

sults to human beings.)

In addition, Fumento thoroughly debunks asbestos scaremongers, anti-food irradiation activism, and the sleazy political deals that have led to requiring that gasohol be used in some cities during the winter months. My only complaint is that Fumento didn't have the space to deal with the "acid rain" fiasco. Ten years and \$500 million dollars of study have shown that acid rain is not harming lakes, forests, crops, or people in Canada and the north-

eastern United States.

Fumento is to be congratulated for having the nerve to ask the technophobes: If modern life is so dangerous, how come we're all living healthier and much longer lives?

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## Crazy Like Fox

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

**Murdoch, by William Shawcross, New York: Simon & Schuster, 492 pages, \$27.50**

A few months before William Shawcross's biography of Rupert Murdoch appeared in the United States, *The New Yorker* fired a warning volley. The blast took the form of a personal assault, an unsourced story accusing Shawcross of journalistic compromises of the most unsavory sort. The hermetic world of publishing was atwitter. Some cynics saw an act of pre-emptive revenge: In his book, Shawcross draws an unpleasant portrait of a former Murdoch colleague who happens to be married to Tina Brown, *The New Yorker's* editor. Brown demurred. Although the book would not appear in America for several months, she insisted the attack had news value. And why? Because *Murdoch* "was much discussed in the Hamptons this summer."

A curious standard of news judgment, this Hamptons chatter. Will *The New Yorker* now run stories about Ben Bradlee's tennis elbow and Mort Zuckerman's war against stinkweed? It would be a shame, in any case, if *The New Yorker's* sleazy slam obscured the value of Shawcross's book, for he has written a fair-minded, comprehensive guide to one of the great figures of the age, a media mogul who bestrides the world like a combination of Colossus and Dennis the Menace.

Murdoch's empire stretches across four continents. Several hundred million people are within reach of either a news-

paper or a television station that he alone controls. And many people, not all of them married to Tina Brown, think this is a very bad thing.

Shawcross himself is admirably ambivalent. His talent for excoriation—which he brought ferociously to bear on Henry Kissinger in *Sideshow*, his controversial account of the war in Cambodia—seems to have been silenced by the sheer magnitude of Murdoch's achievement. *The New Yorker's* ideologues notwithstanding, his book is the better for it. For any honest observer has to admit: Rupert Murdoch is a difficult fellow to figure out.

His father Keith was a famous newspaperman in Australia, and Murdoch watchers from the 1950s onward have seen Rupert's career as an ambitious son's attempt to one-up the old man. His entrepreneurial gift showed itself early; as a boy he sold water rats and manure from the family farm, good training for the future publisher of the *New York Post*. While still a student at Oxford, Rupert inherited from Keith a provincial Australian newspaper, the *Adelaide News*. It became the kernel of his empire.

Murdoch's motto, like Oprah's and our president's, has been "expand or die." From the start bankers were solicitous. Their money in pocket, he gobbled up papers first in Australia and then, beginning in the '60s, in England. His

excellent cash flow carried him to the United States, where he at last built his ultimate dream: Fox Television, America's fourth network.

Contrary to popular image, Murdoch fitted his papers to the tastes of his desired audience, whatever they might be. His tendency has always been down-market, but he understood that the bare-breasted "Page Three Girl" of his tabloids would never do for the *Sunday Times*, unless she was Mrs. Thatcher. His politics were similarly changeable: The Oxford Leninist evolved into a conventional leftist during the Laborite ascendancy of the '60s, and the rise of the conservatives shaped the right-wing populist so reviled by the forces of virtue today.

What excited him, above all and always, was the deal, the acquisition, the steady expansion of his reach

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and power. His methods were his own. As a rule, for example, newspaper conglomerates seeking new properties look for the easy buy-out in a one-paper town. Murdoch lusted after secondary papers, wheezing old organs like the *Boston Herald* or the *Chicago Sun Times*, in hopes of attracting the readers that their competitors, fat with journalism-school pomposity, had neglected or disdained. His approach to magazines, satellite TV, and publishing houses was similarly unorthodox. Some gambles paid off, others didn't. Their cumulative effect—a debt the size of Ecuador's—almost sunk him in 1990.

But Murdoch keeps bobbing along. It is a remarkable odyssey, filled with some

of the most daring maneuvers in recent business history, and readers of this biography may find themselves worrying that Shawcross will replay the details of every last one of them. The author's research is prodigious—superhuman, even—but it is offered up entire. The MBA student may be rapt at the contortions required to buy a minor paper in Australia, but the popular reader will not be.

