



Novelties & Souvenirs

***** Collected Short Fiction ***

JOHN CROWLEY

Award-winning author of the *New York Times*
Notable Book *The Translator*

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A master literary stylist, John Crowley has carried readers to diverse and remarkable places in his award-winning, critically acclaimed novels -- from his classic fable, *Little, Big*, to his *New York Times* Notable Book, *The Translator*. Now, for the first time, all of his short fiction has been collected in one volume, demonstrating the scope, the vision, and the wonder of one of America's greatest storytellers. Courage and achievement are celebrated and questioned, paradoxes examined, and human frailty appreciated in fifteen tales, at once lyrical and provocative, ranging from the fantastic to the achingly real. Be it a tale of an expulsion from Eden, a journey through time, the dreams of a failed writer, or a dead woman's ambiguous legacy, each story in *Novelties & Souvenirs* is a glorious reading experience, offering delights to be savored ... and remembered.

Contents:

Antiquities (1977)
Her Bounty to the Dead (1978)
The Reason for the Visit (1980)
The Green Child (1981)
Novelty (1983)
Snow (1985)
The Nightingale Sings at Night (1989)
Great Work of Time (1989)
In Blue (1989)
Missolonghi 1824 (1990)
Exogamy (1993)
Lost and Abandoned (1993)
Gone (1996)
An Earthly Mother Sits and Sings (2000)
The War between the Objects and the Subjects (2002)

Novelties and Souvenirs: Collected Short Fiction Details

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Austen to Zafón says

I like this author and I enjoyed many of the stories, although I found some of the extremely complicated time-travel ideas a little tiresome. And there was one story toward the end that I just couldn't finish, it bored me so. But I would still check out his other books, especially "Little, Big." He's talented, but he does sometimes bite off more than he (or I) can chew.

James Cook says

The great American poet Robert Kelly mentioned John Crowley's work in an interview, and since I trust Kelly's taste implicitly, I picked up this collection, as well as "Little, Big" & the first book in the Aegypt series, both of which I have yet to read. I DID plow thru these shorter works however and was duly impressed, especially with "The Great Work of Time", a novella in which Crowley creates a narrative that is both 'postmodern' in its way (I hate that word unless it refers to Charles Olson's concept of postmodern, which involves a reaching back to archaic cultures) or experimental, as well as being written in that great tradition of English storytellers like Kipling, Stevenson, Chesterton, and others. I sensed, also, a hint of Borgesian playfulness.

The other stories ranged from excellent to astounding. I especially loved "Missolonghi 1824" in which a descendant of the god Pan is captured by provincial townsfolk and is released by the narrator. I'll be starting Crowley's longer works: Little, Big & the Aegypt series, as soon as I can.

Scott Golden says

There is a variance in quality between some of the stories here -- some of them are quite plain, or 'basic'; however, all of his best short fiction is here as well, and his best is something quite special indeed. 'Literary fantasy' in the best possible (least pretentious) sense of the term. Highly recommended.

Michael Battaglia says

Thanks to his early one-two-three punch of the "The Deep"/"Engine Summer"/"Little Big", Crowley has pretty much generated more goodwill than the guy handing out free ice cream cones on a summer day. For those who are in his sweet spot for thoughtful and somewhat elliptical stories with prose so elegant that it should be dancing backwards and in heels with Fred Astaire, his style promises pretty much an endless bounty of riches that are difficult to find in quite that way anywhere else. If you need something less ruminative and with perhaps actual action then he may not be the author for you but if the idea of drowning in the delicacy of his endless stream of soft prose sounds like a good idea for a night's relaxation then this collection of short stories is probably going to be right up your alley.

For those whose hobbies don't include haunting magazines and anthologies for sporadic work by an author you greatly admire (I might possibly fall into this category), this volume is going to make your life much easier since it includes just about all of his short fiction (minus one story that appeared in "Conjunctions: 39" for you completists out there) that had been published up to 2004, which sounds like it should be out of date by now except he hasn't published much short fiction since then. So this basically acts as one-stop shopping.

