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clubby, upper-class English life. No one except an awkward security officer worries much about the mistake. And second, *The Human Factor* is full of references to writers: Castle uses *War and Peace* to give government secrets away; the man killed by mistake marked his copy of Browning with cryptic private allusions to his hopeless love affair; in Russia, Castle is reading Defoe, who was himself a spy.

Official murder and deceptive literature. All sorts of horrors go on behind jolly facades. But all sorts of murky-looking fronts conceal nothing at all. Books may mean what they say, and they may mean lots of other things; in this context, writer and reader become spies together, practicing for their difficult life in the world, juggling their double allegiance to an innocence that is not always an illusion and to a suspicion that is not always justified. ●

More Passages

The Seasons of a Man's Life

by Daniel J. Levinson with Charlotte B. Darrow, Edward B. Klein, Maria H. Levinson, and Braxton McKee
Knopf, 384 pp., \$10.95

Reviewed by
Anthony Astrachan

IN THE MIDDLE of the journey of this life, I sometimes think that one of the things that make the forest dark is this country's obsession with youth. It's not only the advertising and the TV programming. It's the way the work world is still geared to early adulthood although the proportion of its members in their middle age is constantly growing. It's in the way the psychotherapy subculture—important in America far beyond the number of adherents or sects—remains mired in the old Freudian concentration on the span from infancy to adolescence.

So as I come close to the end of what I am told is a "mid-life crisis," I am cheered that we have entered a new age of exploration, discovering the stages of adult growth. Gail Sheehy's 1976 best seller on adult development, *Passages*, put the phrase "mid-life crisis" in everybody's mouth. Now Daniel Levinson, a Yale professor of psychology who directed one of the in-depth studies on which Sheehy

based her work, provides a coherent theory of the human life cycle in his book, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. (Sheehy's other main source, Roger Gould, will publish his *Transformation* this summer.)

The Levinson theory divides the life cycle into five overlapping eras. Childhood and adolescence run from birth to age twenty-two; early adulthood runs from seventeen to forty-five; middle adulthood, from forty to sixty-five; late adulthood, from sixty to eighty-five; and late, late adulthood, from eighty to death.

Each era is marked by periods of stability during which life structures are built. These stable periods alternate with transition periods during which life structures change. The transitions are frequently times of crisis; 80 percent of the forty men who make up Levinson's primary sample went through crises during mid-life transition. "Roger Mohn," for instance, spent his thirties—the stable period of settling down and "becoming one's own man"—working happily, first as head of his company's metals shop and then as the firm's purchasing manager. At forty, he went into mid-life transition with a promotion to head of manufacturing, a job beyond his aspirations and skills. He lost touch with his wife and children, though they supported him when he developed a cancer and was demoted to a position of equal pay but less responsibility. Then Mohn entered middle adulthood, decided to stay in the less challenging job for its security, and spent more time with his family and his fishing.

According to Levinson, the sequence of periods is inescapable: A man cannot go from early adulthood to middle adulthood without passing through the age thirty transition, settling down, and mid-life transition. Levinson defines each period in terms of developmental tasks rather than such concrete events as marriage or retirement. The tasks of settling down, for instance, are to establish one's niche in society (nest-building, pursuing one's interests within a defined pattern) and to work at "making it" (moving upward along a timetable). Developmental tasks may be antithetical. "Floyd Thomas," for example, a black worker, established his niche in society by socializing with "the boys," playing golf, gambling, drinking, and chasing women (though less than he had in his youth). He worked at making it by getting a factory job as a machine operator, becoming a skilled worker, earning promotions, and by sharing two cars, regular vacations, and an increasingly middle-class life-style with his working wife. His contradictory sides "co-existed in an uneasy truce." Later periods

could integrate or change contradictions in this structure.

