

Chapter – V

Heroic Fantasy in “*ENGINE SUMMER*”

Chapter V

Heroic Fantasy in “*ENGINE SUMMER*”

ENGINE SUMMER is the third novel written by John Crowley, published in 1979 by Doubleday. It is divided in four crystals out of which first two crystals have eight facets each while third crystal has six and fourth crystal has five facets. The novel tells the story of a young man named *Rush that Speaks* about his wandering through a strange, post-apocalyptic world in pursuit of several seemingly incompatible goals.

Rush that speaks, born into the community of Truthful Speakers one thousand years after the Storm, he was raised on stories of the old days - a world filled with saints, a world in which all things were possible, a world which finally destroyed itself. In love with a beautiful woman, *Rush* journeys far and learns much. Taken into the society of Dr. Boots's List, attached to the old mysteries, *Rush* grows closer to a sainthood he could never have imagined.

The novel tells the story of a young man named *Rush that Speaks* his wandering through a strange, post-apocalyptic world in pursuit of several seemingly incompatible goals. The story is set in a post-technological future. Our own age is dimly remembered in story and legend, but without nostalgia or regret. The people of *Rush's* world are engaged in living their own lives in their own cultures. Words and artefacts from our own time survive into *Rush's* age, suggesting that it is only a few millennia in our future. Yet we are given hints that human society and even human biology are significantly changed. Even such basics as reproduction and eating have been altered, first by industrial-age genetic tampering, and second by contact with extraterrestrial life. *Rush* comes of age in Little Belaire, a mazelike village of invisible, shifting boundaries, of secret paths and meandering stories and antique bric-a-brac carefully preserved in carved chests. The inhabitants are divided into clans called cords based on

personality traits. Over the centuries, the people of Little Belaire have perfected an art which they call truthful speaking: communication so clear and accurate, so "transparent", as to leave no potential for deception or misunderstanding. Perhaps as a result of this practice, Little Belaire appears to be free of any violence or even serious competition. Another result of truthful speaking is the existence of the saints, those whose stories speak not only of the specifics of their own lives, but about the human condition. Yet even with the benefit of truthful speaking, secrets and mysteries remain. Rush's journey is set in motion when the girl he loves, Once a Day, elopes from Little Belaire to join another group, an enigmatic society called Dr. Boots's List. In his search for her, Rush befriends a hermit and an "avenger" and shares the secrets of the List. Ultimately he discovers a transparent sainthood stranger than any story told by the gossips of Little Belaire.

The hero of the novel is Rush that speaks who is setting off on a voyage of discovery. He hopes to bring back knowledge that is lost. He finds his first true love, and becomes a saint; he actually sets off on a path to become something else greater, perhaps. Crowley has written the novel in the narrative form. The narrator Rush that Speaks is a hero of novel. He grows up in a Little Belaire, a village of North America. Most of its citizens live and die in the commune, usefully, productively, with great variety and harmony. People can leave Little Belaire at will, but few do these usually because they have ambitions that vary from the norm. One of these is 'Once a Day' Rush's childhood sweetheart. When she was of ten years old, she was stolen by some of her relatives from outside in the company. Four years later when Rush is of fourteen years old, he decides to go on his travel. He has two ambitions-one to find her and another to become a saint.

**BARR. BALASAREB KESARLIKAR LIBRARY
SHIVAJI UNIVERSITY, KOLHAPUR.**

The novel begins with the story of birth and childhood of the hero Rush that speaks who was born in Mbaba's room in a village Little Belaire. Mbaba is grandmother of Rush that speaks. Painted Red and Mbaba are friends from their childhood. Mbaba brings him to painted red to make him a truthful speaker.

Michael Andre-Driussi in his article entitled, 'The Great Knot Unraveled, or Not' published in the book 'Snakes-Hands the fiction of John Crowley, has written about the truthful speaking,

Truthful speaking is mostly like a language. Both receiver and sender must be truthful speaker for it to work, so it is not some sort of universal broadcast system that cuts across language barriers. In fact the greater burden may be on the receiver. And despite the name, truthful speaking is more than just speaking/listening. ('Snake's-Hands the fiction of John Crowley', Michael Andre Driussi, 2003: 101)

According to my opinion this view of Michael Andre Driussi seems to be suitable for the truthful speaker explained by Crowley in this novel. This is illustrated by following passage from the novel where Rush meet Painted Red for the first time:

No, of course she said nothing like that, but it was all in what she did say, in her greeting, for she spoke truthfully, and was very, very good at it: so good that, speaking, she couldn't hide from my knowledge of what she meant. Of course my knowledge then was very slight; when she walked with Mbaba, they both said things I couldn't hear.

"You are not," Painted Red said, "a truthful speaker."

