

Great House by Nicole Krauss.
Viking 2010.

Great House is not an easy book to describe without giving away elements of the story that readers should discover for themselves. It is, however, a worthy successor to *The History of Love* published to much acclaim in 2005.

At the heart of *Great House* lies a desk, and it is this key piece of furniture that binds the protagonists in the book to each other, though decades and continents may separate them. It commences with an encounter in New York between the narrator and a young man, Daniel Varsky, a Jewish poet from Chile, who is about to return home (where he is later disappeared by Pinochet's secret police) and who gifts her his desk, which he asserts had been used by Lorca. For the next twenty five years, as the narrator becomes a successful writer, the desk remains, to all intents and purposes her muse until she is telephoned by a young Israeli woman, claiming to be Varsky's daughter, who requests that the desk be given to her.

It is hard to discern precisely which theme in the book is the major one for Ms Krauss, or whether she intends that to be a choice made by each reader; there are certainly several to choose from: love and loss, the creative process, the challenge of memory and the steps we make to reconcile ourselves with our past, the interconnectedness of different human beings and the extraordinary coincidences that bring disparate lives in touch with each other.

Great House is not an easy book to read, for it demands mental flexibility from the reader, and some patience, but the whole is a deeply rewarding and enriching narrative from a writer heading towards the peak of her creative powers.

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