

Certainly there is real tragedy in this novel, but very little regret, as these daring characters are driven toward their various passions and divergent destinies.

Garcia's meticulous prose and suave, lyrical sensibility invests the narrative with a deeply satisfying richness and intensity. It's a pleasure to give oneself over to a writer as sure and capable as Garcia, trusting that her prose will not falter or shrink from painful truths.

*Monkey Hunting* is an ambitious work. It takes readers deep inside the emotional and psychological complexities of leaving one's homeland and expectations behind to create a new identity. Reading it is like having a lively conversation about the possibilities of racial and cultural fusion with the people actually engaged in it.

## GRAVE NEW WORLD

Sarah Gonzales

*Oryx and Crake*

By Margaret Atwood

Doubleday/Nan A. Talese \$26

CANADIAN POET AND NOVELIST Margaret Atwood's newest public offering is one part ecological cautionary tale, one part creation myth and one part post-apocalyptic isolation fable. The reader gets the sense that Atwood sequestered herself for months before ever laying down a word of this book, so wholly indulgent is the stream-of-consciousness narrative, so complete is the person-on-the-edge fragility of character. As in Atwood's past novels, this book is a delightful amalgam for the sophisticated reader: Her perfectly placed prose, poetic language and tongue-in-cheek tone are ubiquitous throughout, as if an enchanted nanny is telling one a



dark bedtime story of alienation and ruin while lovingly stroking one's head.

This novel, Atwood's eleventh, is similar in theme to her earlier work, *The Handmaid's Tale*, but it goes one step further. In *The Handmaid's Tale* women's bodies are strictly controlled and monitored, while in *Oryx and Crake* all things living are strictly monitored and controlled. Humans cannot stop meddling once the science and technology are available to clone, splice and graft genes, summarily muddying the gene pool to the point where even humans become unrecognizable.

The disastrous culmination of this mad experimentation leads us, after the fact, to the beginning of the novel. Like Homer's war-weary hero in *The Odyssey*, we start when the war is over. Damage done, we are deposited in a lonely tree on a trashed beach. In this tree, wrapped in a dirty sheet, starving to death and reciting bits of encyclopedia to amuse himself, sits Snowman, the narrator of the novel. He may or may not have moss growing on his face, feathers on his chin or three eyes instead of two. He is allergic to the ultraviolet of the sun and knows that people fear him. He is alone.

An indeterminate worldwide catastrophe has occurred, leaving Snowman and the perfect and surreal green-eyed "Children of Crake" as the only humans. Snowman (as in Abominable) scavenges for food, spray guns and other items to aid in his survival, but mostly he forages in his mind for memories of a time when humans ate even when they weren't hungry; of when he was Jimmy and not Snowman; of when he and his best buddy, Crake, played games like Extinctathon and ate SoyOBoyburgers after Nanotech Biochem class.

*Oryx and Crake* is a sort of creation myth in reverse: a story of a desecrated

Eden in which Crake, who grew up to grow perfect humans, and Oryx, an ex-child-porn slave, are Adam and Eve. Atwood's exacting prose, with nary a sentence out of place, takes us from this future, where Snowman rummages through old houses for supplies—the occupants long dead and rotting—back to the days of Jimmy's childhood, before the world was naught. Jimmy meets Crake, a quiet genius-type who becomes the greatest cloner of all time, and Oryx, Jimmy's great love and also greatest torture because of her past as a child pornography slave. The odds of finding true love and loyalty are limited when sex is routinely bought and sold and fellow human beings created at will.

While the idea of the earth coming to ruin through excessive gene mutation may not be that visionary, Atwood has seen with startling clarity into a grim future from one human being's perspective: a human who, like any of us, could conceivably end up in the same sheet, stranded in the same tree, aching to have used her voice while there still existed a context in which to protest.

## PUBLIC DANCER

Tracy McCabe

*Critical Gestures:*

*Writings on Dance and Culture*

By Ann Daly

Wesleyan University Press \$19.95

FEMINIST THEORY AND DANCE studies are two phrases rarely uttered in the same sentence. A discussion of either notion would seem unlikely to provide a bridge to the other. And yet, both share a fundamental concern with what our bodies mean, as Ann Daly's *Critical Gestures* makes clear.

In "Theorizing Gender," the last part of this impressive col-