But just because you can go and collect everything doesn't mean that everything is fundamentally mind-blowing. Like any collection the stories run the gamut in terms of tone and setting, with at least one story coming across as an English professor's idea of a weird joke ("The War Between the Objects and the Subjects" which brought back chill inducing memories of having to diagram sentences in high school). The interesting thing here is even though they're ordered in a roughly chronological order, the level of craft feels about the same from the first to the last. The focus shifts slightly as later stories seem to act more as tone poems, one bleeding easily and dream-like into the next, while the early ones often have a more discernible plot and aim. But it's clear that he emerged at least from a publishing standpoint fully formed and if there's any clumsy space opera efforts lurking about he must have gotten them out of the way early and burned them or buried them in his attic somewhere. Which makes this an easy collection to read unlike other "complete" collections where you're forced to sit through the author's embryonic efforts before getting into the good stuff.

Here, it's all fairly good, although the degree varies. He does like the concept of someone telling a story to someone else ("Antiquities", "Missolonghi 1824") in his best Lord Dunsany fashion which allows him to do the calm "I'm going to tell you about something possibly weird but not freak out about it" thing that works best for these stories, although at times you do miss the foaming histrionics that a Lovecraftian narrator would have brought to the proceedings. But Crowley doesn't really do straight SF or fantasy as much as operate on the borders (except when he's going totally mythological like "The Nightingale Sings At Night" which is good but not a hundred percent my cup of tea) and quite a few stories dip into that realistic fantastic dreamy vibe that "Little, Big" managed so easily, and although they lack that story's quiet sense of the epic in small doses they're probably the closest we come these days to the aforementioned Lord Dunsany, giving us tiny slices of the world beyond the world and what happens when they touch. There's more of a sense of distance in stories like "The Green Child" or "Gone" where we aren't immersed in the personal as much (the latter comes the closest as he intermingles the weirdness of helpful aliens with a woman's desperation to get her kids back) but there's such a calmness and sureness and sheer precision in what he's doing that you can ride along the gravity-defying drift of his prose and while that sometimes runs the risks of letting them float off into the upper atmosphere so that they don't linger in the mind the way his best novels do it often makes for a pleasurable and thoughtful experience while the story is being read and when he does harden the prose enough so that it has actual impact, the effect can be quietly devastating (the endings of "Gone" and "Lost and Abandoned" both having to do with families are marvelous in their underscoring of hard to define emotions).

But while the shorter stuff has its moments, I think it's still the longer works that he excels with. Both "In Blue" and the novella length (about a hundred pages) "The Great Work of Time" give him the space to really work out the ideas and maximize their impact. "In Blue" is strangely unsettling, apparently a story about the revolution the day after the revolution is won but using that as a springboard to explore a man's feelings toward both the new world and his old lover, interweaving with a kind of social mathematics that feels like a world you never knew slowly closing in on you. And "Great Work of Time" is Crowley indulging in the unfettered joy of allowing an idea to play out any way he chooses, incorporating a broader cast of characters, his particular brand of abstraction (this story, fittingly enough is in the middle and seems to mark a bridge between the more concrete earlier stories and what comes later as the tales become more ethereal in their demands on us, asking us to grasp their smoke) and a nonlinear story as he depicts a group that figures out a

