

Short Takes

By Barbara Fisher, 7/28/2002



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Inflating a Dog

By Eric Kraft

Picador, 256 pp., \$25

"Inflating a Dog," the eighth in an ongoing (since 1963) series of novels featuring Peter Leroy, is a hilarious riff on Don Quixote, on the desire for fame, the need for success, the power of fantasy. Peter, now a semi-famous writer of 56, reimagines himself as a horny, dreamy adolescent. As grown-up Peter, he rewrites his mother's sad history, reworks his own disappointing paternity, and revisits his lust for hot Patti Fiorenza. For his mother, Ella, an enthusiastic inventor of such failures as Ella's Cards for Forgotten Holidays, Ella's High-Heel-Low-Heel Convertible Shoes, Ella's Peanut Butter on a Stick, he creates a

fabulous success: Ella's Lunch Launch. For himself, he tests several theories of alternative paternity and enlists the very cooperative Patti to enact the theoretical conceptions with him.

It is his mother's story that most engages him. He wants to reward her years of suburban yearning with immortal fame. He happily floats Ella's Lunch Launch from a literally sinking ship and then for one glorious summer gives her "quite a ride," selling sandwiches and beer to local clamdiggers and pleasure boats around Bolotomy Bay. He reinvents himself as her sidekick, her Sancho Panza, and as her chronicler, her Don Quixote. Immortal fame is hers for one crazy, happy season. He makes his mother's dreams come true - which is, as Don Quixote's madman of Seville says, about as easy as keeping a sinking boat afloat, or inflating a dog.