

KIRKUS REVIEWS

“This delightful omnibus volume includes three novels: the previously published *Taking Off* and *On the Wing* and the never before published *Flying Home*, which completes the adolescent adventure of Kraft’s serial alter ego character Peter Leroy — aka the ‘Bird Boy of Babbington.’ *Flying Home* revisits the 1950s, when Peter’s ‘flight’ from Long Island to New Mexico via a home-made ‘aerocycle’ (which, in truth, only “taxied” at virtual ground level) made him a local celebrity — and also shows him in the near-present, now in his 60s, resigned to tell the unromantic truth about his adventure. We’re also made privy to his youthful experiences at a most unconventional institution of, uh, higher learning: the Summer Institute of Mathematics, Physics, and Weaponry (SIMPaW), a precariously dangling branch of the New Mexico Institute of Agriculture, Technology, and Pharmacy. This southwestern Arcadia is a breeding ground for miscellaneous young geniuses and crackpots, and a vehicle, some might say, for Kraft’s deadpan reworking of the imaginary discipline of ‘pataphysics’ concocted by super-eccentric surrealist author Alfred Jarry. SIMPaW’s inspired simulations of applied science are nicely juxtaposed with Peter’s above-mentioned later return home, accompanied by his unflappably cool and comforting spouse Albertine, as he scrambles for a palatable explanation of his ‘lies,’ which may discourage Babbington from exploiting his local fame as the main attraction of a tourist-friendly theme park. As all Kraft’s novels do, this one meanders and repeats itself nearly ad nauseam. But the tomfoolery retains its power to charm, and Peter’s habit of ‘mental traveling’ finally adds up to something like a Proustian exploration of the phenomenon of memory. Besides, there’s no resisting an author who, while effortlessly shifting gears and subjects, announces, ‘I apologize for this chapter.’ . . . The finished trilogy is a trip not to be missed.”

Kirkus Reviews