"No," I said.

"Well, you will be soon." She put her hand on my shoulder and raised her curling brows at me. "I will call you Rush, as your Mbaba does, if I may; your name Rush that Speaks is too much a mouthful for me." I laughed at that: too much a mouthful! She said a word to Mbaba that meant she and I must be alone, and when Mbaba was gone, she stubbed out the flat end of her crackling cigar and motioned me to come with her into the small farther room.

There she took from a chest a small narrow box that just fit in her lined palm. "Your Mbaba tells me good things about you, Rush," she said. She opened the box. Inside were four small round pots with snug lids, each a different colour: a black one, a silver one, a bone white one, and one the pure blue of a sunset winter sky. "She says you like stories."

"Yes."

"I know a huge number." Her face was gently grave but her eyes were sly behind the glittering glasses. "All true." We both laughed at that; her laugh made me shiver with the weight and fullness of it, light and low though it was. I knew then that Painted Red was very holy; possibly she was a saint.

Why do you say holy?

Holy. Blink told me once that in ancient times they said a thing was holy if it made you hold your tongue. We said a thing was holy if it made you laugh. That's all. (*Otherwise-Engine Summer*, John Crowley 1979: 357)

Crowley in his novel, writes about truthful speaker. Painted Red tells many stories in her classroom about truthful speaker. Rush is the single student who is inspired to go out to seek the material and the added skills for a Great Book his own. Rush is excited by the stories of Painted Red and he wants to become saint.

Alice K. Turner, in her article 'One Writer's Beginning: *ENGINE SUMMER* as a Portrait of the artist' published in the book 'Snakes-Hands the fiction of John Crowley' has written about the truthful speaking and sainthood that,

'Little Belaire was formed as a community of truthful speakers. Starting at about age seven, the children are taught by gossips, usually women of grandmotherly age, hoe to speak truthfully. This is not a hasty process, and it is accomplished mostly through story telling; the stories are often, but not always, about the lives of the saints or retellings of stories the saint told.....('Snake's-Hands the fiction of John Crowley', Alice K. Turner, 2003: 61)

In his childhood, most of the time Rush discuss about sainthood with Painted Red. This discussion made him happy many times and slowly a will developed in his mind about sainthood.

Painted Red said to me: "Remember, Rush, there's no one who would not rather be happy than be a saint." I nodded, but I didn't know what she meant. It seemed to me that anyone who was a saint would have to be happy. I wanted to be a saint, though I told no one, and the thought gave me nothing but joy.

But perhaps to others I might not have looked happy, a shy, slight kid, a Palm cord kid too much in love with

knowledge, with a secret desire that made me inattentive and silent; maybe it was that desire that left me with what seems an odd set of memories of those years. Leaf cord remembers expeditions, achievements, summers they went naked and winters they built snow warrens. (*Otherwise-Engine Summer*, John Crowley 1979: 377)

Rush achieves his ambition. He goes out into the world, meet's a saint of sorts, finds and loses a lady –love, has a strange meeting with an alien mind, has adventures adopt cat and cow, makes a new friend who is not in any a truthful speaker, ingests a vast quantity of drugs, learns great resourcefulness and finds an angel. And along the way he becomes a bona fide saint, not quit in the way he expected. Rush tells story, creates a book that read with love and tears. He further says,

You can tell it; it can be told. Isn't that what it is to be a saint?

To tell all stories in the single story of your own life

I'm not a saint.

You are the only saint. Go on: I'll help if I can. Before nightfall

it will be told; before moonrise at least. (Otherwise-Engine

Summer, John Crowley 1979: 384)

Crowley has spent quarter of the novel on Rush's life at Little Belaire, and then he had spent a quarter on 'Dr. Boots's List'. But Crowley does not make it easy to understand the List. He had put the clues in the novel are the cryptic comments of Zhinsinura, Houd and Once a Day. Rush's infrequent judgements are themselves fairly mysterious.

BARR. DAVASAHEB N. M. BALKAR LIBRARY
SHIVAJI UNIVERSITY, KOLHAPUR.

