

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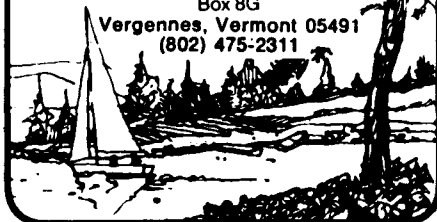
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ness of the biological, psychological, and social elements of the life structure.

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

clear literary requisite. The late Walter P. Webb always compared the historian's craft to that of the sculptor, who creates his effect as much by the stone he chips away as by that which remains. What few shards Weinstein has chipped away he has carefully gathered in the footnotes and appendices.

We have waited more than a quarter of a century for this definitive study of the Hiss-Chambers case; we could have waited longer for a work of true literary distinction. —GEORGE H. REEVES

Montgomery Clift: A Biography

by Patricia Bosworth

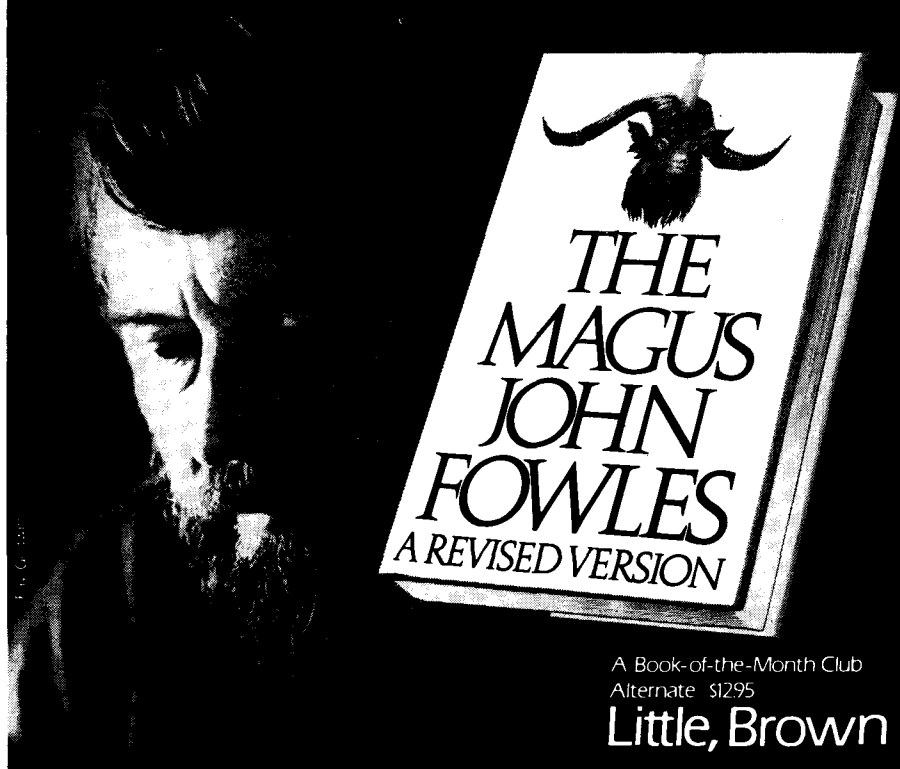
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 438 pp., \$12.95

One of Montgomery Clift's actor friends put it best when he told the author of this biography, "Monty was the first movie star to seem *obsessed*—slightly nuts. There was a tremendous resistance to craziness in the 1950s, and Monty was disturbing—he had an edge." With Marlon Brando and James Dean, Clift made up the triumvirate of actors tortured by introspection and repressed violence, or so it seems in retrospect. In truth, he lacked Brando's and Dean's presence and picked some of his roles carelessly. What's more, his career took a tumble in 1956 when, driving home from a party at Elizabeth Taylor's, he crashed into a telephone pole. Plastic surgery was not able to restore his good looks, and during the last 10 years of his life he was miserable and more insecure. He died at forty-five from a combination of alcohol and pills.

His image and his reality were in open conflict. He was, for one thing, no street punk but a bank president's son raised partly in Europe by an overbearing mother. For another, he was gay. Such factors test a biographer's skill. The first life—*Monty: A Biography of Montgomery Clift*, by Robert Laguardia, which appeared last year—was excessively Freudian. The present one by Patricia Bosworth is level-headed, and its style is more in keeping with the subject. It is, at times, insightful. At one point in the book, someone reflects on *The Misfits*, which was Marilyn Monroe and Clark Gable's last film and Clift's last but one: "Monty and Marilyn were psychic twins," he says. "They were on the same wavelength. They recognized disaster in each other's faces and giggled about it"—which is different from grace under pressure and more fashionable.

—DOUG FETHERLING

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