

tual terms. He confronts an incompleteness of utterance, an indeterminacy of meaning, a seemingly unconscious or random association of images, which simultaneously demand and defy exegesis."

Even clearly recognizing this problem, Watt refuses to accept the aesthetic and symbolist doctrines of the separation of art from life, and he claims for Conrad the same refusal. His interpretations of Conrad's novels include well-developed sections on biographical and historical sources and ideological perspectives. He recommends in interpretation "a primary commitment to the literal imagination" that will enable the reader to see "the larger implications of the particulars which confront him." The symbols will be extended in a "centrifugal" way. "The opposite kind of critical reading starts from an esoteric interpretation of particular objects . . . and combines them into a centripetal and cryptographic interpretation which is based, as in allegory, on a single and defined system of beliefs, and is largely independent of the literal meanings of the details presented and of their narrative context."

In short, Watt refuses to allow criticism to divorce itself from moral and ethical concerns—from what life is like and how it should be lived. This runs contrary to much of modern criticism and, consequently, within the context of recent criticism Watt's approach is radical—even though all he has done is reaffirm, intelligently and persuasively, the common-sense core of the best of traditional literary interpretation.

Watt has the good sense to recognize the good sense in Conrad and thereby rescue him from the cult of irrationality. A constant foil for his interpretations of the novels are the readings that portray Conrad as unremittingly nihilistic in his basic vision of reality. Watt's portrait is of a writer, dedicated to confronting the dark aspects of life without confusing individuality with alienation, who constantly posed the question (as

Watt formulates it): "Alienation, of course; but how do we get out of it?" Watt sees Conrad as maneuvering through puzzling realities toward an ethics of "work, duty, and restraint." Peter Keating, in his review of the book, is correct in saying, "To refuse to see the power of affirmation in Conrad is to surrender (as Kurtz surrendered) to irresponsible and self-destructive forces."

With impressive breadth and depth of scholarship, Watt has demonstrated what in the face of much misguided antimimetic critical theory needed demon-

stration once again: the value of a literary work is determined by more than internal coherence. We can and do judge literature by tests of internal coherence, but we shouldn't stop there. Criticism should involve both intrinsic and extrinsic concerns, and often extrinsic concerns impinge in important ways on intrinsic ones. Recognizing this would not only restore some common sense to the interpretation of a complex and elusive modernist author like Conrad, it would also enable us to appreciate more fully the more modest and quite different achievement of a novelist like Marquand. □

## Ineptitude, Mendacity & Ignorance

Ronald Steel: *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*; Little, Brown & Co.; Boston.

by Paul Gottfried

Despite Ronald Steel's secularist sympathies (abundantly evident in his book), the biography that he wrote reminds me of a particular medieval monkish chronicle. Gregory of Tours, in his history of the Frankish kings, set out to show how Providence had favored the Franks ever since one of their chieftains, Clovis, had embraced the Church of Rome. Needless to say, Gregory himself was a Roman Christian and, driven by a desire for a "usable part" (a favorite New Left phrase), depicted the converted Franks as *always* victorious over pagan and heretical enemies starting with Clovis's reign. Like his pious predecessor, Steel attempts to justify the ways of Providence by reconstructing the historical past. But he does so while introducing distinctly modern twists. For divine guidance he substitutes liberal consciousness, or just plain leftist trendiness; instead of exalting Clovis

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and the Franks, he presents the edifying example of Walter Lippmann and the American intellectual community.

Like most knights of faith, young Lippmann was apparently predisposed to political conversion. Signs of grace could be seen even before he displayed his oracular wisdom by denouncing anti-communism to a younger generation. Before the First World War Lippmann had already begun his move toward socialism; as cofounder of *The New Republic*, he exposed the alleged decrepitude of American capitalism. During the war he urged American intervention on the side of the Allies, taking this hard line because of his firm conviction that a German-Austrian victory would have politically reactionary consequences in Europe. Steel never makes clear exactly why Lippmann broke with the neutralist and pacifist left—and, one might add, with his own German-Jewish background—in declaring his early support for the Allies. He speaks with apparent approval of Lippmann's "severing his ties" with the socialists in 1915 and drifting into the "Wilson camp" soon afterwards, but he offers no plausible explanation as to why such things occurred. The reason, I suspect, is that Steel, although a shrieking anti-

militarist in the face of Soviet and communist aggression, shares Lippmann's naive enthusiasm for "Wilson's war." The German and Austrian Kaisers in 1914 were, after all, less peace-loving than Stalin in 1945—or such is the impression his book seeks to give. Nor does Steel bother to criticize Lippmann's petitioning the Secretary of War for a draft exemption soon after other Americans had begun to bleed and die in a struggle which Lippmann had fervently endorsed. We are simply told that he believed he might better serve his country in a civilian capacity. So much for draft-dodging when committed by a secular saint!

