



John Crowley

The Translator
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John Crowley is the winner of an American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award for Literature. He is one of the most gifted American authors at work today, albeit commercially unrecognized. "Like Fela, the late African pop star who had a huge following among American rock musicians while remaining relatively unknown to American rock fans, Crowley's biggest readership is probably other writers. He is generally acknowledged to have had a huge impact on the fantasy genre, so even if you've never read him, in a way, you have," reads an online review.

The Translator is a departure for Crowley. A novel of tremendous scope and beauty, The Translator centers on the relationship between an exiled Russian poet and his American translator, set against the backdrop of the Cuban missile crisis. We asked John to explain further...

How would you describe *The Translator*?

The Translator is a novel about love and poetry and the end of the world. That makes it sound extravagant, but it isn't: it's set in the early 1960s, during the Cold War, a time when the world as we knew it seemed to be always on the verge of ending in nuclear holocaust; and it's about a young woman, a poet, and the older poet, a Russian, whom she comes to love. It might also be about angels. **What is it about this story that you found compelling?**

In 1962 I was a college student at Indiana University, not far from a major air base. When the Cuban missile crisis happened, we could feel our own extinction very vividly. It's a feeling that those who grew up with the Bomb know from dreams: but we were feeling it awake. I wanted to make a story that had that feeling at its center. **Why *The Translator* now, and not the fourth in the Aegypt Quartet?**

I've been at work on the Aegypt series for over 20 years. Each volume has been harder to write and taken longer than the previous one. Meanwhile ideas for other good books crowd in on me. They seem like - not like vacations, but like escapes to wonderful new places. I can't always resist. **In many of the reviews of your writing you are said to be a writer's writer... Can you tell us the kind of work you enjoy reading? In other words, what books are on your nightstand right now?**

I have teenage twin daughters and a school-choice carpool. There's nothing on my nightstand but a pair of earplugs.... Writers I've had a chance to read lately that I admire and envy (for the things they can accomplish that I can't, or haven't but might) are Jim Crace, especially "Being Dead," and John Banville, especially the trilogy that includes "The Book of Evidence" and "Ghosts." I think they are writer's writers: writers in whom the accomplishment of hard things in words is an integral part of the excitement and drama of the work. I read David Lodge and Anthony Burgess for fun. Why all English, Irish, or Anglo-Irish? I don't know. **Do you have any advice for aspiring writers?**

I tell my students that there are — it seems — no more than a thousand men and women in America currently making their livings entirely from writing fiction, less (I claim) than the number of pediatric neurosurgeons, divas, or professional football players. I point to the *New York Times Book Review* and the ten or so novels reviewed this week, and note that the *Review* has been reviewing as many novels every week for a hundred years and more, and how many are remembered today? And if after this they can go on writing, then they have a chance. If they can stop, they probably should.