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## The Modern Word recommends:

**Eric Kraft**

By **Bob Williams**, staff writer

Although the work of Eric Kraft has received the recognition of the discriminating, he is not widely known. He is a literate author but the perception of him as a comic writer has distracted readers from his distinctive qualities. As an author of a series he has incurred an additional handicap since the reading of several books represents a challenging investment of time.

Eric Kraft was born in 1944. He went to the local schools of Babylon, New York, and completed his formal education at Harvard in 1965 and – graduate school – 1966. He married Madeline Canning in 1963. Kraft and Madeline have two sons: Scott and Alexis. In 1967 Kraft taught English at a junior high school. He has since done work in other areas, chiefly in editing school textbooks.

In 1962 Kraft first conceived the character Peter Leroy. He speaks of it as a meeting but he only began writing around the edges of Peter's world in 1967 or 1968. The first formal works that dealt with what Kraft describes as *The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences and Observations of Peter Leroy* appeared (except for the last of the nine novellas) separately between 1982 and 1985. All of the novellas appeared in 1992 as *Little Follies* but Kraft's first published book was *Herb 'n' Lorna* (1988). Each of Kraft's subsequent novels concerns some aspect of his alter ego, Peter Leroy.

Kraft probes the nature of reality and Peter Leroy is the instrument with which he does so. In Peter's world we encounter many of the same events and institutions that we know in what we call – for want of a better name – reality. But, while the big facts stay in place, the details are skewed in ways that call in question the nature of our reality and emphasize the text as text. As a way of underlining the latter, Kraft, credited appropriately with the design of many of his books, has inserted fictitious illustrations. These are comic inventions but they are multifunctional and textually subversive.

The nine novellas of *Little Follies* describe the boyhood and early adolescence of Peter. Later books provide a more extended background of this same material. *Herb 'n' Lorna* (1988) is the life story of Peter's maternal grandparents, a work in which Peter plays only a small part. *Reservations Recommended* (1990) has even less of Peter. It is a very dark book the protagonist of which has a twisted and troubled nature. Although not a favorite among Kraft readers, its exceptional vividness and sustained power mark it as durable. *Where Do You Stop?* (1992) reverts to the history of young Peter and thus belongs to the *Little Follies* area of Kraft's novels. *What a Piece of Work I Am* (1994) is another dark book and Peter's involvement in it is less dynamic than in the previous books in the series. It has virtues but it has unsolved problems that mar its total effectiveness. *At Home with the Glynnns* (1995) is a novel lighter in mood and gayer in spirit, another novel of the *Little Follies* type. *Leaving Small's Hotel* (1998) has density and complexity of structure and aim that sets it apart from many of Kraft's novels. Although based on the earlier works, it is the best introduction for the new reader. It is one of the major novels. *Inflating a Dog* (2002) is a transitional novel. It involves the youthful Peter but it demonstrates the relationships of that Peter to an older self. The novel bristles with digressions and shows very strongly the influence of Proust. It is in fact Kraft's equivalent of *The Past Recaptured* and strongly reflects the influence that Proust has had upon his work.

Kraft has received little critical attention although among Spanish critics his work has been noted with care and approval.

--Bob Williams  
15 August 2003

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### Additional Information

[Eric Kraft Homepage](#) – The author's endlessly entertaining Web site.



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