Kenneth Lynn, in a penetrating study of this biography for *Commentary*, describes Steel as an unchanging "historian of the sixties." Viewing the American military-industrial complex as the source of most evils in international affairs, Steel considers the war in Vietnam the ultimate expression of our predatory economy and exploitative government. According to Lynn, the prevalence of this ideological focus affects Steel's scholarship. It prevents him from showing interest in serious biographical questions which a more curious historian would no doubt have addressed, e.g. Lippmann's utter callousness in the 30's toward the victims of Hitler's persecution, his seduction of (and later marriage to) his closest friend's wife and his initial indifference toward Nazi tyranny as contrasted with his earlier passionate hostility toward Imperial Germany. Although it may well be impossible to explain fully such apparent failings and inconsistencies, Steel hardly comes to grips with any of them. To him most of the details and intricacies of Lippmann's life are only so many hurdles to get over on his way to condemning the Cold War and to honoring Lippmann as an anti-anticommunist.

Such praise turns ultimately into self-praise, for although advanced in his grasp of reality, Lippmann is never credited with having as much wisdom as his biographer. Although he often

opposed the Cold War, he lacked "a philosophical approach or ideological commitment" and was "reluctant to accept the part that economic demands or imperial ambitions might play in explaining foreign policy." Despite the absence of a pop Marxist perspective, Lippmann allegedly stood above the obsessive hysteria of the McCarthyite 50's. For example, we are told:

While most of the country, including the foreign policy establishment, was behaving as though the Red Army was about to gobble up all of Europe along with half of Asia and Africa, and the Cominform was going to wend its insidious way into the minds and hearts of innocent American children, Lippmann preached restraint and a calculated assessment of national interest.

Since so much of Steel's book is taken up with ranting against anticommunist infidels, it might be worthwhile to speculate on his justification for the endless sermon. His book contains no coherent statement of a Marxist worldview, yet it does suggest his consistent belief that American foreign policy is shaped by our economic system. This economic system, we are led to infer, is advanced capitalism that is already domestically at the crisis stage and which can be maintained only through imperialist adventure abroad. In view of this reality, it is no more productive to chide a capitalist government for being imper-

ialist than to reproach a leopard for being carnivorous. And yet the rigors of an authentic Marxist—or Marxist-Leninist—analysis are really too much for a New Leftist windbag like Steel to accept and, after showing off his Marxist terminology, he lectures capitalists on what he, as a Marxist, must believe are their inescapable vices. Perhaps this is the most bothersome aspect of Steel's book, which typifies an emerging genre of New Left reconstructions of the past. Assuming that one could overlook the turgid prose, repetitive sermons and factual disfigurements, the product is still incoherent—even for a Marxist interpretation of reality. Why should Steel be praising Lippmann for properly grasping America's "national interest"?

An advanced capitalist state's objective interest is supposedly to suppress revolution and to war against weaker states. From a Marxist point of view it was the State Department, not Lippmann, which "made the calculated assessment of national interest." The American government, as an instrument of a bourgeois society locked into a capitalist mode of production, could only respond to predetermined social and material imperatives. To overthrow such a government is historically necessary, but what rationale can a self-proclaimed Marxist find for preaching hell-fire and brimstone to capitalist democracies for behaving as they should?

Like so much of today's New Left history, Steel's biography combines ineptitude and mendacity with ignorance even of the ideological position in which it claims to be anchored. A muddled Marxist and a tasteless hagiographer, he participates in modern radicalism's continuing assault on the historian's craft. Despite his many shortcomings Walter Lippmann was a gifted journalist and an occasionally perceptive political analyst. His life and career deserve a better biography than the one Steel has written. Perhaps such a work may yet be produced once the 60's are truly behind us. □



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# All in the Family

Todd Gitlin: *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left*; University of California Press; Berkeley, California.

by Gary S. Vasilash

American journalism, as it's practiced today, has its roots in the nation's junior high schools. There, the budding journalist learns one lesson that is never forgotten and is neglected only at great peril: everyone wants to see his name in print. That's why the school papers are full of gossip and why adult papers aren't far beyond it. This phenomenon is part of the 20th-century state of mind: remember Bloom in *Ulysses* contemplating the misspelling of his name in the newspaper? Joyce recognized the power and pervasiveness of the media; *Finnegan's Wake* is, on one level, constructed by the media.