The accumulation of business detail fails in the end to illuminate the man. But you can't blame Shawcross for trying, and on the whole readers will be glad he did. Murdoch has always been a man of contradictions: the Oxford student who railed against the class system from a Rolls Royce; the anti-elitist who got Daddy to fix his visa through powerful friends; the promoter of Page Three Girls who disapproved of women wearing

slacks in the newsroom; the faithful family man, personally and (he says) politically conservative, whose television network airs the stupidest (*Studs*) and the most decadent (*Married... With Children*) shows in history.

Even so, it is hard to dislike anyone the *Columbia Journalism Review* calls "a force for evil." Some facts about him are plain. He is humorless, unreflective, and obsessed. He is also courageous, enormously intelligent, and even visionary, able to foresee opportunity and satisfy millions of ordinary people while his enemies fumble around without a clue. He is, in short, a great man. Whether he's a good one too is a question for America's moralists, of whom there are many.

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historian, and biographer. In total, Churchill published over 50 books in his lifetime (including a novel), while managing to hold and acquit himself admirably in virtually every major office in the British cabinet except foreign secretary—the Board of Trade in 1908, home secretary in 1910, minister of munitions in 1917, secretary for war and air in 1919, colonial secretary in 1921, and chancellor of the exchequer in 1924. And did I mention that he won the Nobel Prize for literature?

Gilbert gives you all of this and more, including Churchill's years out of power in the 1930s when, at the peak of his career, he refused to temper his outspoken views on the dangers of Hitler and of Great Britain's failure to re-arm—all at the expense of higher office.

Unlike many of the men with whom he shared the political stage in Great Britain, Churchill was a man of conviction. While he was frequently accused by his enemies of compromising his principles for political expediency, it was rarely true. Classical liberals and others of an individualist persuasion who wish to trace the development of political and economic thought of the young politician who so correctly identified the nature of modern government as "robbing Peter to pay Paul" should pay particularly close attention to Chapter 8, which covers the young Churchill's early years in Parliament.

Close attention is required because Gilbert does not provide as accurate a summary of Churchill's political philosophy in this book as he has elsewhere. One sketch he does furnish in the preface could be misleading: "Both in his Liberal and Conservative years, Churchill was a radical; a believer in the need for the State to take an active part, both by legislation and finance, in ensuring minimum standards of life, labour and social well-being for all citizens. Among the areas of social reform in which he took a leading part, including drafting substantial legislation, were prison reform, unemployment insurance, State-aided pensions for widows and orphans, a permanent arbitration machinery for labour disputes, State assistance for those in search of employment, shorter hours of work, and improved

## The Last Liberal

BY MICHAEL McMENAMIN

**Churchill: A Life**, by Martin Gilbert, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 959 pages, \$35.00/\$19.95 paper

There are many reasons to admire Winston Churchill, including these words from a speech on protectionism in 1906: "You may, by the arbitrary and sterile act of Government—for remember, Governments create nothing and have nothing to give but what they have first taken away—you may put money in the pockets of one set of Englishmen, but it will be money taken from the pockets of another set of Englishmen, and then the greater part will be spilled on the way. Every vote given for Protection is a vote to give Governments the right of robbing Peter to pay Paul, and charging the public a handsome commission on the job."

It is in some ways unfortunate that Churchill's individualist beliefs on politics and economics are less remembered today than his role as the wartime leader who rallied Great Britain to successfully stand alone against Nazi Germany in 1940 and 1941. Saving your country, if not Western civilization, tends

to overshadow all that went before.

In this biography, Gilbert attempts to give a wider appreciation of Churchill's career beyond his accomplishments in World War II (to which only 200 pages are devoted). As Gilbert shows, Churchill was far more than a career politician with a gift for rhetoric who, achieving his country's highest elected position quite late in life, used his words and his voice to rally the British public to keep fighting against what had to seem at the time insurmountable obstacles. Churchill was also an immensely talented and prolific writer—one of the most highly paid of his day—whose liberal political viewpoint was often at odds with the leaders of the Conservative Party and later the Labor Party during his 50-plus years in public life.

Though he was the son of an English lord and a nephew and cousin of English dukes, Churchill was not a man of inherited wealth. He made his living—and a considerable fortune—as a journalist,