

There's a lot of thought in 'Home,' but Kraft can be read for fun, too

"At Home With the Glynn: The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences & Observations of Peter Leroy (Continued)" by Eric Kraft (Crown, \$20)

By Jim Erickson

Eric Kraft is back at his best again. "What a Piece of Work I Am" (1994) went too far into outer space for this reviewer to follow, but his new novel, "At Home With the Glynn," is right on the old Kraft target: the experiences of an oddly corruptible naïf in a world very close to the one we know, but just a little farther into the sphere of lunacy than we have

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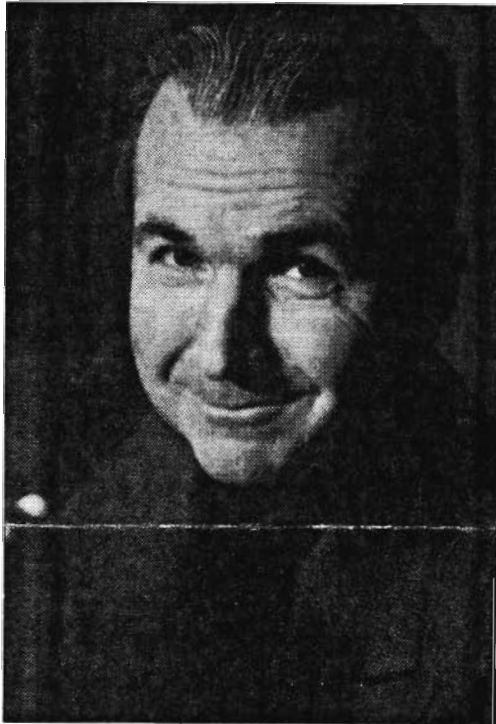
ever been able to go. It's an appealingly safe world in which the normal consequences of beyond-the-norm behavior don't seem to occur and in which real evil seems not to exist; if we had been lucky enough to have the experiences Peter Leroy has, we wouldn't have gotten off so lightly; we would either have suffered retribution or, at least, grown up.

This time, Peter is on the verge of puberty, and the Glynn twins (they aren't really twins, but Kraft readers do not expect anything to be quite what it is initially assumed to be) are a couple of years older, and, being girls, a good deal more developed than he is, at least in terms of sex. Peter is, as always, basically a spectator in life, one who never initiates anything, but, again as usual, he encounters people who initiate him into bizarre and erotic practices, to which he is in no way adverse. Psychologically, he remains a child, eager for new experiences but a little timid and a little slow, amoral but without malice, precocious intellectually but wonderfully uninformed and therefore given to weird theories that fit the world fashioned by Kraft, who one suspects is much like Peter himself.

The art form this time — there always seems to be an art form among the subjects of Kraft's novels — is painting, and Glynn pere's paintings are unconventional enough to provoke thought without being as impossibly far out as the theater in "What a Piece of Work I Am." Again we are invited to wonder how closely the art theories of the characters parallel those of Kraft himself, as well as, this time, those of the auteur theorists in motion picture criticism. And again, we have to wonder how much Kraft is laughing at us when we take his material seriously enough to wonder about things like that.

Intrigue and plot complication are never important to Kraft, so he can take his time developing the detailed absurdities of his situations; speculations and side effects and tangential motives are as important as story development. But no matter how nearly we approach cloud nine, we are always close enough to our world, this time, to see the connections to ourselves, even if what we identify with is our fantasy lives rather than our real ones. I said some novels back that nobody did this better, if indeed anybody else did it at all; I am happy to be able to say it again.

The preface speculates for us about the connections between Kraft's/Leroy's/the artist's experiences/me-



File photo

Eric Kraft is back in top form in "At Home With the Glynn."

mories/fantasies and his work, whether he intends to be completely realistic or not; the theories are not remarkable but the illustrations are strange enough to make them seem so and to fit the mind of Leroy/Kraft and the world of the novel — and, to a gratifying degree, our own. The same is true of the very short Chapter 34, on the subject of the role of literature in life. The little vignettes of child life, like walking home after dark after the movies, are dead-on accurate, assuring us that the eccentricities of the novel do not result from an inability to write realistically or from such abnormality of mind or memory as to make Kraft inaccessible to we supposedly more normal folks. There is a lot of thought in Kraft, but he can be read for nostalgia and just amusement if you don't want to think about him.

"At Home With the Glynn" might be as good a place to start reading Kraft as "Little Follies"; the next level should maybe be "Where Do You Stop?" Those who want relief from Peter Leroy might try "Herb 'n' Lorna" or, in a more serious mood, "Reservations Recommended." But everybody ought to give Kraft a try. There's nobody quite like him, and for people like me he's a real find.

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