

The Barnables

The Urth list — 4 messages, 2 voices, 24 Jun 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2291>

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Adam Stephanides — 24 Jun 2000, 22:40

Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

The full name on that page is "Evan S. Barnable": remind me, was his dad named Evan? Do we have evidence that his dad called him Smoky, and that Smoky is what the "S" stands for; or is Smoky just his hippie handle?

I haven't reread the whole book in a long time, but the only evidence bearing on these questions I can find offhand is in the section dealing with Smoky's childhood: Smoky "lived a lot in three different suburbs with the same name in three different cities, and in each his relatives called him by a different name--his own, his father's, and Smoky--which last so suited his evanescence that he kept it." ("Anonymity," I, 1, p. 6 in Bantam TPB.) Which seems to mean that Smoky's father was not called Evan (since his name was "different"), and suggests that Smoky was first addressed as Smoky by his relatives and not by his father, though Smoky may still be his middle name.

(When I think of his family I just remember his five uncles

Actually, they were Smoky's half-brothers and sisters.

and the way he
and his dad would move from one uncle's house to the other . . . states
beginning with the letter I, that whole thing.)

There is more information on Smoky's family and childhood, but very little; which is kind of peculiar, come to think of it, given the amount we're told about the Drinkwaters. This would seem to argue against the view that sees Smoky as the positive pole of the book and the Drinkwaters as the negative pole. The Drinkwaters are important in themselves; Smoky is only important in relation to the Drinkwaters, poignant though his story is. (It's late at night, though, so I may be all wrong about this.)

--Adam

William Ansley — 26 Jun 2000, 22:24 · follows Adam Stephanides

At 10:40 PM -0700 6/24/00, Adam Stephanides wrote:

Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

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I haven't reread the whole book in a long time, but the only evidence bearing on these questions I can find offhand is in the section dealing with Smoky's childhood: Smoky "lived a lot in three different suburbs with the same name in three different cities, and in each his relatives called him by a different name--his own, his father's, and Smoky--which last so suited his evanescence that he kept it." ("Anonymity," I, 1, p. 6 in Bantam TPB.) Which seems to mean that Smoky's father was not called Evan (since his name was "different"), and suggests that Smoky

was first addressed as Smoky by his relatives and not by his father, though Smoky may still be his middle name.

I re-read the whole book recently and rather carefully and so feel fairly confident when I state that this is the only part of the book where the origin of the nickname "Smoky" is discussed.

However, I disagree somewhat with your interpretation of the passage you quote above. I think that when Crowley says "his own, his father's, and Smoky" he means that the first set of relatives in the first city called him Evan, the second set Barnable (his father's name in the sense of "Mr. Barnable? That's my my father's name.") and the third set Smoky. It may be peculiar for the relatives of a young boy to call him by his last name, but it is not unheard of; it is much less likely (to me at least) that both Smoky and his father would allow their relatives to call Smoky Douglas (for example) if that was really his father's name. It would have caused a lot of unnecessary confusion, if nothing else.

This still makes it seems likely that Smoky's father was not named Evan, but not certain.

William Ansley

Adam Stephanides — 27 Jun 2000, 09:53 · follows William Ansley

William Ansley wrote:

At 10:40 PM -0700 6/24/00, Adam Stephanides wrote:

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I thought of this interpretation, but rejected it on the grounds that the narrator's vocabulary is (or seems) straightforward, without paraphrases of this type. My feeling is that had Crowley meant "surname," he would have said "surname." And after all, "Barnable" is as much Smoky's "own" name as "Evan" is. I do admit, though, that I don't know why Smoky's relatives would have called him by his father's first name.

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Actually, the sentence we're discussing refers to a time after Smoky's father has died.

--Adam

William Ansley — 27 Jun 2000, 22:35 · follows Adam Stephanides

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Well, I guess that serves me right for bragging about how carefully I re-read LB. But I did read it carefully, it's just that my memory is shot.

Even though the fact that Smoky's father was dead at the time completely vitiates my argument, I still find the use of "father's name" for surname to be less of a stretch than you do and feel my interpretation is at least admissible. But you may well be right. Relatives can become confused.

William Ansley