Adam Stephanides, an author of an article “It doesn’t get better: Little Belaire, The List, and the Riven world of ‘*Engine Summer*’” published in “Snake’s-Hands the fiction of John Crowley.” Said that,

“Of course, while there is presumption in favour of Crowley’s explication of his own book, they should not be taken as Holy writ. And this synopsis was in fact written before Crowley has finished the revision that transformed the early version of the book into the published text, and differ from the published text book in minor way. But Crowley’s explication of the list published text closely; I know of no alternative that works as well. Moreover the feature of the List that Crowley is referring to are essentially the same in “Learning to live with it,” the first version of *Engine Summer*, which adapted the synopsis; so Crowley’s thinking on the subject, did not change much.” (Snake’s-Hands the fiction of John Crowley, Adam Stephanides, 2003; 67)

Rush went out on his travel and suddenly found ‘Once a day’. She is with Dr. Boots’s List. In past when they were in Little Belaire, she was taught a truthful speaking at the same time Rush was. But now on his quest of bringing her back, Rush often fears that in the six year of her absence from warren she may have forgotten truthful speaking. After he has been living with her and the List for nearly the year, he asked her about leaving List together:

“We could go back to the Little Belaire.” I meant: to Belaire where we were born, Belaire and the saint and the Filing system and the gossips who untie knots instead of tying them

tighter as the old ones here do, Belaire where every story has a proof and all the secrets have names at least; I meant we could go home.

“It wasn’t my home,” she said, and my heart leaped, for I heard and she had heard me.” (*Otherwise-Engine Summer*, John Crowley 1979: 501)

So when Rush says “Little Blaire” in that context, in that tone with expression, etc. ,it is a “portmanteau word” whose manifest is a short list of association, whose true name is “home”. Despite the fact that she had only two years of training, and that was nearly half her lifetime ago, still she is able to here the true meaning that he is sending.

Even though ‘Once a Day’ hears the meaning, still she rejects the premise that the warren is her home, because she chose the List as her home and she chooses it again. In contrast the angel claims to be a truthful speaker, and claims that Rush’s story has changed the sky city in a positive way, and yet the angels reach the same conclusion that ‘Once a Day’ did: they will not change.

Finally when ‘Once a Day’ refused to go with Rush, he decided to become saint. He starts his journey where he came across the angel. The Angel records whole story of Rush. She takes an interview of Rush, which Crowley has written in third crystal of the novel. Angel and Rush have discussed much about the Rush’s life during this long interview in the third facet of the novel. At the beginning of fourth crystal, Crowley writes that,

... and begin again with another, the fourth.

Perhaps you shouldn’t waste them. We didn’t finish the last.

It’s all right. Can you go on now?

Did you tell me why you need such things, these crystals I mean? If you did I've forgotten.

Only to see . . . to see how strong you are. I mean whether the story will change, depending on who . . .

Depending on who I am.

Depending on who tells it.

Has it changed?

Yes. in small ways. I don't think . . . I don't think any other loved

Once a Day as much as you, I mean as much as in this story.

And I never heard of the fly caught in plastic before.

Will you tell me about him, the one who I am? Is it a man?

It is.

Do you love him?

Yes.

I wonder why I thought so? Because you remind me of her? ...

No, well, I'm not to know, am I? Well. I'll go on. (*Otherwise-*

Engine Summer, John Crowley 1979: 513)

This revealing passage comes immediately after the traumatic experiences of both Rush's hosting of Boots the cat and once a Day's final rejection of Rush have been related. I originally read the questions of identity as stemming from the mind-meld, and the talk of love as a platonic balm for the hurt he suffered from Once a Day. That is, I thought she was telling the sphere, "You are the intelligence of a man (not a cat)" and "You have loved greatly and been spurned but now you are truly beloved."

Again in his penultimate Speech, Rush says, "Only . . . wait, wait. Listen: the one who I am, you must be gentle with him, angel, when he returns, remember Here,

take my hand, and take his hand. Yes. Don't let go." I took this mean to Rush's will that angel's boyfriend should be properly treated.

Rush-who has known all along, of course, that he isn't in the first time his story has been told here. More than he could ever have imagined, he has become transparent; centuries after his own death, with the warren possibly long in ruins below him, his tale goes on. Appalled, he begs the girl to tell him what became of him. She doesn't know; all they know is what Rush Knows: "It is all you here now, Rush." Only his tale has survived, to reach the city, what it is to live on earth. And now that tale is told. We won't witness-can only imagine, from what Rush feels about returning to himself from Boots-what the angel who has been Rush will feel on returning to himself.

References

1. *'Otherwise: Three Novels by John Crowley'*, Perennial An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers (2002).
2. *It doesn't get better: Little Belaire, The List, and the Riven world of 'Engine Summer*
Adam Stephanides *Snake's Hands: The Fiction of John Crowley pp 67-84, (2003)*
3. *One Writer's Beginning: ENGINE SUMMER as a Portrait of the artist Alice K. Turner,*
Snake's Hands: The Fiction of John Crowley pp 59-66, (2003).
4. *Snake's Hands: The Fiction of John Crowley* (Woodland Hills, California: Cosmos Books, 2003) Editor Alice K Turner and Michael Andre Driussi.
5. *The Great Knot Unraveled, or Not* Michael Andre Driussi *Snake's Hands: The Fiction of John Crowley pp 85-108, (2003)*