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## RECOMMENDED READING

At Home with the Glynnns  
by Eric Kraft  
(Crown; \$20)

This latest installment in the personal history of Peter Leroy, Kraft's fictional alter ego, is a witty and wildly digressive epistemological examination in the form of a childhood reminiscence. In the course of his musings, Leroy recalls—among a thousand other things—his neighbor Rosetta Glynn's notion of dinner rolls as symbols of hope, her husband's ingenious method of revealing ideal forms, and his own sexual coming of age at the hands of the precocious Glynn twins (who are not really twins, "but that's another story").

The Garlic Ballads  
by Mo Yan; translated from the  
Chinese by Howard Goldblatt  
(Viking; \$23.95)

This powerful, misanthropic saga of survival-scrabbling garlic farmers betrayed by their government was originally banned in China. Complex multiple treacheries, familial and official, illustrate the rottenness of society; it's hard to tell courtship from rape, marriage from slavery, food from garbage, or jail from hell. But, as Mo piles grimness on grimness with Rabelaisian gusto, the reader is more exhilarated than depressed.

Robert E. Lee: A Biography  
by Emory M. Thomas  
(Norton; \$30)

Lee's reputation as a military genius and his dignified behavior in defeat have led many biographers to become hagiographers, while others have reacted to his canonization with revisionist devaluations of his career. Thomas offers a "post-revisionist" view—one that shows Lee's battlefield audacity to be prompted by the limited resources of the Confederacy and his personal dignity to be the product of a lifelong effort to avoid the shame that attended his feckless father. Thomas may lack the literary gifts of Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's most prominent celebrator, but his Lee seems more true to life.

The Liars' Club  
by Mary Karr  
(Viking; \$22.95)

This barbed memoir of a close and calamitous family from a Texas oil town moves with the same quickness as its double-edged title. Karr, the daughter of a lean, one-punch refinery worker and an artiste with a past, lovingly retells their best lies and drunken extravagances with an ear for bar-stool phraseology ("A butt like two bulldogs in a bag") and a winking eye for image (to describe spinning away from spankings, she quotes Yeats's widening gyre). The revelations continue to the final page, with a misleading carelessness as seductive as any world-class liar's.

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in the rain  
and make  
it all  
worthwhile.