Levinson sees three sets of tasks running through the life cycle. The first set deals with the evolution of the life structure—building one, terminating it, exploring the possibilities in both the self and the world for new structures, and building one. The second set deals with forming components of the life structure—a dream, usually of work or love; an occupation; love, marriage, and family; mentoring relationships; and friendships. (On the last, Levinson says, “In our interviews, friendship was largely noticeable by its absence. As a tentative generalization we would say that close friendship with a man or woman is rarely experienced by American men.”) The third set of tasks has to do with adult individuation, which Levinson defines as resolving the basic polarities of young/old, destruction/creation, masculine/feminine, and attachment/separateness.

Levinson and his colleagues started their research by studying the lives of 10 men in each of four occupations—hourly paid workers, corporate executives, university biologists, and novelists. They also looked at what they call a “secondary sample” of men whose lives have been portrayed in history and literature—among them Dante (who first painted the mid-life crisis as a dark forest), Shakespeare, Gandhi, Freud, King Lear, and Willy Loman.

The pieces of biography from both samples bring *Seasons* to life. I was fascinated by a new look at Bertrand Russell. He spent the stage of settling down and becoming one's own man writing *Principia Mathematica* with Alfred North Whitehead and living in an emotionally cold, celibate marriage. Then he started his mid-life transition by having an affair with Lady Ottoline Morrell (whose nightgowns he hated) and let World War I shake him out of his prejudices. I was equally fascinated by a much longer biography of novelist “Paul Namson,” who spent his thirties in the family stockbrokerage business while writing his first two novels and passed his mid-life transition wandering from university teaching to writing to real estate investment while he fought with his wife. He emerged into middle adulthood with a stronger marriage and a literary career that combined biography with fiction.

The biologists, executives, and workers

Anthony Astrachan, a research associate of the Center for Policy Research, is writing a book on what men feel about the changes that women are making in the lives of both sexes.

were just as interesting, but I wanted to know more about the workers. Levinson left me with the disturbing if unsurprising suspicion that workers find it harder to achieve a satisfactory middle-adult life structure than men in better paying and more prestigious occupations.

The biographical sketches in *Seasons* are fuller and more significant than those in Sheehy's *Passages*, but they may seem less pertinent to readers looking for easy identification with their own lives. *Passages* was a frenetic book of many moments, each of them barely anchored by Sheehy's shallower theory but capable of lightning-flash illumination of a reader's experience of his own moments. *Seasons* is a more serene and flowing book that casts a steadier light on the stages of one's own life. I started it convinced that my own life cycle departed often from the norm but finished it abashed to see how closely Levinson's theory fit me.

Seasons is so good that I can only reproach it for not being perfect. Some imperfections are stylistic: The movement back and forth from elaboration of the theory to the biographies that illustrate it is uneven. Some are theoretical: Levinson does not really explain how or why the shift from becoming one's own man (acronymed as BOOM, the boom of the late thirties) to the mid-life transition and its frequent crises takes place. What makes a man give up the stable structure he has struggled to build and start to question his own fundamentals? There is still a lot to learn, as Levinson is the first to admit. He calls his findings hypotheses to be tested, not laws that have been proved.

I think it a pity that Levinson did not study any women. He says that a group of 40 was the largest his team's resources could handle and that a study of 20 men and 20 women would have done justice to neither gender. I must therefore be sorry he could not find resources for a study of 80. Future research will no doubt repair this omission; one doctoral dissertation on women that uses Levinson's theory has already been completed. But the number of places in America where men and women interact is growing, and I hope that future studies of both the male and the female life cycles will take these interactions into account more than Levinson's research was able to do.

The new discoveries about adult development give us a new clarity and a new unity of vision about ourselves that is intellectually and emotionally exciting. Levinson opens a myriad of new insights by compelling us to look at the interrelated-

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Wit Twister No. 115

Edited by Arthur Swan

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word. Answers on page 52.

The cheerful — — — — —

— need not bring again

His frosty blocks to these — —

— — — — — men

Whose — — — — —

projects, as does their stage,

The image of this cold and blood-
less age. A.S.

