immediately invited to meet up with her which was a great opportunity and opened up doors to meet with other artists too, so my research has been directly informed by the current post-punk scene”.

During his research, Mankowski was supervised by Northumbria academic and Man Booker Prize longlistee, Dr Andrew Crumey, as well as Senior Lecturer, Dr Adam Hansen. Mankowski said: “Between Andrew and Adam I had some fantastic opportunities to reflect on my work throughout the process. Andrew was great at giving me technical advice and he would also critique my work as it progressed from a reader’s perspective. He also introduced me to publishers, while Adam helped me pitch my work to music magazines, resulting in publication in titles like Pop Matters.” Dr Crumey, who is also the author of Pfitz and Sputnik Caledonia said: ‘Already recognised as a major rising talent, Mankowski here establishes himself as a significant voice in British fiction with a novel that will raise knowing smiles from the rock cognoscenti, plaudits from literary critics, and will captivate readers everywhere. This is clearly a writer of great talent.’ The book will be officially launched in Newcastle on 28 February at The Cluny 2. The launch will include performances from Kingsley Chapman of acclaimed North East band, The Chapman Family, as well as Newcastle-born act, Hausfrau. For further information, see www.thecluny.com.

How I Left the National Grid is published by Roundfire Books and will be available in February.

For further information about Creative Writing at Northumbria University, visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/creativewriting

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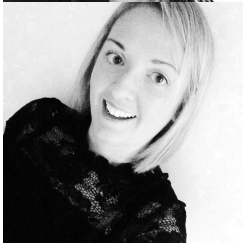


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