

novel does not immediately grip the imagination but slowly grows upon it, like the landscape seen from a train:

A landscape without distinction which one passes on a journey and immediately forgets; and wonders where it came from when one day it reappears in the memory, more distinct than any of those looked at more carefully. Meadow, wood, air and water: these life-giving four.

That sounds terribly writerish here,

but in the context it doesn't. Anyway, that is what happens.

*Alberta Alone* is not one of the very great novels—the kind that change you and become part of you forever—but it is one of those that make you remember certain things you thought you had forgotten. To read it is, in part, to relive the painful experience of growing human.

And apparently that process has not changed much in the last half-century or so.

## Professor's Pajama Games

*The Doctor Is Sick*, by Anthony Burgess (Norton. 260 pp. \$4.50), recounts the impact of lowlife on a contentedly ossifying professor of linguistics. Elinor Baumbach is a free-lance writer and critic.

By ELINOR BAUMBACH

AS ANTHONY BURGESS's reputation grows in this country, his publishers push ahead with the publication of his entire canon. In the past few months we have had the early *A Vision of Battlements*, the excursion into criticism *Re Joyce*, and now *The Doctor Is Sick*, a witty study of an ossifying professor of linguistics whose life has become defined by the dogma of language and whose emotional decay is reinforced by the growth of a brain tumor which, as the book opens, requires immediate treatment.

Dr. Edwin Spindrift has been bumbling contentedly along, immersed in his consonant blends and comparative dialects. His lack of sexual appetite seems a distasteful but irrelevant fact, although he is unhappy about his uninvolved involvement in the implications of his wife's adulteries. When a sudden fainting spell brings him to a doctor, he is more irritated than dismayed. Whose life finally could be more rational than his?

However, from the moment Edwin finds himself enmeshed in the terrible efficiency of a London hospital, his world begins to crack, erupt, convulse into the sort of horrific comic vision which Burgess handles with consummate skill.

Unfortunately, in this case the vision ultimately fails. It is black enough to suit our time, and certainly funny; but Spindrift does not have sufficient weight. His predicament behind the comic situation is not serious enough. Céline once

said that futility is the intellectual's vice. Convinced as we are of Edwin Spindrift's futility, we need more than grotesqueness to persuade us of his redemption.

But what Burgess does well, he does very well indeed. Refusing to accept the fact of his illness, Edwin, repelled by the grim cheer of the hospital technicians, who are extensions of the machines they operate, distracted by his wife's disappearance with her newest lover, decides to escape. With wrinkled pajamas and freshly-shaved skull he descends into the surreal bar which is his wife's last forwarding address. When his baldness is discovered by the Dickensian characters who frequent the illegal establishment he becomes a minor celebrity. In a brilliant series of Keystone capers, which flash before us like scenes from the new cinema, Edwin spins from the clutches of the Stone Brothers' show-biz ambitions for him as a contest winner ("Undred nicker an' a film-test. Fink of what vat means to you, only a poor bleedin' perfesser."), into the arms of Bob Courage, a mad-eyed mobster who has developed a yen for what he guesses to be Edwin's special perversions. He bobs in and out of the hands of the law and finally, in best farcical manner, opens a wrong door innocently to find his wife in bed with a perfect stranger.

THE book is punctuated by memorably amusing scenes: Edwin lecturing on semantics to row upon row of prostitutes and pimps; the climax of a chase when Edwin, crowned the "Bald Adonis of Greater London" in a humiliating circus of flesh, spits an obscene word into the television microphone before being leapt upon by all his pursuers.

Throughout Edwin's travels there have recurred commercials for a new cleaning device, the "Spindrift." This joke is emblematic of a deeper flaw in the book as a whole. Its milieu throughout is a shade more picturesque than ex-

acerbating—a failure, it would seem, of Burgess's generally mordant intention. When Edwin emits his four-letter expletive, the word is described, not quoted. This sort of evasion might produce comedy, but not the Swiftian revelation that has become a Burgess trademark.



**Mechanized Caesar:** The opening pages of *Gascoyne* (Putnam, \$4.95), Stanley Crawford's first novel, read like a wild parody of the hard-boiled detective story. Receiving a tip that Rufus Roughah, "prominent citizen and big crook," has just been shot, Gascoyne visits the Roughah estate, where an extraordinary amount of action goes on, including an exquisite interrogation by Gascoyne of Roughah's young widow.

