Questions for Cristina Garcia’s *Monkey Hunting*

1. Why does Cristina García use multiple narrators? Why does she jump back and forth between time frames and settings in China, Cuba, New York, and Vietnam? What does such a narrative approach add to the novel that a more conventional structure could not achieve?

2. What ironies are revealed in Chen Pan’s letting himself be drawn to Cuba with dreams of returning home “a wealthy man”? What are the consequences of his fantasy of coming back to “build a splendid house by the river, huge and on stilts, better than any in his village’s memory. He’d buy two or three more wives, comely and fecund as hens, found his own dynasty”? (pp. 5—6). In what ways is this kind of dreaming similar to the fantasies of those who enslave him?

3. When Chen Pan arrives in Cuba, the narrator observes, “Here he could no longer rely on the known ways. Who was he now without his country?” (p. 21). Does Chen Pan lose his identity in Cuba? Or does he blend his Chinese identity with a new Cuban identity? In what ways is the novel itself about personal identity in relation to family, country, class, race, and gender?

4. *Monkey Hunting* takes place against the backdrop of Cuba’s revolutionary war against Spain, Mao’s cultural revolution in China, and the Vietnam War. How do these historical events influence the characters and their actions? How are these wars related?

5. Chen Fang says, “There is no harder work than being a woman” (p. 96). Why is she in a unique position to know this? Is she right? Does the novel itself support her view?

6. When Chen Fang meets Dauphine, she says, “Her long blond hair hung like a voyage” (p. 140). Why would Chen Fang describe her in this way? What does the likening of her hair to a voyage reveal about both Chen Fang and Dauphine? What does it foreshadow? Where else in the novel does this kind of metaphoric language occur?

7. Chen Pan tells his grandson, Meng: “In your life there will be two paths, one easy and one difficult. Listen well: Always choose the difficult one” (p.193). Why does Chen Pan offer this advice? In what ways has he himself chosen the more difficult path?

8. Thinking about the American soldiers who brought home Vietnamese women after the war, “Domingo wondered about these migrations, these cross-cultural lusts. Were people meant to travel such distances? Mix with others so different from themselves?” (p. 209). In what ways is his own family an example of such migrations and “cross-cultural lusts”? What are the good and bad consequences of such movements?

9. What motivates Chen Pan to buy the mulatto slave Lucrecia and her son? How has his own experience as a slave affected this decision and his treatment of Lucrecia?
10. When the Protestant missionaries try to convert Lucrecia, she asks, “From what?” and asserts her belief that “whenever you helped someone else, you saved yourself” (p. 128). What specific examples of this ethic does the novel provide? In what kinds of behavior is it subverted?

11. Why has García divided her novel into three parts: “Origins,” “Traveling Through the Flesh,” and “Last Rites”? How are these parts related to one another? In what sense is the novel about spiritual journey?

12. The novel ends with a remarkable sentence: “When Chen Pan drank his red wine, he smiled and became immortal” (p. 251). How should this sentence be interpreted? In what sense has Chen Pan become immortal?

13. What does *Monkey Hunting*, as a whole, say about the struggle between love and compassion, on the one hand, and greed and oppression, on the other? What does it say about the conflicts arising from the desire for freedom and the impulse to control?