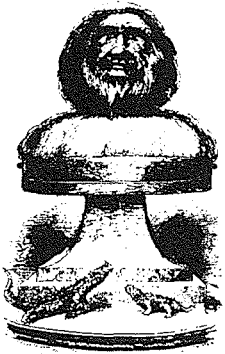


but something must fill the vacuum. He calls on religious and atheistic humanists to bury the hatchet and work together "to introduce moral dimensions into economic and social debate and decision."

Arts & Letters

ECCENTRIC TRAVELLERS:
Excursions with Seven
Extraordinary
Figures from the Eighteenth
and Nineteenth Centuries
by John Keay
Tarcher, 1983
216 pp. \$12.95



English eccentrics seem to have a penchant for travel to out-of-the-way places. In our century, the renowned Alfred Thesiger sojourned so long in Arabia that he all but became a Bedouin; his *Arabian Sands* (1959) is a brilliant record of the experience. But the 18th and 19th centuries had their share of oddball British travelers—many of them gifted writers. Keay, a Scottish author, offers portraits of seven. James Holman, a Royal Navy officer who retired in 1810 at age 25 because of blindness, became what Keay calls "the travelling phenomenon of the age." In 1823, he set off on one of his bolder adventures—a 3,500-mile trek from Moscow to Irkutsk. Advised against making the arduous trip through desolate Siberia, particularly since it offered so little to see, Holman reasoned that the trip was a logical one for a blind man. In the life of William Gifford Palgrave, scholar, soldier, Jesuit, "eccentricity lay not in the manifestations of an extraordinary personality, but in the baffling diversity of alibis under which he concealed it." From 1846 until his death in 1888, he posed, variously, as a sheik in Damascus while attempting to convert Moslems to Christianity; as a priest in Egypt while filing reports for the French Foreign Ministry; and as an Arab physician in Gaza. Where his ultimate allegiance lay is hard to determine: Near death in Japan, he seemed to abandon his Catholic faith for Shintoism. All Keay's voyagers were unusually determined and courageous. Not content with merely *observing* animals, the naturalist Charles Waterton, much admired by his junior in the field, Charles Darwin, journeyed far and wide "to come to grips with them—literally." Traveling in Guyana in 1805 to collect specimens, he enlivened his days by wrestling

**ONE WRITER'S
BEGINNINGS**
by Eudora Welty
Harvard, 1984
104 pp. \$10



with alligators. Being at odds with their own society gave these eccentric globetrotters an advantage over their more inhibited countrymen: unfettered curiosity. All were, as Water-ton put it, "well fitted out for adventure."

Born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1909, Eudora Welty has, with an absolute indifference to self-promoting fanfare, established herself as one of America's foremost writers of short stories and novels, many of which deal with the power and mystery of family relations. Here, in the space of three lectures (originally delivered at Harvard University in 1983), she relates the story of her genesis as a writer. Along the way, Welty manages not only to evoke the book-filled world of her childhood (back when "the dark was dark") but also to describe the lasting influence of her parents. When she was a little girl, living in the house she inhabits to this day, her father, an insurance executive, a lover of clocks, telescopes, and gadgets, scored the soles of her shoes so that she would not slip on the hardwood floors. From him, the future writer acquired a lasting fascination with time, a keenness of observation, and the knowledge that one could never take enough precautions. From her mother, she learned, among other things, about secrets—that, specifically, "one secret is liable to be revealed in the place of another that is harder to tell, and the substitute secret when nakedly exposed is often the more appalling." (Her mother would not explain where babies came from but did tell her, in morbid detail, about the death, at his birth, of an older brother.) Looking, as she did over the years, at the affection between her parents, Welty became, as she puts it, a "loving kind" of observer. And what she looked and listened for most of all were stories—stories that came out of gossip, jokes, and fibs. "It took me a long time," she recalls, "to realize that these very same everyday lies . . . were in fact the basis of the *scenes* I so well loved to hear about and hoped for and treasured in the conversation of adults."