

Book Review

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Afloat on the Bolotomy

THE PERSONAL HISTORY, ADVENTURES, EXPERIENCES & OBSERVATIONS OF PETER LEROY

By Eric Kraft.

Cambridge, Mass.: Apple-wood Books.

Seven volumes. Paper, \$4.95 each.

By Robert Plunket

This "serial novel" of seven short volumes (more are expected) is a real delight. Peter Leroy, the hero, is an intelligent, eager-to-please but otherwise unremarkable little boy growing up in Babbington, N.Y., a fictional town famous for its clams, during the 1950's. As an adult Peter recounts the little moral lessons that shaped his character. He freely admits to changing details and rearranging events, and this reinventing of the past is full of sly insights into

the way writers create fiction.

In "The Static of the Spheres," for instance, he turns his grandfather into a crackerjack Studebaker salesman to explain the unexplainable fact that every family on the block owns one. Peter even lets himself win the name-the-school contest in "Take the Long Way Home" because as a 10-year-old he so desperately wanted to. But while he plays fast and loose with the facts he does so only to bring the truth more clearly into focus. He can win the contest but he cannot win Veronica McCall. To do so would violate the whole social fabric of Babbington and besides, Peter's wife, Albertine, would never allow it. (Mr. Kraft has read his Proust with results that will bring a chuckle to the dourest graduate student.)

Some of these stories are pleasantly familiar. "Life on the Bolotomy" tells of a boating trip to find the source of a local river. Others, like "The Fox and the

Robert Plunket is the author of "My Search for Warren Harding."

Clam," detail Peter's first encounter with metaphysical questions and the uses and misuses of literature. Still others are just plain funny. "The Girl With the White Fur Muff" deals with the power struggles involved in casting the fourth-grade play and brought memories of my own grammar-school days rushing back with almost frightening clarity.

Mr. Kraft understands the way children make friends, the intuitive knowledge they have of sex, the depth of the anxiety they feel when confronted with a world they can only pretend to understand. He is a serious writer who uses comic techniques. Sometimes he uses too many; the early volumes in particular are full of gimmicks — "how to" articles from the Impractical Craftsman magazine, advertisements from the Babbington Clam Council, and so on. Later on, when Mr. Kraft hits his stride, a purer narrative takes over and Peter Leroy's world shines through just like childhood itself: both tiny and enormous, full of mystery and wonder, but with terror lurking all around the edges. □