way to time travel and decides to use that to their advantage in making sure the British Empire stays Rule Britannia forever. Its clever and thoughtful and wide-ranging in a way the rest of the stories often aren't, playing to the best of his strengths while still allowing him to build up some momentum (its interesting how many other stories have used a similar idea, from the movie version of "The Adjustment Bureau" or Michael Swanwick's "Bones of the Earth" to seemingly every other "Doctor Who" story). A lot of the stories come across as him relaying events to us from a careful divide, while those two stories put us right in the mix of the catastrophe, coating the world with dust and allowing us to brush away the coatings to discover the true colors underneath. In essence, I think that's what I read him for, those moments where the world is gradually unpeeled to reveal a self that lingered not sideways or above or even behind but right in front of us the whole time. For me, his best work finds the world anew, in a place right where you left it and not quite the same. None of this equals his masterpieces but they can't be expected to. In a world too wide for us to ever completely perceive in all its wonder and darkness, these are merely fields to linger in, perhaps frolic or even lie on the ground and stare at the sky and listen to the wind and maybe just for a moment feel the motion of the earth and for even a fraction of a moment the minuscule effect of your meager weight on that spin, the hesitation of the friction of the skip. And maybe its nothing and maybe its fleeting but its just enough to prove that you exist, that life isn't just inertia set forth by hands too old to fathom. In forms and ways both visible and immeasurable we all affect each other, from the center outward and in all the other directions we can't see.

Jamie R says

I tried for three years to read this book. I kept picking it up and forcing myself to read some of it, until finally letting myself abandon it.

I adore John Crowley; His Little, Big is one of my all-time favourites. I'm not really sure where he went wrong with this collection - some of the ideas in the stories are brilliant, and will stay with me forever, but it was just painful and boring to read.

A.D. Jansen says

Solid collection. The writing, though occasionally concept-heavy and overly abstract (the boring "In Blue" being the worst offender), is generally of very high quality, and the themes are diverse and thoughtfully explored. I hate to make an arbitrary comparison to *The Best of Gene Wolfe*, but since they're both collections of SF short stories and I read them concurrently, yep, it's gonna happen. This one maybe doesn't quite reach the heights of Gene Wolfe's very best stories, but overall it's much stronger; sentence for sentence, Crowley is clearly the superior writer. I suspect the reason he isn't more widely read is that, more so than Wolfe, he truly straddles the border between literary and genre fiction, and for the average SF reader this makes him "too literary." When he writes a ghost story, for example, the ghost is of Virginia Woolf. When he writes about time travel, the time travelers spend most of their time talking about orthogonal logic and Cecil Rhodes. When he writes about aliens . . . well, you get the picture. Not terribly pulpy stuff. Anyway, John Crowley is a unique and under-appreciated writer and this book is a good indicator of his talent.

Shaun says

This book is on the short list of books I've liked enough to read twice in the span of the years. A collection of short stories that tells a tale of a British organization using time travel to preserve the British Empire. The historical edits made to preserve the British Empire turn out to be at the expense of the integrity of time and space. Given the handling of time travel in these stories, it wouldn't surprise me if the writer of *Twelve Monkeys* was familiar with the stories collected here. It's an extremely complicated and rewarding text.

elka says

Usually I can flutter through a book of short stories, but Crowley's prose is somewhat inaccessible or unreliable, meaning I will get drawn into the tone of one story and the next will leave me dry. There are some great shorts, though. I especially liked "Antiquities" and "Great Work of Time". I have this book stashed in my cupboard downstairs, in case I ever need a book to read while I'm in the kitchen and have forgotten the book(s) I'm currently lugging around actively from room to room. Crowley, you've got imagination, and I won't give up on my varied experience of your tone. (Or your pace.)

Nancy says

Some of the stories I really enjoyed, some left me baffled, and some were yawners. But hey, he writes, I talk about writing. He has original ideas and clever comments. Let's leave it at that while I suggest you read and decide for yourself.

Yve says

I love John Crowley's (lengthy) novel *Little, Big*, yet this short fiction collection felt like a bit much. The number of stories included is not in itself intimidating, but many of them are novella length and quite dense besides - it took me two days to read "Great Work of Time" and "In Blue." Crowley clearly has an obsession with manipulating time and history and all the works in this collection share that, whether they are firmly science fiction/fantasy or just literary fiction starring crazy people. It usually works for him, but in stories like "In Blue" I could only take so many consecutive pages of head-spinning invented math and physics before I had to put the book down. I think it might have been for the good of the world if Crowley met up with Roger Zelazny, formed a Lewis Carroll fan club, and did a bit of mutual venting before committing every one of their rambling wacky schemes and inside jokes to paper.

