



## Forty Ways to Look at Winston Churchill: A Brief Account of a Long Life

By Gretchen Rubin

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### Forty Ways to Look at Winston Churchill: A Brief Account of a Long Life

By Gretchen Rubin

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 Craft 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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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Eschewing the linear, chronological approach of most biographies, Yale Law School professor and Churchill devotee Rubin (*Power Money Fame Sex: A User's Guide*) has written 40 brief chapters looking at the British prime minister from multiple angles: Churchill as son, father, husband, orator, painter, historian, enemy of Hitler and many other roles. Rubin's unique approach works surprisingly well, bringing fresh insight to an exhaustively covered subject. Writing on Churchill as son, for instance, Rubin hammers home the point that he spent his life trying to measure up to an imagined, idealized father. Churchill's real father, Rubin makes clear, thought his son was destined for mediocrity and told him so. When she discusses Churchill's famous gifts as an orator, Rubin contends that his speeches were sometimes overblown, overly heroic and often ignored. She agrees with David Cannadine (*In Churchill's Shadow*) that Churchill's oratory was most effective when matched by times that required heroic action, such as the spring and summer of 1940. In a chapter devoted to Churchill's legendary drinking, Rubin provocatively presents arguments from both sides: that the drinking was harmless and that it was a major problem. In the end, Rubin sees "her" Churchill as a tragic hero. His life's goal was to preserve the British Empire, yet his greatest achievement, the defeat of Hitler, hastened the empire's end. While Rubin's account clearly isn't comprehensive and belabors a rather obvious point—that different, even opposing, perspectives on one life are possible—it is an excellent introduction to one of the most written about men in history. Photos.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—In this fast-paced, fragmented account, each of the 40 short chapters examines one topic: Churchill as leader, father, in tears, etc. Some are no more than lists, one is a simple chronology, and another a compilation of quotes. But taken together, they capture some truths about him, chiefly the many contradictions and complexities of his life and career. Moreover, there are valuable lessons here concerning the difficulties of examining the great lives of history. Rubin has almost as much to say about biography as a subject as she has about Churchill—a good thing for readers relatively new to the genre. And a further lesson lies in her extensive notes and bibliography. It is instructive to witness how much research is necessary to support even a brief account of a long life. Average-quality, black-and-white photos have been thoughtfully chosen. Rubin has much to offer teens, especially those with only vague notions of the great man.

*Robert Saunderson, Berkeley Public Library, CA*

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### Review

“A compelling read . . . Gretchen Rubin has produced a shrewd, original, and utterly engaging book, one that achieves the considerable feat of distilling an epic life to its essence while deconstructing the art of biography. *Forty Ways to Look at Winston Churchill* does for the writing of history what Wallace Stevens’s ‘Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird’ did for poetry—both does it and shows us how it’s done.”

—JAMES ATLAS

Author of *Bellow: A Biography*

“At last! A book to put all the other books on Churchill into perspective. The Great Man was in danger of becoming hidden by the forest of verbiage in his memory. Gretchen Rubin cuts a clear path to her subject, and along the way takes the reader on a fascinating and hilarious journey.”

—AMANDA FOREMAN

Bestselling author of *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*

“Was there ever a better subject for biography? Heroic, petty, noble, selfish, courageous, devious, grandiloquent, plain-speaking, generous, tyrannical, Churchill was all these and more. Rubin strives to capture the essence of her larger-than-life subject not through a head-on assault, but by circling him and taking snapshots from a multiplicity of angles. Her *Forty Ways to Look at Winston Churchill* is a feat of intelligent compression, a stereoscopic portrait for the space age, a biography in miniature, and not least, a rattling good read.”

—MICHAEL SCAMMELL

Author of *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography*

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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