

Mr. Crowley. do you talk to the dead?

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 Aug 2000

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Alice Turner — 08 Aug 2000, 18:28

QUESTIONS FROM THE LIST

Mantis:

In the AEgypt series, is JC really talking about the decline and fall of the glorious 60s into the ugly 70s rather than any other cryptic secret recent history?

There's a sense in which the series is about a whole phase in the 60s that seemed not to pay off. But perhaps anybody who's going through their 20s, 30s, experiences the same kind of decline. I was reading a memoir about the 50s-back in the 50s we were filled with such hope, all things seemed possible, change was coming, we were so disappointed, and the war in Vietnam came and it all turned ugly. Well, of course, because he was 25. But there's also, as in the theory of climacterics that Mike comes up with, the case that your own feelings coincide with a general social sense that things are on the rise and changing. It can be enormously potent. I think it's more about that feeling. An analysis of the feeling rather than an expression of it, I would hope.

Wm. Ansley:

The Gorey quote from The Unstrung Harp: Yup, it's wonderful to reach a stage in your life where people are paying such close attention that they can catch your semi-conscious plagiarism, which is what that is. Sometimes you get to a point that you just cannot find words better than some other author's, and you think you can get away with it. Gorey has been a favorite of mine ever since I bought The Willowdale Handcar from my older sister in like 1959. I had never heard of this person or this book, and it was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen. The next one I got was The Doubtful Guest. My sister and I used to exchange them. She has a whole set of originals, which is probably pretty valuable now.

What is really going on when Smoky has his heart attack; Wm. suggests that the "garden" in Smoky's heart (p 618-20 in the QBPB ed. is opening to become the new works into which the Drinkwaters and their clan move.

That's really interesting. That's not what I was thinking, no, but maybe it is one way of viewing the end. My understanding of it was a sort of metafictional one. What Smoky knows at the end is how the Tale is going to end and where they are headed. What he says to them is No, you're going the wrong way. It's back there we're headed. And he even tries to turn around and finds himself unable to turn. Meaning: The Tale is over, and where they are headed is into the book they are in the process of trying to exit from. He has just come to the understanding that the whole thing was a Tale, that it's happened, that he's in it, that he can't exit from it. So no, it was not my idea that he had opened up the paradise into which they enter, but it's an extremely moving idea. And he [Wm.] has just demonstrated that it was there.

Adam:

In what sense are the Drinkwaters dead? And is the final banquet a dream as in Alice?

I don't regard them as dead at all. Smoky is, but not the rest of them. Smoky dies of a heart attack, just as they're all setting out. Dr. Drinkwater's scheme of the reverse infundibulum is in fact the case. Every group, everybody, moves on one place, as in Alice's tea party. As the people from our side move into the position of the fairies in that section of the world, the old fairies move on to some place even more distant.

Are the Drinkwaters fairies already or do they become fairies once they've crossed over?

They become the fairies they modeled in physical life once they get to the other side. Another group of human will replace them. It's not cyclical; it's progressive. As Dr. Drinkwater said: Inside, the lands get larger and larger, the further in you go the bigger it gets, till it is infinite at the center. Self-selected groups, I guess, would be the ones who say We're going over and identify themselves with those who have gone over. But the dead are not there. Dr. Drinkwater's dead, so is Nora, so is Violet and that gang, and they don't come.

Is LB a retelling of Through the Looking Glass? If so, who is Smoky?

Alice would not be Alice. It would be Smoky, obviously, who is Alice. That's an amazing scheme [Adam's, which I have snipped]! I wouldn't have thought it would work out so neatly. Well, of course it couldn't be Smoky, because he doesn't make it to the other side of the mirror. Daily Alice is definitely named for Alice. Her name actually comes from a bell that went off in my brain when I saw an ad in The New York Review of Books for "Dali's Alice," Alice, illustrated by Salvador Dali. I read it in my mind as Daily Alice.

In GwoT, the date given for the dirigible crash is not the date of the crash in reality. Is this deliberate?

Dr. Johnson, after he wrote the Dictionary, was reproached by a horsewoman who asked him why on earth he had defined a pastern as a horse's "knee." And he looked at her and said, "Ignorance, Madame, pure ignorance." No, it's just a mistake. If I got the year wrong, it's because I forgot to look it up to make sure that it was right.

What happened in Rhodesia? Does he meet his older self who warns him against creating the Otherhood, and confabulate the story of the lion later?

No, he doesn't convince him not to do it. It can't be done any more. The Denis who went back to shoot Cecil Rhodes failed to shoot Cecil Rhodes, at which point none of the plots happened, none of the succeeding things. But he can't get back, and is stuck there in 1898. He gradually grows older within the time frame of the original situation, which restores itself progressively as he lives on. He does meet himself coming to Africa in 1956. The thing that was possible to have happened can't anymore have happened. The thing about time travel stories, of course, is that they are impossible. They're not only impossible in fact, they're impossible to describe, to write. It's all a matter of tricks and writing them is a bizarre experience because you're studying your own premises constantly--who is this, and is it right, and how could he have done this if he hadn't already done that. The paradoxes are constantly accumulating as you write, and you have to keep pushing them aside and picking only the ones that will continue to create a story ahead of you. Because if you think about them, you'll find that you can't write the story.

Compositional methods: I have always written books in longhand because I never learned how to type. That's changed somewhat with computers, but I still do most of every book in longhand on long legal pads. Nowadays because typing and retyping and rewriting is so much easier, I do more of it on the computer than I ever used to do on the typewriter. I used to write a draft in pen, and then another draft in pen and then only when I had finally thought everything through, as far as I possibly could, did I start typing. I would usually type only one draft, maybe retype some pages if I absolutely had to, but the idea of retyping things was just so appalling that sometimes I'd leave things rather than retype. Learning a new method of putting words on paper definitely changes your compositional methods. Word processing has changed a lot of things. I think of Henry James halfway through his career when he began dictating to a "typewriter"-a typist-and she would type this up and give him a draft and he would go over it and correct it and change it and edit it and give it back. And it really changed the way he wrote. I started using the computer on GwoT, only the latter parts of it. L&S was the first whole book I actually wrote on it. But my holograph manuscript was still very complete. Now they're scrappier, but they still exist. I love the word processor--it's a great thing! And the micro-editing you're capable of, it's just so fabulous. I'm still a slow typist, but I've finally learned to type with all my fingers instead of just two. I'm better in the morning than I am in the afternoons. I think a long time before writing, I don't generate huge numbers of drafts; in fact I find it nearly impossible to throw out something I've written. I'll put it in another book, or put it somewhere else, or spend huge amounts of time trying to shoehorn it in. It's a drawback since I'm very prolific and I don't need to do that, but I can't resist hanging on. I also tend to checkerboard as I write, instead of starting at page 1 and then writing on to the end. A scene, and then one later on, and then over to the side. This may be part of what makes these last books so interreferential. I write a scene and then remind myself that I want to write something that references or mimics that much later on. It's a danger, because I know that readers can't read them in the same way as writers write them. I tell my writing students not to do that. Don't have a book assembled in your mind and then give out gradual scraps to the readers, assuming that they will put them in the right places, like a jigsaw puzzle with a big picture that you will have in the end. Readers don't read like that, because you don't have a big picture to plug these things into. You're just getting them sequentially, one at a time. So I warn against that, but I actually do it myself.