

Kraft, Eric. *Passionate Spectator*. July 2004. 256p. St. Martin's, \$23.95 (0-312-31882-0).

Kraft continues the charming and mischievously intellectual adventures of the eccentric writer Peter Elroy—last seen in *Inflating a Dog* (2002)—in the newest installment in a long-running series relishable for its clever literary allusions (from Proust to Twain), shrewd philosophical satire, and faith in love and loyalty. Peter and his dotting wife, Albertine, have left Long Island for Manhattan, and Peter is anxious to promote his current esoteric venture, *Memoirs While You Wait*. But he is distracted by two friends (or are they merely persistent figments of his imagination?) intent on telling him their stories: hapless Matthew Barber, who lands in a hospital cardiac care unit, and blithe Bertram W. Beath, a “passionate spectator” who insouciantly bluffs his way into erotic interludes with spectacular women. Meanwhile, Peter—whose credo is “Life, of course, is just the first draft of our memoirs”—is called to jury duty, where a clerk presents his own solipsistic theories about memory, veracity, and the nature of the self. **And Kraft? He's as ebullient, canny, and entertaining as ever.** —Donna Seaman