

Novelty Short Guide

Novelty by John Crowley

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Novelty Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters.....	3
Social Concerns/Themes.....	4
Techniques/Literary Precedents.....	5
Key Questions.....	6
Related Titles.....	8
Copyright Information.....	9

Characters

Crowley's collection of shorter fiction shows an impressive range of characters. From the mythic first man and woman to the contemporary novelist paralyzed by his inability to turn creativity into concrete work, Crowley presents characters who seek happiness within the uncompromising framework of time. His characters chafe under the bonds of social institutions. Intent on making some change in their society, they are invariably confronted by the results of their actions in history. In "The Nightingale Sings at Night" the first man and woman discover time and consequently, death. In "Great Work of Time," Denys Winterset's attempt to bring peace and prosperity through the actions of the Otherhood distort the fabric of the world. Hare's rediscovery of history in a world that has erased the past in "In Blue" and the alcoholic novelist's refusal to enter any future in "Novelty" place both characters in painful isolation outside of society. All of these characters serve as vehicles through which Crowley examines the interplay of time, history, creativity, and society.



Social Concerns/Themes

Published two years after the critically well-received novel *Aegypt* (1987), Crowley's collection of short fiction, *Novelty*, explores the relationship between time and creation in four stories which have widely divergent settings.

The first story, "The Nightingale Sings at Night," retells the creation and fall of mankind. In Crowley's version, Eden is presided over by Dame Kind, a figure whose name can be directly traced to the medieval allegorical tradition from which the modern character Mother Nature is drawn. The fall of the first man and woman is precipitated by the Moon, whose changing phases lead Man and Woman to discover time, and thereby, death.

The second piece, "Great Work of Time," is the most ambitious story in the collection. Set during the last days of the British Empire, this short novel investigates the possibility of time travel and how it might be used to create an alternate, "better" future.

Members of the Otherhood, a secret society of idealists, volunteer to go back into time and make subtle changes in the past to improve the present. Their efforts at creating a new future result not in a better, more peaceful world, but in potential disaster.

The third tale, "In Blue" presents a dystopia based on a complicated system called "act field theory," which attempts to predict actions and events from masses of information stored in a computer. Here, the central character of the short story, is dissatisfied with a society based on act field theory, a world in which all events have been accounted for. Eventually, Hare embraces a new, less comfortable, role as historian, sketching the pre-revolutionary buildings of the old order.

"Novelty," the final story in the anthology, focuses upon an alcoholic, less-than-successful writer frozen by writer's block and unable to turn his creative impulses into fiction. Establishing his identity based on insightful past accomplishments, the writer feels himself trapped between the poles of Novelty and Security. Despite their varied settings, these works investigate the concepts and interaction of time, history, and creativity. In the interplay of these abstractions, each story recognizes the concomitant power and potential dangers. The fall of man, the obliteration of men and races, the alienation of the individual from society, and self-alienation — all are products, Crowley suggests, of these powerful forces.



Techniques/Literary Precedents

Crowley employs a variety of techniques in *Novelty*. "The Nightingale Sings at Night" is cast as a simple retelling of the creation myth. Yet at its heart, it owes much to the beast fables and allegorical tales of the Middle Ages. Beast fables were a popular genre well before Chaucer's perfection of the form in the *Canterbury Tales* (c.

1390). Dame Kind is a character drawn from works such as Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung's *Roman de la Rose* and Alanus de Insulis's *The Complaint of Nature*.

"Great Work of Time" with its time travel and focus on the British Empire clearly echoes the work of H. G. Wells, particularly *The Time Machine* (1895). In his third short story, "In Blue" technique and literary precedent change again; here Crowley employs the genre of dystopian fiction in the tradition of Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1925), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949). The final short story demonstrates Crowley's abilities as a writer of metafiction, a fictional experiment investigating the nature and construction of fiction itself. Together the four works present a range of techniques demonstrating the abilities of a talented craftsman.

Key Questions

Collections of short stories like *Novelty* offer a wide range of topics for discussion. Initially, discussion group members may wish to rank the short stories from most to least successful and talk about each in turn. What criteria determine placement in the ranking? Are any stories artistic failures?

Crowley's interests are reflected in the varying subjects that are treated in his short stories. What, for example, is Crowley's position on British colonialism in "Great Work of Time"? How is "The Nightingale Sings at Night" related to the tradition of the medieval beast fable? Assessing the differences in the stories in point of view, characterization, setting, and style should result in a number of insights.

Following the treatment of individual short stories, discussion members may find it useful to consider *Novelty* as a single work, looking for thematic connections between each of the stories. How does Crowley present the theme of time in each of the stories?

Which stories concern themselves with love? With the writer and his story?

With myths? By viewing the short stories as a single work, readers may discover a number of qualities that characterize a Crowley short story.

1. Are the four stories in *Novelty* connected in theme? How?
2. Myths explain natural events by presenting stories in which supernatural powers are at work. How does the story "The Nightingale Sings at Night" serve as myth? What natural events does it explain? Is the explanation satisfactory?
3. What purpose does the Nightingale serve in the short story?
4. When do Boy and Girl become Man and Woman in "The Nightingale Sings at Night"? Why is the change significant?
5. Is "Great Work of Time" essentially pessimistic? Does Crowley believe that no changes in the present can improve the future?
6. In a number of his works, Crowley combines fictional characters with individuals from history. Is he successful in doing so in "Great Work of Time"?
7. What exactly is act-field theory, and how does it work in the story "In Blue"?
8. Is Hare, the protagonist of the story "In Blue," a rebel? Against what does he rebel? Is any part of his rebellion unwarranted?
9. A metafiction is a fictional experiment that pushes at the limits of the narrative. Why is "Novelty" a metafiction? Does the experiment yield a useful product?



10. Why does the writer in "Novelty" feel himself trapped between the poles of Novelty and Security? Must many writers feel this way?

Related Titles

With their focus on time and history, the short stories in this collection reexamine issues Crowley presented in *Little, Big* (1981), and *Aegypt* (1987). In both of these earlier works, Crowley intertwines fairy tale, myth, and legend with the events of everyday life and the mysteries of time. Like *Aegypt*, each of the stories in *Novelty* probes the nature of history and the pain which results in its creation, manipulation, and study. *Novelty*, then, represents a reinvestigation rather than a departure for Crowley.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994