

# Books/Leisure

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section

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## What can be said of Peter Leroy? The world is his clam

Reviewed by  
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Over the last year, a serial novel has been quietly appearing in small volumes with such enigmatic titles as *My Mother Takes a Tumble* and *Do Clams Bite?* The protagonist of this "autobiographical" saga is a fellow named Peter Leroy.

Who is Peter Leroy, what does he do, that we should notice him?

Peter Leroy is born. About that time, a man who has been enamored of Peter's mother — the Leroy's next-door neighbor, in fact — finds his girlfriend after wild pen-pal confusions that are beyond description. All this takes place in the first volume, *My Mother Takes a Tumble*, the setting of which is Babington, Long Island, "clam capital of the world" according to Peter.

Erotic tension having surrounded his infancy, Peter later dreads emasculation while swimming with his intrepid Big Grandfather (Volume 2, *Do Clams Bite?*). He is coaxed past this crisis by the twins Margot and Martha

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**PETER LEROY**  
A Serial Novel  
Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4  
Eric Kraft  
Apple-wood Books. 388 pp.  
\$19.95; paper \$4.95 per volume

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Glynn and the sentimental Manhattan-quaffer May Castle.

Peter then plans a boating trip to the source of the Bolotomy River with his friend Raskolnikov; he has been told, though not convinced, that "life is like a river." This adventure is the subject of Volume 3, *Life on the Bolotomy*.

As we leave Peter, at the end of *The Static of the Spheres*, the last of the four installments to date, his other grandfather, Guppa, has just constructed an elaborate radio following instructions from *The Impractical Craftsman*. Peter revels in his radio's superior grade of noise.

Peter Leroy is a middle-aged dreamer and

hotel-owner, a muller and rewriter of Babington history, a man past-obsessed in the Marcel Proust manner and a slow, sly creator of his own salutary myth.

The fact is that he does next to nothing, though he does it with the self-involved stateliness of a man determined to place his life in an assortment of contexts and to extract from it the maximum of pleasures. We may accompany him as he philosophizes ("life is more like clam chowder"), remembers the preoccupations of prepuberty ("Ariane would be prowling around the house in a slip, rubbing against doorjams or running her hands over her hips and purring"), and re-creates the correspondence-courtship of Dudley Beaker, con artist and commercializer of clams, who is driven to, through, and past drink through sex-role reversal.

The sex is bracing and the boating can't be beat, but as we leave Peter he is sweeping up after a grandfather who has nearly been broken by the lust to create. More elaborate failures are sure to await our hero. The next installment, *The Fox and the Clam*, is due in

September.

These books, here collected in hard cover for the first time, are awfully funny, though perhaps not for everyone. Admirers of Lewis Carroll, James Thurber, P.G. Wodehouse and Garrison Keillor should definitely sip or quaff; Woody Allen addicts will get the sense of swimming in clam chowder (not necessarily unpleasant). The prose approaches the private and precious, but in the best sense of these often derogatory terms.

Novelist Eric Kraft recalls a sunny past, those years when Americans considered themselves heirs of all the world's literature and leisure. Peter Leroy cherishes his life, and he won't be hurried. We are less patient in awaiting his promised return.

The Peter Leroy paperbacks are available in local stores. The one-volume hardcover book can be ordered from Apple-wood Books; Box 2870; Cambridge, Mass. 02139. The series is also available from Apple-wood by subscription.

Edna Stumpf reviews fiction and science fiction for *The Inquirer*.