

## **MONKEY'S UNCLE**

*By Jenny Diski.*

*Trafalgar Square, \$24.95.*

If Freud, Marx and Darwin were set adrift together in a boat, what would they talk about? Food, according to Charlotte Fitzroy, the protagonist of Jenny Diski's overwrought sixth novel. Charlotte, 49 years old and unlikable, has gone mad. This becomes apparent when she is found stark naked in her garden, pulling up the plants. Less apparent to the outside world is Charlotte the Mad's imaginary underworld, where she meets Jenny, a fashionably dressed



orangutan who serves as her guide. Also on hand are a possible ancestor, Robert FitzRoy, captain of the Beagle and inventor of the weather forecast, and those three hungry men — Marx, Freud and Darwin. A devoted socialist, Charlotte blames Marx for capitalism's world dominance, Freud for having made people more self-centered and Darwin for denying humankind the comfort of faith. But all discussion is preempted by their growling stomachs. Meanwhile, back in the real world, Charlotte the Depressed is checked into a mental hospital, where she tries to come to terms with the recent death of her daughter. The end of the novel disintegrates into a New Age parody in which Charlotte discovers yet a third self — a wailing infant. Charlotte the Mad and Charlotte the Depressed bicker over who is best suited to take care of the neglected and disappointed inner child. Maybe food might not be such an unenlightened topic of conversation after all.

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