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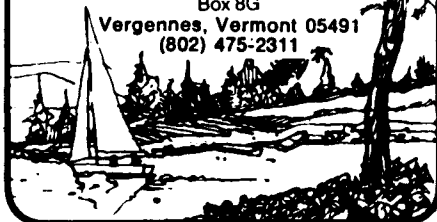
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ness of the biological, psychological, and social elements of the life structure.

This new vision may also enable us to do better at the Sisyphean tasks of organizing our individual lives and our society. The free participation of women in the work world, for instance, turns out to be not only a matter of women's liberation and efficient use of a labor force but also something that can help men resolve the masculine/feminine polarity within themselves, which Levinson sees as one of the main tasks of the mid-life transition.

The Seasons of a Man's Life makes this a good season to learn about our own growth. ©

Books in Brief

The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller

Edited by Robert A. Martin

Viking, 256 pp., \$15

This thick collection of essays, interviews, and journalistic pieces is a book of paradoxes. It is rather startling, for example, to find the author of *Death of a Salesman* complaining about the American "blue play," with its cult of "pathetic defeat," its predictable "documentation of alienated loneliness." No less surprising is Miller's admiration for Ibsen—not for his realism but for his "mysticism." Miller obviously takes seriously his own antideterministic celebration of the unpredictable.

Miller is liveliest in the famous squabble over his "Tragedy and the Common Man" (1949), in which he argues that the modern fear of being displaced has tragic dimensions and that the common man knows this fear best. To the academics' sustained howls of outrage that a tragic hero must have rank and stature, the playwright counters that "there is no more reason for falling down in a faint" before Aristotle's *Poetics* than there is for having one's "illnesses diagnosed by Hippocrates," especially since Aristotle lived in a slave society: "When a vast number of people are divested of alternatives, as slaves are, it is rather inevitable that one will not be able to imagine drama, let alone tragedy, as being possible for any but the higher ranks."

The later essays generally have a sharpness of focus and sophistication that the earlier ones lack. Particularly impressive is the author's foreword, with its attack on the contemporary obsession with irony, the stylized reduction of human suffering to "a

groan and a cough." Miller worries in the foreword that he has talked too much over the past 30 years; but the early talk has been highly influential and the recent talk sometimes brilliant.

—JACK SULLIVAN

Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case

by Allen Weinstein

Knopf, 704 pp., \$15

The inextricably knotted and twisted strands of evidence pertaining to the Hiss-Chambers imbroglio are as difficult to follow in Professor Allen Weinstein's book as they were when revealed thread by thread during the two years that followed Whitaker Chambers's startling charge against Alger Hiss before the House Un-American Activities Committee, in August 1948. Chambers accused Hiss, then president of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, of acting as a Soviet agent while serving as a second-echelon official in the State Department.

Weinstein has spent more than five years examining all public records, reading all published reports, and interviewing all those who participated, either directly or indirectly, in the case. He even obtained a court order that compelled the government, particularly the FBI, to release previously classified documents. His detectivelike search for the truth has been meticulous and commendable. Though Weinstein at first believed Hiss to be innocent, he ultimately concluded that both Hiss and Chambers had been guilty of perjury.

However, it is regrettable that Weinstein has prematurely yielded to the "rush to press." Someone once observed that if a book is worth printing, it should be worth writing. This is perhaps a harsh judgment, but Weinstein's book is disorganized to the point of shapelessness. In moving from one hearing to another, he repeats testimony, skips back and forth in time, changes focus from Chambers to Hiss, throws in a plethora of unevaluated detail, and devotes too much space to lengthy documentary extracts. *Perjury* is tedious and confusing.

When truth seems to hinge on such unlikely objects as a 1929 Ford with a "sassy little trunk," a prothonotary warbler, Chambers's bad teeth, an Oriental rug, a Woodstock typewriter, and a pumpkin patch—in addition to conflicting testimony by witnesses and politically motivated interrogations—a dexterous hand guided by a commanding point of view becomes a