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EW review: Krauss' ingenious 'Love'

Impressive, ambitious narrative falls just short of dazzling

By Jennifer Reese **Entertainment Weekly**

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(Entertainment Weekly) -- It's probably silly to worry about destabilizing the marriage of novelists Nicole Krauss and Jonathan Safran Foer by comparing their books, because the couple is so clearly asking for

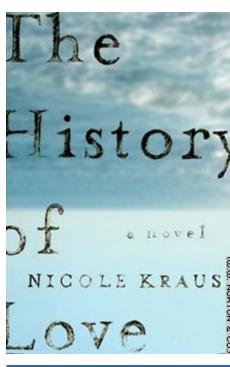
In the past six weeks, the newlywed authors have published clever, selfconscious second novels so similar you can't not compare them.

Both works feature brainy, fatherless New York City kids -- his a 9-year-old Stephen Hawking fan, hers a teenage girl obsessed with wilderness survival -- who embark on quests that bring them in contact with tragic, old Eastern European men (his a witness to the Dresden firebombing; hers, to the Holocaust) who have recently lost sons they never knew. Both play games with page layout and wage relentless charm offensives that don't always achieve their ends.

Foer's "Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close" and Krauss' "The History of Love" beg to be judged against each other. So here goes: Her book is better.

Last month's "Extremely Loud" hit some lovely, original high notes, but "The History of Love" is the more ingenious and

coherent work, written with considerably more artistic discipline.



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Leo Gursky, a cantankerous old Jewish locksmith living in Manhattan, broods constantly about his unlived life. As a young man in Poland, Gursky wrote books to impress his lover, the beautiful Alma, for whom he named all the women in one of the volumes he never got around to publishing. (For safekeeping, he gave the manuscript to a friend, who emigrated to Chile.)

Pregnant with Gursky's child, Alma fled Poland for the U.S., but by the time he joined her five years later, she had married another man. Ever since, Gursky has lived in the shadows, mourning his lost love, spying on his son from a distance and, recently, modeling for a nude drawing class because, as he puts it, "All I want is not to die on a day when I went unseen."

Just about everyone in Krauss' book turns out to be a similar kind of poetic oddball, wnich can begin to grate. Fourteen-year-old Alma Singer (yes, Alma), a precocious kid who idolizes Antoine de Saint-Exupery and has memorized whole sections of "Edible Plants and Flowers in North America," was named for characters in an obscure Chilean book, "The History of Love," which her father gave her mother when they were courting.

Alma's father has died, and her mother, a translator, now stays in the apartment all day in a flowered kimono, amid dictionaries and crumpled balls of paper. Worried, Alma begins a search for an appropriate new suitor, a quest that leads, both improbably and believably, to an investigation of the strange and alluring little book behind her name.

Krauss has created a crazy spiderweb of associations and missed connections. Miraculously, she manages to make all the delicate filaments not only hold together but also support the weight of the enormously ambitious narrative. That this impressive feat of literary engineering stops short of dazzling has to do with the forced quirkiness that has wormed its way into her prose. Did Krauss learn to be cute from her husband, both of whose books seem somewhat desperate to amuse?

Krauss' cool, high-concept 2002 debut, "Man Walks Into a Room," showed no such blatant neediness, but every page in "History" brings a shameless new claim on your affection with some bright, adorable image or idea. Alas, the more the work pleads, the

EW Grade: A-

less you want to yield.

'Boy A,' Jonathan Trigell

Reviewed by Channing Joseph

newspapers "The Evilest Boy in Britain."

Jonathan Trigell's haunting debut (loosely based on a real 1990s case) follows a 9year-old who commits a gruesome murder and gets dubbed by politicians and

Fifteen years later, Boy A -- a.k.a. Jack Burridge, an alias chosen to hide his identity from the still-outraged public -- wins release from prison and re-immerses himself in a world that's unforgiving but strangely tantalizing in "Boy A."

He discovers the opposite sex ("a new species: of legs, of lips, of breasts, of hips, of eyes, of thighs"), while still tormented by violent urges and the fear that his past will be discovered.

Though Trigell masterfully builds sympathy for Jack, the story's overly ambiguous ending leaves a bittersweet ache for more.

EW Grade: B+

'Artemis Fowl: The Opal Deception,' Eoin Colfer

Reviewed by Gillian Flynn

Need ... more ... pixie ... dust.

Eoin Colfer's "Artemis Fowl" series -- about a young, nefarious Irish mastermind and his adventures with fairies -- has always been staunchly uncute. The elves and centaurs Artemis runs with (and often runs a-fowl of) are technology-toting, gizmoobsessed bad-asses.

But in this fourth edition, "Artemis Fowl: The Opal Deception," Colfer is practically channeling Tom Clancy.

Fowl and wary elf Holly Short reteam to keep a "murdering pixie genius" named Opal



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Koboi from pitting humans against fairies. The characters -- especially sarcastic Artemis, now 14 -- are still a blast, but Colfer seems too dazzled by all the gadgetry and explosives jammed into this tale.

EW Grade: C+

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