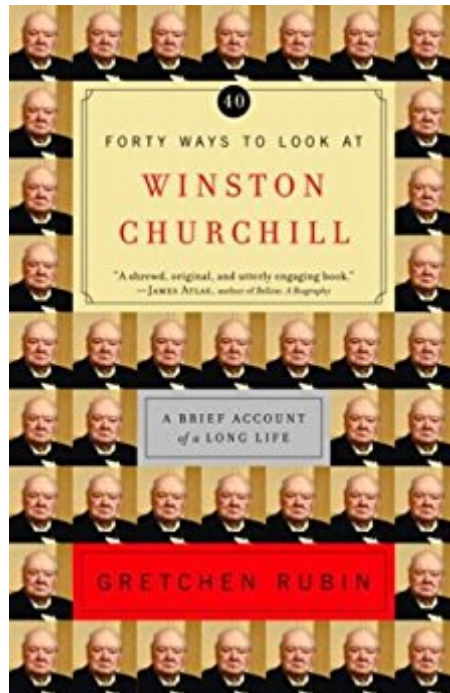


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Forty Ways To Look At Winston Churchill: A Brief Account Of A Long Life



Synopsis

Warrior and writer, genius and crank, rider in the British cavalry's last great charge and inventor of the tank, Winston Churchill led Britain to fight alone against Nazi Germany in the fateful year of 1940 and set the standard for leading a democracy at war. Like no other portrait of its famous subject, *Forty Ways to Look at Winston Churchill* is a dazzling display of facts more improbable than fiction, and an investigation of the contradictions and complexities that haunt biography. Gretchen Rubin gives readers, in a single volume, the kind of rounded view usually gained only by reading dozens of conventional biographies. With penetrating insight and vivid anecdotes, Rubin makes Churchill accessible and meaningful to twenty-first-century readers with forty contrasting views of the man: he was an alcoholic, he was not; he was an anachronism, he was a visionary; he was a racist, he was a humanitarian; he was the most quotable man in the history of the English language, he was a bore. In crisp, energetic language, Rubin creates a new form for presenting a great figure of history and brings to full realization the depiction of a man too fabulous for any novelist to construct, too complicated for even the longest narrative to describe, and too valuable ever to be forgotten. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I don't have anything against attorneys as a group of people, but as I read this book, the phrase that kept returning to me was "clever lawyer's trick." Though Gretchen Rubin continually describes this as "a personal look" at "my Churchill," it seems as much a demonstration of the talented lawyer's ability to passionately argue both sides of a question while never making more than an intellectual commitment to either. On the whole, this is a book that's as much about the author as it is the subject. Many of the reviews on this page describe this book as a good shorter biography of Churchill, but for people looking for a brief introductory volume, I would much sooner point them to one of the excellent short bios that came out in 2002, Lukacs' Churchill: Visionary. Statesman. Historian. or Keegan's Winston Churchill: A Penguin Life (Penguin Lives). Both of them are "conventional" narrative biographies, but each does a fine job laying out the motivations, facts, and consequences of Churchill's massive life. I think it's better to master the themes before exploring the variations, as Rubin does. And while not everyone wants to read thick tomes like Jenkins or Rose or Manchester (or still yet the official biography by Randolph Churchill and Martin Gilbert), I'm afraid anyone who relies on "Forty Ways..." as their sole source of information on, and interpretation of, the life of the Man of the (Twentieth) Century will be selling herself short.

This is an excellent book -- a must for Churchill fans. Many of my favorite stories about Sir Winston are here, but I also learned lots of things I didn't know. (Do you know what the Great Man's last words were? What his favorite brand of cigar was? Whether he was a hero to his valet? Read the book and find out.) "Forty Ways" is an extraordinarily honest book: Rubin does not pretend that a biographer can know it all. She presents both sides to questions about Churchill's drinking, his "black dog" depressions, his relations with the two Randolphys in his life (his father and his son), his egotism ("I am so conceited," Churchill wrote his mother, that "I do not believe the Gods would create so potent a being as myself for so prosaic an ending" as an early death). There is no effort to deceive the reader here, to trick him into embracing the author's favorite theory: Rubin candidly admits that her Churchill is a hero and a great man, but she insists that the reader must draw his own conclusions. Rubin is splendid on Sir Winston's use of language, the blessings and burdens of his Spencer-Churchill heritage, his painting, his bulldog bellicosity, his "island nation" patriotism, his relations with Hitler, the Romantic qualities of his historical imagination, the "Dickensian aptness" of his name, his complicated relations with his wife. ("Oh my darling do not write of 'friendship' to me,"

Churchill told Clementine, "I love you more each month that passes and feel the need of you & all your beauty. . . . I am so devoured by egoism that I wd like to have another soul in another world & meet you in another setting, & pay you all the love and honour of the gt romances.") The end of the book is extraordinarily moving.

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