

Love & Sleep Short Guide

Love & Sleep by John Crowley

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Contents

Love & Sleep Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters.....	3
Social Concerns.....	4
Techniques.....	5
Themes.....	6
Key Questions.....	8
Literary Precedents.....	10
Related Titles.....	11
Copyright Information.....	12



Characters

Pierce Moffet, first introduced in *Aegypt* (1987), continues as Crowley's central interest in *Love & Sleep*.

After leaving Noate University without completing his Ph.D. in history and Renaissance studies, Pierce secures a job in New York City teaching history and literature. Eventually, his unhappiness and failed relationships lead him out of New York and to Blackbury Jams in the Faraway Hills of New York State. Here he meets Rosie Rasmussen and Rosie's uncle Boney Rasmussen whose foundation is the literary executor for Fellowes Kraft's estate.

Through these connections, Pierce's interest in alchemy and magic which originated in his reading of Kraft as a youth in Kentucky is brought full circle.

Pierce is tied closely to the Rasmussen family. Boney Rasmussen's foundation employs Pierce to transcribe Kraft's unpublished manuscript, and slowly a relationship is forming between Pierce, Rosie Rasmussen and her daughter Sam. Crowley has noted that the child has been featured more extensively in this novel in part because his own twin daughters have grown to take a greater share of his life — they were born at the time *Aegypt* was released. Boney's death in this novel does not signal the end to Pierce's investigation of Kraft's final manuscript or his own research into shifts of history. In fact, at the close of the novel, Pierce expresses his intention to continue his search in Europe.

One of the impressive aspects of *Love & Sleep* is Crowley's recreation of actual historical figures of the late sixteenth century. These characters — poets, alchemists, and court figures — move through sections of Crowley's novel bent upon achieving their political, scientific, supernatural and intellectual ends. Crowley employs familiar literary figures such as Sir Philip Sydney as well as less familiar ones such as Fulke Greville whose ghost is still thought to haunt the halls of Warrick castle. Crowley presents the supernatural elements of the novel with such confidence that the reader's belief is willingly suspended. It is obvious that Crowley engaged in careful historical research of the Renaissance and that his historical characters interact with his "fictional" ones seamlessly.

Social Concerns

Pierce Moffet, the protagonist in Crowley's *Love & Sleep*, is in the process of trying to find out who he is.

This quest for identity and fulfillment has led him to leave New York City for rural Blackbury Jams. In the course of the novel, Crowley includes sections in which Pierce reflects on his past and how a number of key events have influenced his present character. Indeed, the interplay between Pierce's past and present parallels the larger theme of time in the novel. Pierce's search for purpose is a universal one, and his meditations on his personal development give the novel a central character with whom the reader can empathize.

Techniques

A sequence of novels presents special problems for the writer to overcome.

Approximately seven years separate the publication of *Aegypt* from *Love & Sleep*, sufficient time for many readers to forget plot, character, and themes.

Crowley has fashioned *Love & Sleep* in such a way that it can be read and understood independently of *Aegypt*.

The novels are complimentary to each other, one detailing Pierce's failed romantic relationship, the other his youth in Kentucky. In addition to structuring this second novel so that it can be read independently of the first, Crowley has maintained the same level of interest in his material. Writers and readers must both continue to be engaged in the issues of a work started almost a decade earlier. Thus far, Crowley's sequence shows the same level of enthusiasm.



Themes

The Prologue of the novel contains a passage we later discover to be written by Fellowes Kraft, a historical novelist Pierce Moffet read devotedly in his youth. "Once," writes Kraft, "the world was not as it has since become. Once it worked in a way different from the way it works now; its very flesh and bones, the physical laws that governed it, were ever so slightly different from the ones we know. It had a different history, too, from the history we know the world to have had, a history that implied a different future from the one that has actually come to be our present." These ideas become the core of Crowley's novel. Even before Pierce Moffet reads these words in an unpublished manuscript among the effects of Fellowes Kraft, he believes he has important evidence that history and the physical laws governing the universe are subject to change. In a meeting with his literary agent, Julie Rosengarten, Pierce discusses writing a book which would present this theory of a changing history in which events as well as the laws of the universe shift.

Pierce tells Julie that a shift took place sometime between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that he believes another is about to occur as the twentieth century ends. Only those individuals whose lives straddle such temporal discontinuities could have memories of both histories. Pierce's proposed book will show that such changes have taken place in the past and will prepare its readers for the immanent new age. As *Love & Sleep* progresses, Pierce continues his search for signs that "the world was not as it has since become."

On a personal level, Pierce is embracing change as well. The novel opens in the early 1950s with Pierce newly relocated with his mother to Kentucky where he lives with his four cousins, Joe Boyd, Hildy, Bird, and Warren, as well as his uncle, Dr. Sam Oliphant.

His separation from his father and integration in this extended family proves a difficult adjustment. Two events from this period in Kentucky affect him deeply. In burning the trash, his weekly chore, Pierce inadvertently starts a forest fire that burns for two days, destroying acres of Cumberland Mountain forest land. The accident scars both the landscape and Pierce.

Later on, when his mother and uncle travel to Florida leaving the children in the care of a housekeeper, Pierce and his cousins "adopt" Bobby, a child whose fundamentalist grandfather has raised the girl in physical and intellectual poverty. Bobby is kept hidden from the housekeeper — also her relative — and fed and cared for by Pierce and the Oliphant children. When Bobby becomes seriously ill, Pierce and his cousins can no longer keep her presence in the household secret. Even though Bobby's grandfather, Floyd Shaftoe, disapproves, Bobby does remain with the Oliphants until she recovers.

