

Smoky Barnstable

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 28 Jun 2000

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akt — 28 Jun 2000, 13:48

Hastily after a looong weekend:

Said Adam:

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 doubt it. It's a nickname for a boy who seems to be "streak of presence surrounded by a dim glow of absence," and whom only cheerful George Mouse clothes in enough presense so that at least the Invisible Man has bandages so that people won't sit on him. It is the Drinkwaters, mainly Alice, who cure him of anonymity. At least, en famille.

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

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

Right.

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.)

They are not poles; they are complementary. Smoky is terribly important; he is chosen (though he is far too modest to envision himself this way). Without him, the Tale could not be told. Look, this is a trope of Crowley's: The ordinary decent man finds himself in extraordinary circumstances, and, without believing at all in the situation which others seem to think merits action, agrees to do what is asked of him, to do his duty. It is the existential situation in a fairytale setting. Not only Smoky, but Rush who Speaks (from ES) and Pierce Moffit (from the Aegypt series) are heroes of this sort, and I think that Loren Casaubon from Beasts started out

this way, though he sort of dribbled off (like the book). But to reiterate, JCs guys do their damn duty. That is their task, their quest, and because they take up that burden, willingly or not (Smoky is willing), the world whirrs.

The Drinkwaters are NOT negative, btw. To my mind that is a complete misreading. Theirs is not a world of good and evil and judgment calls. It just is.

-alga