

As Parkinson's effort suggests, the overall impression created by *The Whole Earth* is that the credit for a vigorous opposition to technocracy and pollution should go mainly to the political Left. This implicit boast, which is the burden of most of the other recent books devoted to ecology and the natural life, is a good way off from the truth. The fact is that the first, and often the deepest and most eloquent, critics of the new order of capitalist industrialism, with its legacies of urbanization and dehumanization, were the men of the true Right: traditionalists, men of church and crown, of radical aristocratism. Capitalism, truly considered, is itself of the Left: it was a concomitant of whiggery and reformationism, that is, of anti-traditional rebellions, of the repudiation of the ancient Right. The early liberals and socialists, from Peel to Macaulay and Mill, are in fact *defined* partly by their tendency to admire science, mechanical invention, and trade-affluence, which in combination were allowing men to achieve "higher standards of living," *i.e.*, to build the pollutive secular city. Catholic and Anglo-Catholic rightists like Balzac, Donoso-Cortés, and Swift, stood in the shadows and prophesied disaster. The liberals' and socialists' visionary radiant cities or utopias of the future were more often than not premised on continuing natural exploitation, industrialization, scientization, and technicization of the environment. What an anthology one could cull from their writings: *From Comte to Harvey Cox*, or, ten thousand pages of devotion to the god *Techne*!

It is, therefore, disingenuous of the ecologically preoccupied Left to create the impression that unlike capitalism it provides a feasible social (rather than merely individual) alternative to pollutive industrialism and urban dehumanization. I say feasible: of the making of many theoretical utopias there is no end, but the empirical proof is that the Left has found no realistic alternative. Behold the empires of the Left—Sweden, Russia, China—where the worship of *Techne* continues unabated!

In any case, the present book would have been better balanced had it included more jottings from lovers of the *ancien régime*, who detest as much as McKain, Berry, and Snyder appear to detest the impersonal, the super-industrial, the hyper-cerebral, the anti-natural, and who celebrate perhaps more memorably the concrete, the individual, the loving, the "genuine response to the natural world," as McKain puts it. I mean that there are fine concrete and intimate essays and passages in Traherne's *Centuries*, in Hooker's *Laws*, in Clarendon's *History*, in Southey's *Life of Nelson*, in Newman's sermons, in Stevenson's "Plea for Gas Lamps" and "*Pulvis et Umbra*" (the Latin could be vernacularized), in the essays of Hilaire Belloc and Eric Gill and in the autobiographies of W. B. Yeats.

Reviewed by ROBERT BEUM

Not Proven

The Optimist's Daughter, by Eudora Welty, New York: Random House, 1972.
180 pp. \$5.95

IN THE LAW COURTS of Scotland there is, I believe, in addition to the conventional verdicts of guilty and not guilty, a third alternative: "not proven." And this unsettling judgment is what one must finally pass on Eudora Welty's most recent novel, *The Optimist's Daughter*, which appeared some years ago in a shorter version in *The New Yorker*.

The new novel comes only two years after *Losing Battles*, Miss Welty's celebration of a hill-country Mississippi family reunion, with all its concomitant intra- and extra-family tensions, attractions and repulsions. There, one felt, almost for the first

time in reading Miss Welty, that he might be in danger of drowning in the context, so particularized was every scene, every time, every place. Miss Welty of course has never leaned toward anything that smacked of "local color" in the invidious sense: her country, which represents a vision rather than a commodity, is never labeled "for export only." However, in *Losing Battles* one felt at times that he couldn't see the forest for the trees.

Not so with *The Optimist's Daughter*, which, on the whole, seems very spare indeed, though Miss Welty's usual Mississippi (the town of Mount Salus) and even New Orleans and West Virginia figure as settings for the action. The novel concerns Laurel McKelva Hand; her father, Judge McKelva; and the wife he has taken in his old age, Wanda Fay Chisom from Madrid, Texas ("Madrid" accented as "Mildred"), and ultimately the conflict that brews, then emerges between Laurel, who has long been widowed and away from Mount Salus up in Chicago, and Fay, who is about her own age, for the Judge's life, then death.

Entering a New Orleans hospital for an eye operation, after which he must remain perfectly immobile for days, then weeks, watched over first by his daughter, then his young wife, the Judge finally—and unexpectedly—dies—from what, it is hard to say. Too much life, too much time, perhaps even a suggestion that Fay shocked him into a fatal seizure by "abusing" him for not getting up and *living*. (She says, "I was trying to scare him into living!") Then Laurel and Fay take the Judge's body back to Mount Salus aboard the New Orleans-Chicago train the Judge had loved (the Illinois Central's Panama Limited of blessed memory?); and the stage is accordingly set for a three-ring Mississippi funeral, enhanced by the arrival of a whole truck-load of Chisoms from Texas. ("You can't curb a Baptist," one of the characters says—the McKelvas are of course Presbyterians. "Let them in and you can't keep 'em down, when somebody dies.")

