

Balancing the Books

Too Many Sideshows

By Father John S. Kennedy

The reader experiences pleasure, and even excitement, as he goes through the first pages of Eleanor Clark's novel "Baldu's Gate" (Pantheon, \$7.95). Here is a book, truly literate, he says to himself, about real, multi-dimensional people in an expertly defined milieu and place. This kind of thing is rare at a time when novels are likely to be slipshod and tasteless in all respects.

But the excitement dies, the pleasure fades, as the book progresses. For it proves to be overwritten and overloaded. The single virtue constant from first to last is the depiction of the setting, a small town in Connecticut, here called Jordan.

The narrator is Eva Buckingham Hines. The Buckinghams are a long-established family in Jordan, but their fortunes have declined. Eva's father was an ineffectual person, and her mother brought disrepute on their name through a scandal which is fully explained only near the close of the book.

The Buckingham house, perhaps the finest in the town, is becoming ramshackle. Lucas Hines, Eva's husband, is an impecunious drifter, whom she married after Jack Pryden, to whom she considered herself engaged, deserted her without explanation.

Jack Pryden represented Eva's opportunity to rejoin the town's upper crust. He is the nephew and sole heir of Miss Adelpia Pryden, a cultivated, wealthy, imperious native who has dominated Jordan for years. Eva has been banished from the Pryden house because of that unmentionable misdeed of her mother's, and shut out of the Pryden world because of Jack's unaccountable flight.

But now, years later, Jack is back in town. He is a biochemist and heads a laboratory where efforts are being made to isolate a certain substance in the human brain. There is something sinister about this experimentation.

Almost simultaneously is the return of an older man, a sculptor named Baldu Blake. For almost a decade his house and ruined studio have stood empty, while he has been alcoholically idling elsewhere. Now he sobers up, comes back, restores his studio, gets earnestly and brilliantly to work.

Still another man has appeared on the scene, a fabulously rich outsider, Chuck Jaris, who falls under the spell of Baldu Blake's imagination and integrity and begins to plan with the sculptor a renewal of Jordan which will bring it into the twentieth century without doing violence to its immemorial character, making it an inspiration for gadget-mad and materialistic America.

With all three of these men, as well as with her husband,

Eva is involved in one way or another.

(She aspires to marriage with Pryden, willing to abandon her husband and young son. But the Pryden prize is denied her yet again, and it appears that she finally achieves a happiness which she had previously underrated.)

The exploration of memory and mystery is a chief occupation of this novel. Eva must be a kind of world champion rememberer. Incessantly and almost illimitably, like a cow grazing, her mind roams back over the past. Indeed, there are memories within memories, flashbacks within flashbacks. It gets confusing after awhile, and pretty tedious.

As for mystery, what of the scandal perpetuated by Eva's mother? If one is determinedly patient, this is ultimately revealed and proves to be more misfortunate than malicious. Is Jack Pryden actually the olympian Miss Pryden's nephew? No, he is her son. But who is his father? Baldu Blake.

And what of the close-mouthed Lucas Hines, who suddenly appeared in town as a bread salesman? He eventually tells his practically interminable story, which is stunningly complex and embarrassingly rich in unlikely surprises. In fact, this recital brings the novel down irrecoverably. It goes from drama to melodrama to soap opera.

Moon Rock Celebration Set at Planetarium

You don't have to go to the Moon to discover what it looks like. A piece of the Moon, brought by the astronauts to earth one year ago will be on view in a special exhibit Friday, Aug. 7, 6 p.m.-11 p.m. at the Strasenburgh Planetarium, Rochester.

play which will show how lunar rocks differ from earth rocks and suggests a theory for the creation of the Moon.

One of the principal features of the MOON ROCK ROCK celebration will be music provided by the highly popular "The Red, White and Blues."

The Teen Leagues are operating a soft-drink stand and five neighborhood associations are supplying music, posters, handbills and grounds clean-up. Bruce Pollock of the Phoenix Lighting will present a light show to back the rock music groups.

An unusual free outdoor festival on the Planetarium grounds, including a MOON ROCK ROCK celebration is planned, to welcome the Moon rock. Families are invited to bring picnic suppers or drop in casually to take part in the evening's entertainment. No tickets will be required to see the dis-

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