

FANFARE

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

PICKS OF THE WEEK

BOOK

The New York Times picked Eric Kraft's novel *What A Piece of Work I Am* as a Notable Book of 1994. More important, we loved it here at The Commercial Appeal.

It has now been issued in a trade paperback format (Picador/St. Martin's Press, \$11) to coincide with the publication of his new novel, *At Home with the Glynnys* (see review, Page G3).

Kraft is one of those authors who provides so much delight that we may forget to take

him as seriously as we ought to. With compassion and mischievous intent, he subjects reality to the torque of manipulation and memory. Do reality and memory have any truck with each other? Is life a stage and we mortals mere players upon it? If that's the case, who wrote the play we star in and the scenes we shuffle into as bit-actors with a few mumbled lines?

Kraft explores these issues in *What a Piece of Work I Am*, a joyful and chastening novel in which Ariane Lodkochnikov, called Tootsie Koochikov in school, attempts to rise above her station, her reputation and her small-town life by way of the avant-garde theater; or is it theater, and does Kraft's habitually naive hero Peter Leroy know where life ends and theater begins? He — and we — know one thing; we're all crazy about Tootsie Koochikov, who defines the concept of a dish, a game chick, a blessing.

Last year, we said: "One reacts to the novel on a personal level, delighting in the concreteness of its complexities, the evanescence of its construction and in the playful purposefulness of its prose. Like a mirror held to a mirror, the novel allows us an oblique glimpse of ourselves reflected a thousand times at the oddest angle."

We'll stick with that assessment.

—Fredric Koeppe