I like how "Antiquities" is the weirdest most involved *Alice in Wonderland* reference I've ever read. I like how "The Nightingale Sings at Night" is a Garden-of-Eden-expulsion rewrite that still somehow manages to be clever and engaging. I like how I knew "The Reason for the Visit" was about Virginia Woolf before he even put out any specific names. I *really* liked all "Great Work of Time" despite the fact that its length and its placement in a collection rather than as a standalone felt inappropriate. I loved "Her Bounty to the Dead," meticulous and hypnotic. And I also liked "Snow" and "Gone," which are both pretty atypical science fiction.

With this book and *Little, Big*, I've enjoyed Crowley's writing so much that just wanted to read it all in one

swoop, to absorb it whole without stopping. But, to the contrary, his work takes a lot of time to think about and trying to just run through it is pointless. For this reason, it would be really hard to make this work as a short fiction collection, no matter how the stories are ordered I can only imagine it would still feel like it needed to be broken into smaller parts to process individually. It was a bit deceptive to see this as one volume I could pick up in the library because I felt like I should read them all at once. Still, I can't complain that they're now easily available and collected, and I very well might check it out again if only to re-read "Great Work of Time."

Kevin says

As the subtitle implies, *Novelties & Souvenirs* collects most of John Crowley's short stories/novellas up to around 2002. This collection is a third in the line of Crowley collections which had its beginning in *Novelty: Four Stories* by John Crowley. Does not seem like a lot, but those four stories take up a huge chunk of the collection and will no doubt also be the ones most people remember. Particularly a doozy of a novella called "Great Work of Time". But more on that later.

As can be expected, this collection presents the spectrum of John Crowley's writing talents in its mere 330-odd pages. This is how the man writes, in a beautiful, surreal style about ideas that will vaporize the gray matter within your skull more often not. This is where you leave behind your literary training diapers, kiddies.

So this book contains fifteen stories. These are arranged by order of publication, by arbitrary authorial decree. The theme of the stories range from the supernatural, the theological, the metaphysical, the mythological, the poetical, the literary, and the sociological. Also, there is time travel and aliens from time to time.

The constraints of the short fiction mean that not a lot of time is spent explaining how 'things work'. This is very apparent in the time-travel story "Great Work of Time" and "In Blue". The first is by far the longest story in the book, clocking (ha) at about 100 pages. Its subject matter is such that I have come to different conclusions than others have over the ending. Something that is bound to happen when you use 'imaginary' in its standard and mathematical sense. Also be sure to review the term 'orthogonal', that is kinda a very important concept to the story. "In Blue" centers around something known in-story as an 'act-field'.

Good luck with that.

Not every story is going to require extra work on the part of the reader. "The Nightingale Sings at Night" strikes me as an example of a straightforward, touching story about why the nightingale sings at night and the expulsion of Man and Woman from Eden.

John Crowley's stories are like caramels. Oftentimes, you have to chew on it for a while before you can begin to digest it. Some require more mental processing than others. Still others you will find completely incomprehensible until you research the folk tale it is based on ("An Earthly Mother Sits and Sings", I'm looking at you!). It does not follow trends, nor does it care for your concept of 'plot and resolution.' What it does care about is 'effect', and all the work that Crowley puts into these stories goes towards exactly the effect that he wants. And oft times, I believe these 'effects' are much more important in literature than mere entertainment.

