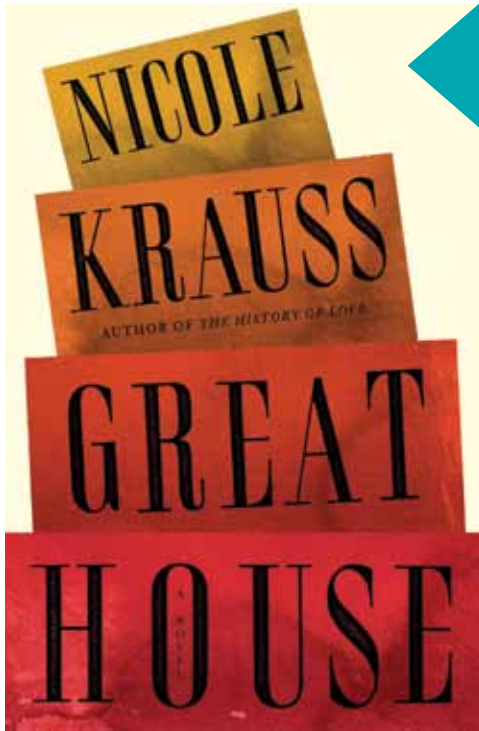


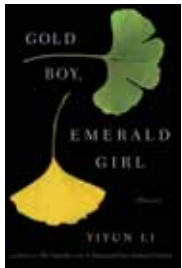
BOOK REVIEWS



Great House

by Nicole Krauss (W. W. Norton & Company)

What immediately drew me to Nicole Krauss' 2005 novel *The History of Love* was startling absent from *Great House*: that is, magnetic characters. *Great House* follows many lives, but it's difficult to connect the dots between them. The one thing they share is a piece of furniture, a desk that had been owned by several writers over time (although it's conspicuously missing from one storyline). Krauss unravels, at times painstakingly slowly, the stories of an American author, an Israeli father and son, an aging British couple, and a family oppressed by a father's obsession. Long-winded inner monologues eventually reveal the symbolic importance of the desk as a holding place, a safe "house" for memories, specifically those of the Jewish people. But then, how does the mysterious Chilean poet fit into this collage of collective Jewish memory? And is it significant that many of the book's narrators act as voyeurs to those who appear to be the "real" main protagonists? Clearly, *Great House* doesn't demand a meticulous understanding of story and place. Rather it gently nudges one in and out of deeply buried thoughts and secrets, offering clues to understanding these damaged souls. While it often puzzles more than it enlightens, Krauss' unfailingly lovely prose is compulsively readable. It's easy to forgive cryptic monologues when a character describes Beethoven's String Quartet as a "feeling as if I alone have been lifted up on the shoulders of some giant creature touring the charred landscape of all human feeling." That sensation is not much different from walking through Krauss' own devastating landscape, her words carrying you above the wreckage. — **Maurene Goo**



Gold Boy, Emerald Girl
by Yiyun Li
(Random House Hardcover)

Gold Boy, Emerald Girl is a collection of nine short stories that previously appeared in publications like *Zoetrope* and *The New Yorker* by

Yiyun Li, who teaches writing at UC Davis. In the book, Li's expert powers of observation deliver intimate snapshots of the human experience. She has a gift for capturing rich, complex characters in just a handful of pages, always managing to pick the perfect moment in time to draw up her lens and snap a frame that exposes an entire life. Set against the cool backdrop of communist China, Li's omniscient narrators grant us voyeuristic access to desires, regrets, and secrets. Whether her protagonist is a female soldier, a dutiful son, or a surrogate mother, each maintains a complacent façade that belies a hidden roil of white-hot and painful emotions. Seemingly black-and-white issues fade into shades of grey as Li confronts readers with unexpected scenarios. "A Man Like Him" portrays a wrongfully accused pedophile as a loving son who tenderly cares for his aging mother. "Proprietress" exposes a well-to-do business owner who takes in single, helpless women she detests merely to stroke her own ego. *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl* brings the heart-aching mess of everyday life into sharp focus without judgment or condemnation. — **Amanda Jude**

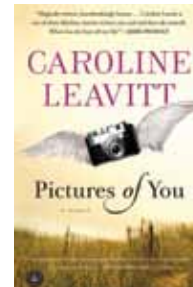


Reality Bites Back
by Jennifer L. Pozner
(Seal Press)

For all the "reality" that today's TV viewers are bombarded with, very few programs offer anything other than stereotypes and scripted situations

that you probably won't ever find in the real world. In *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV*, Jennifer L. Pozner, founder of Women in Media & News (a media analysis and advocacy group) analyzes these so-called guilty pleasures and deconstructs the effects that reality shows have on our views of gender, race, sexuality, and culture as a whole. As women, Pozner suggests we ask ourselves just how seemingly harmless series like *America's Next Top Model*, *Bad Girls Club*, *The Bachelor*, and (the one that started it all) *The Real World* affect the way society views our sex. Much of the book reads like a women's studies textbook, which is to say it can lull a bit at times. But for every section you may want to flip through, there's another that you'll keep referring back to. Chapters titled "Fun with Media Literacy!" and "What Are You Going to Do?" for instance, offer everything from drinking games(!) to critical thinking tools and other goodies that will inspire you to better understand and challenge media stereotypes.

— **Nicole Nalls**



dude reads chick lit:

Pictures of You
by Caroline Leavitt
(Algonquin Books)

Caroline Leavitt's ninth novel, *Pictures of You*, starts with a fog-enshrouded car crash and unspools into a tapestry of

grief, sorrow, and the darkened recesses of family secrets. The novel centers around the mysterious wreck and the intersections of all the lives associated with it. There's the photographer in the process of leaving her philandering husband who kills a woman standing in the middle of the road. There's the now widowed husband, who tries to understand why his wife would put herself in such danger. And then there's the victim's husband's son in a car nearby, who's the one with the secret. The novel at times swerves along that dotted white line into Lifetime TV-movie territory ("*How can you do this to us? / I don't want to leave you! / I want you to come with me! / I don't want you to leave! We need you here. / I know it's been rough, but things will get better...*"), but stays on the road, nevertheless, to a satisfying conclusion. With a tragic story and a cast of highly relatable, flawed characters, *Pictures of You* is a kind of female version of another novel that revolves around a car accident, John Burnham Schwartz's haunting *Reservation Road*.

— **Jonathan Shipley**