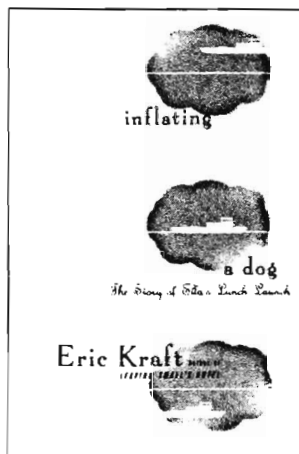


★ **Kraft, Eric.** *Inflating a Dog.* July 2002. 256p. St. Martin's/Picador, General Fiction \$25 (0-312-28804-2).



(age 14). Sentimental, loving, raucous, wise, and great fun, this is simply not to be missed. —Nancy Pearl

It's always a welcome occasion when a new novel is added to Kraft's ever-growing oeuvre, collectively called *The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences & Observations of Peter Leroy*. His latest—the eighth installment—is no exception. Reading the Peter Leroy saga is akin to watching a champion juggler deftly keep dozens of balls in the air while executing an intricate double-time tap dance routine—all without breathing hard. In these books, which all take place in Babington, a small town on the southern end of Long Island during the middle years of the twentieth century, Kraft explores the lives of the extended Leroy family and friends. The series is not written in chronological order, and although each novel can stand alone, reading them together certainly enhances the pleasure one takes from these comic masterpieces that are also testaments to the exhilarating power of memory. *Inflating a Dog* tells two stories: the attempt by Peter's mother, Ella, to start a business, and 13-year-old Peter's discovery of serious sexual longing, whose object is Patti

weaves a circular tale of lives that unintentionally intermingle to produce life-changing events, and his vivid descriptions of the city and culture bring them to life for the senses to savor. —Elsa Gaztambide

Landis, Jill Marie. *Magnolia Creek.* Aug. 2002. 384p. Ballantine, \$19.95 (0-345-44041-2).

Dr. Dru Talbot is eager to get home to the bride with whom he had only one night of wedded bliss before the Civil War took him away, but he soon discovers that after reports of his death, Sara took off with a Yankee. In fact, she actually returned to Magnolia Creek only one day before him with Lissybeth, her bastard baby. When the newspaper attacks Sara in a scathing editorial, it looks like Dru will never be able to get his medical practice off the ground unless he divorces her. Then a yellow fever epidemic strikes, and as the backwoods herbal healer from the wrong side of the creek and the handsome scion of the town's founder work together to save lives, they realize that they still have feelings for each other. Readers will weep with sorrow and joy over Landis' smart and romantic tale, which parallels Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* (1997) in its deliberate pacing and dramatization of the toll exacted on a marriage by war and class differences. —Diana Tixier Herald

Larsen, Deborah. *The White.* July 2002. 240p. Knopf, \$22 (0-375-41359-6).

Larsen takes the true story of Mary Lemison, a white woman captured by the Shawnee before the American Revolution, as the subject for her accomplished first novel. After her parents are killed, 16-year-old Mary is given to two Seneca sisters. Renamed Two-Falling-Voices, she falls into total apathy. Gradually her sisters draw her out, and a young man from the Delaware tribe takes her for his wife. At first Mary

resists the idea of the marriage, but her patient husband soon wins her over. Their first child is stillborn, but their second is a healthy son, and Mary is happy until her husband dies on a trading mission. Mary is grief-stricken, but when she meets Hiokattoo, an older warrior, she once again falls in love. Throughout her life, Mary struggles with her heritage and her new life; she has several opportunities to return to white society, and takes none of them. Larsen handles Mary's complex emotions and her dueling desires with subtlety, and her elegant prose vividly brings Mary's world and thoughts to life. —Kristine Huntley

YA/M: Good readers will find Mary's identity struggle compelling; some graphic violence. KH.

Lawrence, Anthony. *In the Half Light.* July 2002. 384p. Carroll & Graf, \$26 (0-7867-0999-5).

James is a child growing up not far from Sydney, Australia. He's a good kid, bright, loved by his family and friends, but he has kept a secret for as long as he can remember—he sees things, hears voices, and often sinks into depression. As the lights, the voices, and the muttering aloud become more and more frequent, he is diagnosed with schizophrenia and embarks upon a difficult journey of treatment. Along the way, James finds solace in three different women. First, there is his infatuation with a woman named Stephanie, a fellow schizophrenic, who eventually disappears. Then he meets Tina, the daughter of bookstore owners, with whom he has a tragic affair. Finally, after leaving Australia for the west of Ireland, he falls in love with the tempestuous Sarah, a flamboyant and alcoholic musician with whom he finally finds peace and acceptance. Lawrence's novel presents an excellent look at a disease as experienced by the person diagnosed, in a beautifully poetic and very well crafted narrative. —Michael Spinella

Leonard, Hugh. *A Wild People.* July 2002. 288p. St. Martin's, \$23.95 (0-312-29029-2).

A distinguished dramatist (*Da*) and memoirist (*Home Before Night*, 1980), Leonard hasn't previously tried his hand at fiction. He knows how to create vivid characters and revealing situations, however, so reading his first novel puts one in practiced hands. Getting on in years, Dubliner T. J. Quill embarks upon an affair with a beautiful but manipulative woman. At the same time, he finds his flagging career suddenly launched skyward by a job as director of an archive devoted to an Irish American filmmaker. There is bite to Leonard's social commentary, for the narrow streets of the boomtown Dublin he shows us are thronged with builders of James Joyce theme pubs; dissolute, has-been rockstars; and gossipy arts bureaucrats. No "Oirish" need apply, or turn these pages, for there is no sentimental Auld Sod here. Instead, there is a land where enough graft buys posthumous citizenship, and extramarital affairs are conducted with almost continental nonchalance. If it is hard to care much about the characters, the novel's steamy action more than compensates. —Patricia Monaghan

MacLeod, Sally. *Passing Strange.* June 2002. 288p. Random, \$23.95 (0-375-50613-6).

Claudia has grown up with a face so unattractive that it causes people to look twice, but she marries a man who can see past it—or so she thinks until he and his wealthy parents suggest that she get "fixed up." Rather inexplicably, she undergoes expensive plastic surgery and is transformed into a beauty. She and her husband move to North Carolina to begin a new life, and the more time she spends behind her new face, the more detached she seems from the world around her. Turning away from her husband's expensive toys, rich friends, and a lifestyle she sees as inauthentic, Claudia becomes fascinated with the black people living on the fringes of their society and falls in love with black yardman Calvin. Their affair seems to bring the promise of something better for both of them, until reality disastrously intervenes. A sharply observed study of the many ways that people judge each other, this dark debut gains momentum after a shaky start. —Carrie Bissez

Mason, Felicia. *Testimony.* June 2002. 256p. Kensington/Dafina, \$24 (0-7582-0059-5).

Cousins Roger McKenzie and Tyrone Thomas combine their musical talents to launch the gospel group, the Triumphant Voices of Praise. Some 18 years later, after untold dedication, Roger's example and effort have failed to spark critical and commercial success. Roger begins to suffer from nightmares that have left him so unnerved that he is unable to give the group the attention it deserves. His anxiety has affected the choir's unity and caused dissension among the members. While Roger is dealing with guilt from the past, Tyrone is struggling to hold onto his marriage. His wife, Georgie, causes tension in their relationship by challenging