



## John Crowley

**Novelties & Souvenirs**  
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**Do you see large themes connecting the stories collected in *Novelties & Souvenirs*, or do you think of the stories as separate and discreet?**

They were written as separate stories, with different reasons, on different occasions — some were solicited, some intended for particular markets — and yet they seem to me to reflect matters (I'm not sure I'd call them "themes") that have always been of deep interest to me. Among those is the malleability of reality, and what it would be like if it could be altered by human wishes; what goes on in the mind and heart of someone who makes such wishes — as in "Novelty" and "Great Work of Time," for two different examples; and the open-ended nature of the course of time, that produces unintended consequences, not always good or bad.

**Where does your interest in the manipulation of time come from?**

Time is a central element of all fiction. The feeling in stories that time is passing much as it does in our own human life is actually an illusion produced by the craft of the author, using certain established conventions, or subverting those conventions. In fact time in fiction goes very differently from the way our time goes — it proceeds at different rates, for instance, and can go backwards as well as forwards, and things in fictional time can happen more than once. I think I take delight in using the devices of fantasy and science fiction to make this strange quality of fictional time clear — and to make readers think about their own human time.

**Many of your stories have a fable-like quality. Do you have any special interest in the fable?**

True fables — and I'm not sure I've ever written one — are the hardest of all literary forms, I think this is because many of them are actually collective: they are written by all of us, by our human experience. My own fable-like stories are an attempt to use some of the forms of fable for my own purposes, which are more limited. A story like "The War between the Subjects and the Objects" is one way of using fable, in this case as a way of illuminating a permanent fact of human consciousness. "The Nightingale Sings at Night" is a kind of anti-fable: it's intended to offer a different way of imagining the beginnings of human life as expressed in the Bible fable (fables of course, are neither true nor false, which is another reason why a fiction writer is drawn to them, and feels them to be at the core of his work.)

**Which is your favorite of the stories collected in *Novelties & Souvenirs*?**

I like several for different reasons. "In Blue" I like because I think it achieved the goal I set for it: to describe a society utterly unlike my own, but which like my own was neither good nor bad — couldn't be summed up. I like to re-read "Great Work of Time" because the voice is so unlike my own — the imitation of an English voice was so much fun (the same voice, somewhat more comically, is in "Antiquities," which I also like). "Snow" is probably the most "perfect" and I'm proud of it — not a word out of place.

**What are the main differences, apart from the obvious one of length, between writing short stories and novels?**

Stories are like hills — you go up one side, and down the other. Novels are like mountain ranges, which are made of hills, but hills that lead to one another, and to central heights, and other peaks, before you go down. Writing a novel is a little like writing a number of stories about aspects of the same situation, none of which exactly end, and all of which lead on. So it's not so different. In a novel you have the freedom to digress a little — indulge some private or irrelevant concerns. The greatest difference may be in the work of memory: writing a novel requires remembering from one end of the process to the other what it is all supposed to be and to mean.

**What writers have most influenced your work?**

I think there are two kinds of influences (in general; surely there are more). There are influences that I know about — authors whom I deliberately and consciously model myself on, and even steal from — and many of those would surprise readers, who don't see the influence. The other influences are ones I am unconscious of imitating, but which readers can see easily. Of the first kind I can name Vladimir Nabokov, Robert Louis Stevenson, Walt Kelly (Pogo) and Shakespeare. In the kinds of effects I try to bring off I think I draw as much on the work of Winsor Mackay (Little Nemo in Slumberland), Beethoven and Mozart as on writers. A huge influence comes from writings whose authors I often can't remember — or never knew — the authors of pulp science fiction, cartoons and comic strips, Little Big books, children's books from Thornton Burgess and Dick and Jane to the Alice books and their imitators (Davy and the Goblin, e.g.) Of the second kind of influence I'm not the one to say, I guess, though the names mentioned have ranged from T.H. White and Chesterton to George Bernard Shaw (!).