

theological or ecclesiastical; it was rooted in their living and dying. That is why they must be studied biographically, and not, as Gandhi was studied in the 1960s, tactically." Yet it seems that the greatest connection between these two men was not tactical or biographical, but philosophical; and in fact Green's analysis is strongest when he touches upon philosophical parallels.

By juxtaposing their lives, Green does find certain similarities that are interesting, and he honestly and freely admits disparities. "Without denying the obvious differences between the two achievers," he writes, "it is possible to see some likeness." But sometimes Green looks too hard, forcing comparisons that aren't necessary to an understanding of the unique characters of Tolstoy and Gandhi. For example, Green writes: "The scope of both efforts, of mind and will, is enormous and in that sense comparable in the two cases. One may point to the number of years, and of hours per day, which the two men put into their work." This is true, but not relevant to the unique relationship between Gandhi and Tolstoy's thought. Many people who have achieved greatness or infamy have demonstrated equal dedication.

Later, Green writes that Tolstoy's wife, Sonia, "kept raising the emotional temperature and psychological costs of their struggle, raising them toward the ultimate, death; just as, by his public rhetoric and private conspiracy, Jinnah [the Muslim political leader of India] raised the communal temperature and the political costs for Gandhi." Green then equates the two deaths. But a comparison like this also seems far-fetched and not necessarily pertinent.

*Tolstoy and Gandhi, Men of Peace* is strongest when it relates the two men's philosophies ("the only root of effective anti-imperialism is asceticism"), and it's a shame that Green uses so much more space telling the stories and searching for biographical similarities.

## Peter Leroy

By Eric Kraft  
Watertown: Apple-wood Books.

By Adrianna Rubinic

**R**emember the delight of being promised a bedtime story? Then, the word "story" was

magical, and we believed in unicorns and princesses in pink silk. We didn't consider the dragon's oral fixation, or the potential for proletarian uprising among the Three Little Pigs. But now we're too wise; we've read Freud and Marx, and "stories" will never be the same to us. "Story" is the telling epithet of Eric Kraft's art. His serial novel *Peter Leroy* snares the magic that stories have for the innocent. What's more, he recalls our own innocence by appealing to our memories while he explains his own.

As 37 year old Peter Leroy narrates his life as a boy growing up in a small clamming town, we realize that he is recreating his past to fit his present concerns. In fact, Leroy prefaces each episode by relating the liberties he will take with the truth in his version of his past. For example, he wryly admits that he writes of a boy, Raskol, as being a long-time friend, when in reality the friendship only lasted two days. He fictionally extends the friendship, he says, because Raskol seems like the archetypal friend.

As we read the tale, we are always aware of Leroy entertaining us, perhaps in front of a fire (crackling of course), with a pipe in his hand. It is the novel's peculiar charm that Peter the adult and Peter the child exist simultaneously. And we feel the force of the young Peter's fledgling attempts to understand events around him. Kraft charmingly highlights these experiences with the mature Leroy's reflections on them—reflections we can also identify with.

In the second episode, "Do Clams Bite?" a clamming expedition with Peter's grandfather becomes a rite of passage into manhood, and nine year-old Peter confronts his confusion about the difference between males and females—as well as between idealists and cynics. In another illustrative scene Peter hears the story of his great great grandfather, Black Jacques, from three different perspectives. May Castle, a worldly older woman, tells Peter that "There's a little Black Jacques in all the Leroy boys." Peter's great great grandmother describes Black Jacques as a swarthy, dashing Algerian who invented a hearty brew, Leroy Lager, and printed great poetry on the bottles. But his father bluntly tells him that Black Jacques was a drunkard, only poetic "when he was too drunk to hold a pencil." Of these revelations Peter Leroy writes: "I wasn't sure then just what it meant to be like Black Jacques," but now "being like Black Jacques means, I think, letting yourself be seduced by your dreams, pursuing them, sending them flowers, and never noticing, at last, that you've made a fool of

yourself." Such digressions remind us of the omniscience of 18th century serialists like Hardy and Dickens. But since Kraft's moralizing is not quite so profound, and the convention is outmoded, his novel cannot approach great "art." But his unobtrusive exposition, a relic of classics and a staple of fables, enhances his novel as a great "story."

Much like the archetypes of prince and pauper that we accepted as children, Kraft's characters are mere sketches. But they are vibrant for us because Kraft nostalgically conjures them up.

Kraft's descriptions also render his novel more story-like. His images and scenes just miss being clichés, and are forceful not because they are so original, but because they are so familiar to us. His loping sentences add to his incantatory tone: "Imagine, please, the lassitude of a summer day along the estuarial stretch of the river. The sun is stuck in place directly overhead and seems to yawn there, dozing. Heat is suspended in the air like fog. The river is lying at slack tide, as relaxed and unhurried as a boy lying on his back and watching the clouds drift by, dreaming.... Across the river a dark-haired girl about your age, a beauty in a white bathing suit, with eyes that even at this distance make your heart stop for a moment, lies on the deck of a lean blue sloop, stretching her legs out, turning her face to the sun, dozing, dreaming going nowhere."

But perhaps, as children, what charmed us most about stories were their plots. Kraft's are delightful because they evoke our own unique misadventures. In "Do Clams Bite?" Peter must repeat his grandfather's clamming procedure: he must collect clams from the under water sand and carry them in his swimming trunks. Young Peter, in deference to his masculinity, is tormented by the question: do clams bite?

In "Life on the Bolotomy," Raskol and Peter build a boat in order to discover the Bolotomy River's source. While serving us these adventures, Kraft also bastes American life.

In "My Mother Takes a Tumble," he pokes fun at the alienation and confusion of changing sex roles. A lonely man writes letters in a woman's persona to a lonely woman whom he thinks is a lonely man.

Since *Peter Leroy* is a serial novel, and one with no anticipated end, it is impossible to assess the merits of the novel as a whole or to predict its future course. The chapters of *Peter Leroy* are self-contained in a slim 90 pages of large type. Published every three months, the novel is a pleasant habit to lapse into—a collection of whimsical bedtime stories to savor with a cup of tea. □