Another section of *Love & Sleep* presents historical characters caught in the middle of a shift into a new age. This part of the novel, set in the 1580s, involves such historical personages as Giordano Bruno, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Francis Walsingham, and Doctor John Dee who are caught up in the political intrigues of the age. Significantly, Doctor



John Dee and the sensitive Edward Kelley employ a special globe in which appears the angel Uriel who communicates through Kelley future events, among them the beheading of Mary, Queen of Scots and the sailing of the Spanish Armada. This previous age was one in which alchemy and magic still had power and in which the supernatural world directly intervened in the events of the natural world.

These events, Pierce discovers, are the subject of Fellowes Kraft's unpublished manuscript, and the reader eventually discovers that the crystal globe in Boney Rasmussen's possession may actually be the same one Edward Kelley used to contact the angel Uriel.

The differences between Pierce's youth in Kentucky and his present understanding of his past and between the extraordinary experiences of John Dee and our understanding of Renaissance history point to Crowley's interest in the magical power of memory and time. Tied to this intellectual theme is Pierce Moffet's search for personal fulfillment — love. He is not alone in that search. Rosie Rasmussen in the middle of a divorce lacks fulfillment as well. Even the title of the novel identifies love as an important issue. Since *Love & Sleep* is the second book in a four volume sequence, no resolution of any of the major themes takes place. That must wait for the final two books.



Key Questions

As the second novel in a series, *Love & Sleep* offers some special opportunities for group discussion. If any of the group members has read *Aegypt*, a summary of that novel may help the group see how the two novels compliment each other. It may be useful to pursue how the characters — particularly Pierce and Rosie — are changing or developing in this series of works.

In an interview, Crowley mentions that Rosie's child, Sam, figures more prominently in the second novel as a response to the birth of his own twin daughters. As he experienced parenthood in the course of writing the novel, his characters in *Love & Sleep* reflect the growth. Group leaders may wish to focus on the events of Pierce's childhood in Kentucky. What role does religion play in Pierce's life as well as in the historical novels of Fellowes Kraft? What connections might be made between the conflict between Catholicism and fundamentalism in 1950s Kentucky and the events of the Protestant Reformation recounted in other portions of the novel?

With two more volumes in this series planned, groups may wish to discuss what they expect will happen in future books. Will the Woods Center for Psychotherapy figure more significantly in the events of the next novel? Will the next novel take place largely in Europe? These speculations may yield some valuable insights into themes of the current book.

1. How does the early section of the novel which focuses on Pierce's experiences in Kentucky fit with the notion of a shifting history?
2. To what extent does the theory of shifting history and physical laws correspond with contemporary groups that promote "New Ages"?
3. Why does Pierce have difficulties in relationships with women? Does he have character flaws which prevent him from establishing constructive relationships?
4. How has Crowley used real, historical events and fictionalized them?
5. What part does religion play in the novel? Is there a connection between the Catholic baptism of fundamentalist Christian Bobby and the sixteenth century religious conflicts involving Doctor John Dee.
6. In what ways can *Love & Sleep* be seen as a novel of memory? Are our memories constant, or do they change?

Are there any ways in which memories become magical?

7. What purpose does Boney Rasmussen serve in the novel? Why is he so eager for Pierce to investigate the manuscripts of Fellowes Kraft? Does Boney have information that Pierce lacks?



8. What is the significance of the title of *Love & Sleep*? Who is loving and who, sleeping? The last sentence of the novel is "Wake up." Who is the messenger sent to do the waking?

9. Is this a fantasy novel? Crowley has been interested in moving into the literary mainstream. Has he succeeded?

10. Crowley has acknowledged that his novel is full of coincidences. Can you identify some of the coincidences in *Love & Sleep*? Do they add or detract from the novel? Why?

11. Since *Love & Sleep* is the second novel in a projected four-volume sequence, what predictions can you make about the final two novels? Has Crowley included any hints?

Literary Precedents

Startlingly original in conception, Crowley moves the reader back and forth through time while he tells a story with a complexity and skill reminiscent of John Fowles in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). Both Fowles and Crowley fuse historical figures and fictional ones while presenting the intellectual climate of an age, and both give special emphasis to the importance of place in their novels. At the end of *Love & Sleep*, Crowley includes an Author's Note in which he acknowledges a number of writers, among them Harry Caudill whose *Night Comes to the Cumberland*s (1963) helped him craft the section on Pierce's youth in Kentucky; John Bossy, whose *Giordano Bruno and the Embassy Affair*, along with Gerald Mattingly's *The Armada* (1959), and R. J. W. Evans's *Rudolf II and His World*, provided background on the sixteenth century; and Ioan Couliano, whose *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* served as a source for much of the fantastic elements of the novel.

Related Titles

Obviously, *Love & Sleep* is related to the first novel in the sequence, *Aegypt* (1987). Crowley employs many of the same characters in both novels, and the author's intention to explore themes of time and memory remains unchanged.

Although clearly a fantasy novel, *Little, Big* (1981) investigates similar themes of time, memory, and secret histories.

Both novels are set in the city and country. Readers may also see thematic connections to *Novelty* (1989), Crowley's collection of short stories.

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