We have seen and heard all this before,

in Miss Welty's work—the collision between the aristocrat and the good yeoman stock (*not* white trash), in such novels as *The Ponder Heart* and *Delta Wedding*. But here—it's hard to say just how and why—it all seems somewhat forced, the dialogue, of which she is past mistress, replete not with manner but mannerism—the Mount Salus people talking in arch ellipses, the Texans in off-key country idiom. Probably, as Henry James might have said, the whole thing isn't sufficiently *rendered*: Miss Welty just calls her conventional signals and expects us to respond accordingly. It's not really *proven*, and finally we don't believe a great deal of it.

What ever drew the judge, who called himself an optimist, as his first wife, Laurel's mother, sank farther away from him into disease and then dissolution while he kept going, into falling for the "round, country-blue eyes and . . . little feist jaw" of Fay? Is there some sort of implied comparison between the loner Laurel, with no one left to see her off for Chicago but the six "girls" who were her bridesmaids so long ago, and Fay, the nothing that came from nothing, one of "the great, interrelated family of those who never know the meaning of what has happened to them"? And is it Laurel's own recognition of this unwilling kinship that brings her to leave her mother's breadboard (made for her by Laurel's dead husband, Philip) with Fay, to do with as she likes (she's been cracking walnuts on it), instead of coming to actual blows over it—as some sort of symbol of the concrete legacy Fay has been left (the house)? What does Laurel's own long reconstruction, gained through reading their old letters before she burns them, of her parents' married life and their lives before marriage signify? What does her own longing for her dead husband ("*If Phil could have lived—*") mean, in the wider design of the novel, despite its poignant dramatization of loss: "She wept for what happened to life"? Finally, there even seems a tenuous sort of reconciliation between Laurel and Fay, between what may be the

over-loved and the under-loved, the past and the future, as Miss Welty elsewhere suggests: "Memory lived not in initial possession but in the freed hands, pardoned and freed, and in the heart that can empty but fill again, in the patterns restored by dreams."

But then what does it all mean, how does it all cohere into a meaningful, completed action? One is never sure—no more than he is about why Laurel and her father act as they do (Miss Welty never seems to get inside them, they remain flat). The Chisoms, in all their commonness, come more nearly alive: clannish, round, real. ("‘Friends are here today and gone tomorrow,’ Mrs. Chisom told Laurel and the Mayor. ‘Not like your kin. Hope the Lord don’t ask me to outlive mine. I’d be much obliged if He’d take *me* the next round. Ain’t that a good idea, children?’") And one wonders finally if they don’t carry off the honors of the day, whatever Miss Welty may have intended.

Robert Penn Warren long ago summed up Miss Welty’s principal thematic preoccupation as the love and the separateness in folks, in life, in the world. And I would add that she has seemed, again and again, to put the question of how much one can do for another, how much one can love another, how "close" families can be, without compromising the integrity, even individuality of both the beloved and the lover. I think these same preoccupations are with her still, and they flash out vividly, even lovingly in isolated instances in this novel. But as a whole, I do not think they cohere into a unified design; so Miss Welty’s case here must, as far as I am concerned, remain not proven.

Reviewed by ROBERT DRAKE

Hai Pylai Haidou

Has The Catholic Church Gone Mad?

by John Eppstein, *New Rochelle, N. Y.*:
Arlington House, 1971. x + 173 pp.
\$6.95.

IN THIS ANGRY, polemical work, Mr. Eppstein, a noted English convert to Roman Catholicism and expert on international law, argues that what he calls the "disarray" of the Catholic Church in Europe and the Americas is due to the "decadence" of European civilization. He says:

The Catholic Church has not gone mad. Insofar as Catholic minds have gone mad it is *not* a universal phenomenon: it is a European phenomenon, and is the consequence of attempts to adapt and accommodate a religion based upon man’s entire dependence on God (a humble and contrite heart and the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom), to the conditions of a society in which pride in man’s scientific achievement and his supposed social and intellectual emancipation has led to a general impatience with authority at every level and disbelief in the moral law itself.

Throughout his book, Mr. Eppstein tries to demonstrate how those who would attempt to adjust what he believes are eternal truths to the temporal social order have succeeded in undermining the Church which they supposedly hold to have been founded by God to realize those truths. The theologians, influenced by De Chardin and by essentially Protestant existentialist ideas, have bartered away basic Roman Catholic doctrine in an effort to accommodate non-believers, Protestants, and the secular world in general. Many of these theologians, who were so powerful in formulating policies at the Second Vatican Council, have forsaken their roles as scholars to become political advocates of their own speculative ideas.