Sarah says

This is a beautifully written collection, but it did little for me. The first four stories held my attention, and "The Nightengale Sings At Night" was poignant and elegant. Crowley's writing style has a nineteenth century reserve about it, which works well in the context of most of the stories, but leaves me uninvolved in what I'm reading. Other than the handful of stories I enjoyed, I found most of the characters unlikeable or uninteresting, and as such, ended up skimming stories that really only stood up to a close read. Oh, and how many times can the word "stochastic" really be used in one book?

I'll loan it to any of my friends who want to read it. I think others might enjoy it more than I did.

Nickie says

The War Between the Objects and the Subjects. Brilliant.

Bonnie Stufflebeam says

Originally posted on Short Story Review:

I'll admit I have yet to read John Crowley's masterpiece *Little, Big*. It's on my list, certainly, but I always prefer reading a writer's short stories before delving into their novels. *Novelties & Souvenirs* therefore served as my introduction to Crowley, and I was in no way disappointed.

There are fifteen stories in this collection written over twenty-five years – one, "Great Work of Time," is a novella – and the stories are presented in the order they were written. Looking for a general progression of Crowley's storytelling ability, I could find none; the stories in the front of the book seem just as well written as those at the back, written further along in Crowley's career. The only trend I noticed was that the stories at the end of the collection seemed to deal more with abstractions. In his earlier short stories, there seems to be little in the way of abstract concepts. In his later work, such as "In Blue," "Lost and Abandoned," and "The War between the Objects and the Subjects," there is more to puzzle over in terms of plot and deeper meaning, though as in all the Crowley stories here, there is certainly a great deal of depth.

My favorite in this collection would have to be the novella "Great Work of Time," in which Crowley proves that the time travel story has certainly not overstayed its welcome. The story, which begins with the origin story for the time machine itself, soon moves to bigger and more complicated matters, such as a secret society of time travelers who work to maintain the British Empire and the values that their benefactor, Cecil Rhodes, held dear and a man, our protagonist, chosen to complete a task he has, in a time travel world, already completed. Complications, of course, arise.

"Great Work of Time" is partly so interesting because of the structure, being broken up into different sections and told out of sequence. It's not the only story where Crowley plays with structure. Two stories, "Antiquities" and "Missolonghi 1824," are told almost entirely in dialogue format, set up beforehand as a meeting between two individuals. In "Antiquities," those two people are friends meeting in a club; one

relates the story of the possible supernatural reason behind a plague of inconstancy in a nearby town. In “Missolonghi 1824” the dialogue is between Lord Byron and a young Greek boy. Both are intriguing in both the present of the story and the story being told.

The other stories to keep an eye out for in this collection: “The Nightingale Sings at Night,” a creation myth in which the nightingale and the moon are central characters, and though it shares similarities with the story of Adam and Eve, it makes those similarities its own. “Snow” explores a new technology that allows loved ones to record 8,000 hours of one’s life in case of death, to remember them. “Gone” is an original first contact story in which people are more than willing to let the aliens into their lives. “Exogamy” is Crowley’s take on the fairy tale.

Jacob says

I’ve been meaning to read Little, Big for a long time, but I found this collection and thought I’d give it a try. Often, I like to read an author’s short fiction first--not to say that short fiction is inferior to long fiction, or that it’s “practice”--but because short fiction generally seems to offer nice, small, bite-sized samples of an author’s work. And there is a wide variety of subjects here: creation myths, faerie tales, sci-fi, time travel, stories within stories. Very beautiful, fluid, well-crafted prose; other reviewers mention a bit of a 19th century/classical feel to the collection, which, unfortunately, only works for about half of the collection. It works for some of the fantastical stories, such as “Antiquities,” “The Green Child,” “The Nightingale Sings at Night,” and a handful of others, but feels out of place with the rest. The longest, “Great Work of Time,” was slightly difficult to follow, and I had to struggle to finish a few others. A bit dull and inaccessible at times. Oy.

A very mixed collection of stories, some great, some less so, showcasing Crowley’s wide and varied imagination. Makes me more eager to try out his novels.