Some people are satisfied with one properly spelled citation, but others can't see their name often enough. And as this print (and now video) addiction grows, these egotists want to be able to direct the camera angle, rephrase the quote and so on. A few years down the line this will be called "media manipulation." Some hire public-relations firms to do it; some go to other extremes (e.g. kidnapping a newspaper heiress). But the junior-high-schooler is not quite so calculating: it's just that he or she feels ever so self-important and just *knows* that everyone else agrees with the assessment. And woe to the journalist who doesn't. The student will storm and rage and tell the world how the school paper distorts everything. Moreover, he will loose his venom on the individual reporter or editor he feels is responsible for the grievous error. It's

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obvious, he asserts, that the journalist a) is blind, deaf and dumb; b) has something personal against him; and/or c) is being manipulated by or is a part of a cabal that aims to destroy him.

In *The Whole World Is Watching* Todd Gitlin sounds like an angry junior-high-schooler. The axe he grinds throughout the book (in prose that rivals some would-be Marxist theoreticians or McLuhanists at their most convoluted) is against the media; for the sake of convenience, the *New York Times* and "CBS News" are set up as victims for his blade. While many might think that those two organizations are in need of a little surgery, it probably isn't for the same reasons Gitlin has. He was a part of the "Movement" in the 60's. Indeed, he was president of Students for a Democratic Society (June 1963 to June 1964), the successor of Jane Fonda's husband (a.k.a. Tom Hayden). In the book SDS is a synecdoche, in a sense, for the "Movement." It's not that SDS was snubbed by the press. No, Gitlin is filled with indignation because the group didn't get the kind of coverage he knows it should have had. He was there, he tells the reader on a number of occasions: he *knows* what should have been said and how it should have been reported. And if he wasn't there, or isn't too sure about something, he doesn't let that get in the way:

Therefore, the scarcity of hard-and-fast evidence . . . cannot be taken as conclusive disproof of the hypotheses . . . We have no evidence that Johnson directly attempted to manage news of the antiwar movement. But . . .

And so on, throughout. Rules of evidence straight out of *Alice in Wonderland* for the man who bewails the lack of media objectivity.

Before looking at Gitlin's charges and the fanciful way in which he ex-

presses them, a bit of history of SDS is in order. A history of the organization, titled *SDS* (Random House, 1973), was written by Kirkpatrick Sale, seemingly a patron saint of Gitlin. (Gitlin describes Sale, circa 1968, as "one of the editors of the *New York Times Magazine* and the one most sympathetic to SDS." In the first chapter of *SDS*, Sale expresses a high opinion of Gitlin, listing him along with others who are in Sale's view "some of the best of the generation": Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, Marge Piercy and Bernardine Dohrn. Quite a crew.) SDS had quite a colorful family tree—*bad* because it rotted from within and managed to blow itself up. According to Sale, the taproot of SDS is the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, which was formed by Upton Sinclair and associates including Jack London and Clarence Darrow in 1905. In 1921 it became the League for Industrial Democracy, since leading members thought *socialist* sounded too radical. LID formed a Student League for Industrial Democracy in 1928. It was a socialist group, and it lost a communist faction in 1931, the New York Student League, which subsequently became the National Student League (1932). In 1935 SLID and NSL joined and became the American Student Union. It folded in 1941. LID had been hanging on. It restarted SLID in 1945, which became SDS in January 1960. The title, it seems, was picked for cosmetic purposes. Like its predecessors, this group was torn by divisions. Members were incapable of deciding whether they were going to be communists or socialists and which causes they would espouse. The United Auto Workers got SDS on its feet with a \$10,000 grant in 1960 and provided other monies later. Civil rights was the first SDS cause. It provided good visibility. Like its predecessors, SDS became factionalized, which Gitlin blames on the media, which distorted the problems and was