It soon develops, however, that Gascoyne is very much more than a private eye. A thoroughly mechanized man, he literally lives in his car, which is equipped with a telephone and various other appurtenances. He has reduced his animal needs to a minimum, subsisting on two candy bars a day and half an hour's sleep. There is a girl, "good old Marge," in his life, though her status is uncertain; but Gascoyne's interest in sex is largely confined to its potentialities for blackmail. For more than ten years he has ruled his unnamed city, which appears to be in California: he has erected housing developments for all sorts and conditions of men (including what is probably the world's only prefabricated slum), and provided them with a chain of supermarkets. He owns the used-car lot, the demolition company, the newspapers, the funeral home, and the police commissioner. Gascoyne also holds under government contract the top-secret zoological warfare station, where security precautions are so awesome that upon the entrance of visitors the typists zip themselves, desks and all, into large plastic hoods labeled "Shhhhh!"

When Police Commissioner O'Mallololly insists on calling Roughah's death a suicide, and absconds with both the corpse and the murder weapon, Gascoyne smells treachery within his empire, and things proceed rapidly from bad to horrendous, culminating in the epic Battle of the Police Tower and a subsequent saturnalia in the Celeste Gascoyne Maternal Memorial Auditorium. To divulge any more would be unfair to Mr. Crawford's unbridled imagination.

Gascoyne's first-person narration, deadpan if grammatically uninhibited, adds a dimension to the preposterous goings-on, until one wonders uneasily just how exaggerated they really are. This is an uproarious book, but the fun does not obscure the chilling reality that inspired it.

—RUTH L. BROWN.

# The Tammany Side of the Story

***Behind Closed Doors: Politics in the Public Interest*, by Edward N. Costikyan (Harcourt, Brace & World, 369 pp. \$6.95), explains the nature of modern urban politics. William D. Ogdon is a member of The New York Times editorial board.**

By WILLIAM D. OGDON

EDWARD N. COSTIKYAN pleads guilty to being the first leader of Tammany Hall to write a book. Some Tammany bosses of the more distant past may never have read one. But Mr. Costikyan is of the new breed of city politician—literate, and even fastidious in his tastes, a musician in his spare time, and a lawyer by profession.

Politics is not a life career with him; he moves in and out of it at will. Although in politics for nearly fifteen years, his tenure as New York County Democratic

chairman (succeeding Carmine G. DeSapio) lasted only thirty-two months, ending in November 1964. He departed in what was reported at the time to be a disagreement with the then Mayor Robert F. Wagner over patronage and political support from City Hall.

Within a few months, however, he was back in political harness, managing the successful Democratic primary campaign for mayor by Abraham D. Beame, who defeated the Wagner protégé, Paul R. Screvane. His credentials as a campaign manager and a political prophet were impaired on election day in November. John V. Lindsay was elected mayor, in spite of Costikyan's election-eve forecast that Beame would win by well over 100,000 votes.

*Behind Closed Doors* is a misleading title if it encourages the reader to expect scandalous disclosures about what goes on in smoke-filled rooms of New York political clubhouses. For, as Edward

Costikyan warns, this is not a "kiss-and-tell" book.

It is really several books. It is an adult primer of how to get out the vote, and swing it your way if possible, through the awful drudgery of pushing doorbells and trying to get into New York apartments. It is a book that tells how the district captain builds his strength, how he scrounges for money to pay legitimate expenses. It is a debunking book, laying to rest the "myths" that aspirant money often buys nomination to public office, including judgeships; that delegates to state party conventions have any individual autonomy of their own; that Bar Association endorsements of candidates for judgeships are the final and uncontestable distillation of impartial, holy wisdom, and that political chairmen have sinister and almost unlimited power over government.

MR. COSTIKYAN is a strong believer in the political party as an agent for "good government," and mourns the decline of its influence. He is a middle-roader in the "reform" movement in New York Democratic politics, a former law partner and devoted admirer of the late Adlai E. Stevenson. He was the man chosen by Wagner to succeed Mr. DeSapio as Tammany boss, whom he describes as a man "obsessed" by ego. Wagner he believes to be a "political genius."

But he is level-headed about the "reformers," noting their almost unanimous interest in patronage on their way to "regularity." And although Costikyan ran a clean shop as Tammany leader, he retained some of the standards hallowed in the past.

He defends the racial and religious "balancing" of tickets as a sound manifestation of democracy. He is somewhat ungenerous to the Liberal Party, which he says has become a tail for someone else's kite. Costikyan doesn't say so, but this conviction was probably confirmed when the Liberal Party abandoned the Democratic Party for once and went with Lindsay. He apparently sees nothing wrong with offering a government job to a man as a "sensible solution" to avoid a primary fight. But he was willing to battle to the bitter end to keep a candidate with "an honest-to-God police record" off the ballot.

He explains the wariness of political leaders in accepting a "newcomer" as a candidate for public office; they are uneasy, not knowing what heinous blunder these neophytes may commit on the stump. The leaders feel more comfortable, and confident, with candidates they have seen around the clubhouses and worked with while pounding the pavements.

Although he defends national political conventions, Costikyan takes a dim view of the state nominating process in

