

Jewish American Literature: Nicole Krauss

Olli, Fall 2023

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This course meets September 5th, 12th, 19th, and 26th at Olli, M2 building in downtown Champaign

This seminar will focus on Jewish-American literature, through the lens of one writer whose works bring out a range of contemporary Jewish experiences across diverse historical times and geographical spaces: Nicole Krauss. We'll ask many questions including, how does Jewish-American literature in general, and how does Krauss in particular, both represent and grapple with Jewish experiences. Throughout the course we will read closely and be attentive to the structures of the novels, the tonalities and shifts in the writing styles; we'll look at metaphors, similes, and other tropes, we'll analyze the rhythm of the sentences and the larger meanings embedded in the texts. With each new time and place we'll work towards understanding the historical context and grapple with how the past informs the present. We'll read two novels together: *Great House* and *The History of Love* (Nicole Krauss). While Jewish-American literature is a very broad and blurry category, these two novels are just a mere slice of the pie. They are not "representative" texts but do give us a wide swath of Jewish literature and experience to ponder. Blake helps us understand the universe in a grain of sand:

William Blake: "To see a World in a Grain of Sand

And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand

And Eternity in an hour." ("Auguries of Innocence," 1803)

Disability and Inclusivity Statements (adopted from Brenden Hay)

This course welcomes students from all ethnicities and backgrounds, religions, identities, and expressions, including neurodiverse people, and trans and non-binary people. I also welcome students who have disabilities, as well as pregnant people and those with children. If you require accommodations, please reach out to me and we can discuss what you need to make the class work for you.

The effectiveness of this course is dependent upon the creation of an encouraging and safe classroom environment. Exclusionary, offensive or harmful speech (such as racism, sexism,

homophobia, transphobia, etc.) are not conducive to this kind of conversation. We are all responsible for creating a positive and safe environment that allows all students equal respect and comfort. I expect each of you to help establish and maintain an environment where you and your peers can contribute without fear of ridicule or intolerant or offensive language. I have no expectation that you will all agree; I just expect you all to listen to one another and respect opinions, including those you do not share.

My pronouns are she/her. This course welcomes and affirms people of all gender identities and expressions. Please tell me how you would like to be addressed and referred to in our class.

Tuesday September 5th, 3:30-5

Introductions

Background to Nicole Krauss (read: Interview with Nicole Krauss, *Contemporary Literature*, Fall 2020).

Discussion of *Great House*, pp. 3-167

In-class optional (five-seven minute) close reading/writing exercise:

Free associate from the perspective of one of the characters in *Great House*.

Tuesday September 12th, 3:30-5

Discussion of *Great House*, pp. 171-289

In-class optional (five-seven minute) close reading/writing exercise:

Write two paragraphs: the first is a book review of *Great House*; the second is either a close reading of a paragraph or an analysis of one of the symbols in the text.

Tuesday September 19th, 3:30-5

Read *History of Love*, pp. 3-134

In-class optional (five-seven minute) close reading/writing exercise:

Imagine possible endings of *History of Love* (if you haven't finished it yet); or, tell us what you thought would happen before you got to the end.

Tuesday September 26th, 3:30-5

Finish *History of Love*, pp. 135-254

In-class optional (five-seven minute) close reading/writing exercise:

Pull out one moment when Krauss refers to another author and discuss the meaning of this particular comparison.

Comparison between *Great House* and *History of Love*, wrap up discussion.