



## *The Roar of the Lion: The Untold Story of Churchill's World War II Speeches* by Richard Toye.

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In a postwar speech, Winston Churchill declared that, while the whole British nation had resisted the Axis with a lion's heart, he himself had merely "had the luck to be called upon to give the roar" (1). By "the roar," the aging titan meant, of course, his wartime speeches, which showed his long-honed oratorical skills at their best and won a place in almost all histories of World War II. Until now, however, the speeches have received little scholarly attention, a lapse British historian Richard Toye (Univ. of Exeter) has now made good. In *The Roar of the Lion*, he surveys all of Churchill's major wartime speeches and many lesser ones as well.

Toye explains how Churchill composed his speeches, identifying the sources that influenced him, the audiences he envisioned, and his words' reception in Britain, its empire, and other countries around the world, especially the United States. These speeches very effectively (and deliberately) "globalized" the war in an unexpected but fruitful way.

For the most part, Churchill dictated his speeches at night to sometimes intimidated stenographers, pacing back and forth, smoking his trademark cigar. Speaking almost in a whisper, he sounded out various locutions before declaiming his final version loudly enough for the stenographer to take down. He vetted a typed copy in the morning and often circulated it to one or more ministers, the whole War Cabinet, or other individuals whose counsel he valued. He then made suggested changes in wording and content, if he thought them justified. Based on his careful research in the Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, and in the National Archives, Toye identified some individuals who suggested changes, including the prime ministers of South Africa and Canada, a former British ambassador to the Soviet Union, the foreign editor of the (American) Scripps-Howard newspaper chain, two US ambassadors, and, indirectly, President Franklin Roosevelt himself. As Toye rightly states, however, Churchill's major speeches consisted of his own words and thoughts.

As a young man, Churchill found his enduring models of prose style in the works of Thomas Babington Macaulay and Edward Gibbon, whose long, sonorous sentences and vivid imagery he strove to emulate, along with a flair for irony. His rhetorical mentors were his father, Lord Randolph, who enjoyed an illustrious political career; David Lloyd George, prime minister in World War I; and William Bourke Cockran, an American congressman (D-NY).<sup>1</sup> They taught him how to hold the attention of an audience. The oratorical tradition of the House of Commons demanded high standards of literary eloquence; with this in mind, Churchill painstakingly rehearsed his wartime speeches, sometimes before unsuspecting guests. He never felt comfortable without a written draft in front of him and tried to avoid extemporaneous interjections, although he did well there when he had to.

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1. *Wikipedia*, s.v. William Bourke Cockran, "In 1895, Cockran, a friend of Britain's Churchill family and reputed one-time lover of Jennie Churchill, introduced her 20-year-old son, Winston Churchill, to American high society during Churchill's first trip to New York. Years later, as British prime minister, Churchill credited Cockran as his first political mentor and the chief role model for his own success as an orator."

Curiously, Churchill's speeches in the House of Commons were never electronically recorded, the House being averse to the new technology. Though he never broadcast live from the House, some contemporaries "recalled" for historians or documentarians how moving they found his radio delivery in speeches given only in the House. These included some of the most gripping he presented in the war: in 1940 alone, his "Prime Minister" speech (13 May) declaring "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat"; the "Dunkirk" speech (4 June), with its soaring promise to fight the Wehrmacht on the beaches, on the landing grounds, in the fields and in the streets, never to surrender; the "The Fall of France" speech (25 June), with its heartfelt expression of "profound sorrow at the fate of the great French nation and people"; and the "Battle of Britain" speech (20 August), with its imperishable tribute to Fighter Command: "Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few." To be sure, the BBC covered all his speeches in detail and had a newsreader quote extensively from them. Newspapers, too, carried long excerpts. Perhaps these accounts stimulated future memoirs.

Exceptionally, Churchill gave his "Their Finest Hour" address in the House of Commons (18 June) and then, hours later, repeated it in a broadcast to the nation. His dislike of having to make this extra effort and his insistence on keeping his cigar in his mouth resulted in a disappointing performance. Churchill also repeated for broadcast the Pearl Harbor address he gave in the House, to no better effect: auditors thought he sounded tired.

Churchill did broadcast other speeches to the nation and the empire throughout the war, starting on 19 May 1940, when he soberly appraised the crisis in France after the German breakthrough on the Meuse. These speeches, though fewer than those presented in the House, addressed major themes, even if they lacked the memorable phrases of his 1940 efforts. Churchill also used the radio to speak directly to occupied countries and neutrals, especially the supremely important American audience.

The most interesting portions of the book concern the British people's reactions to Churchill's addresses, reconstructed from reports made at the time by the Home Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Information and the invaluable evidence gathered by Mass Observation, a sociological research agency—diaries of private citizens, interviews, and the notes made by eavesdropping observers in the field.

How, then, did Churchill fare with the public at large? The short answer is "well enough"; the long one is "not as well as might have been expected." The first House of Commons speeches aroused little interest, despite coverage by the BBC and the press. Nor did the national broadcasts, even of the "blood, toil, tears, and sweat" speech, grip their listeners. Their prime minister's courageous promise to fight to the finish, even if England were invaded, drew a surprisingly mixed reaction, extending even to indifference. The Dunkirk speech strained rather than fortified the nerves of the few who heard excerpts broadcast by the BBC or read about it in the newspapers. A breakthrough came with the 14 July 1940 "War of the Unknown Warriors" speech, in which Churchill reaffirmed his defiant resolution even against a German invasion of Britain. This speech, seldom highlighted in the Churchill story, sparked widespread enthusiasm and lifted the nation's morale: "the unanimity of the response was a new and remarkable phenomenon" (64).

Public support for Churchill rose and fell throughout the war. Whenever he seemed to face a crisis of his own that might endanger his hold upon power, he always recovered nicely. Notably, he rebounded from the devastating surrender of Singapore in 1942, the gravity of which he did not conceal. One secret of his endurance was his consistent high marks for candor: he earned the public trust by reporting bad news fully and accurately. As his radio audience grew, listeners warmed to the style and substance of his speeches and his relentless determination to fight to the finish. But, proving the maxim that you can't please everyone, there was always a dissenting minority. Some found his attitude to-

wards Germans and Italians too belligerent or condescending. A few thought he was enjoying the war too much. In the final months of the war, he was accused of excessive sympathy for authoritarian regimes in Greece and Spain.

Churchill's compatriots could not have known how closely foreigners were tracking his speeches and reacting to perceived slights or disrespect. His vast international experience allowed him to walk a global tightrope. Generals Charles de Gaulle and Henri Giraud, rivals in the French Resistance, might resent a word, a phrase, or an omission. Apprehensive Greeks and unappeasable Poles had somehow to be calmed and appeased. Churchill could not criticize neutral but pro-Axis Spain, given its strategic importance as an Atlantic country and its border with Gibraltar. Neutral Turkey had to be coddled, despite its links to the Third Reich. Nationalists in India could, and did, take offense at the prime minister's failure to endorse postwar reforms. Even the prime ministers of Australia and Canada might protest if the efforts of their countries seemed to be too little appreciated.

Until Pearl Harbor, Churchill always to keep the Americans uppermost in his mind: they must believe neither that Great Britain was losing nor that it could manage without any help whatever. The German invasion of the USSR created a moral, political, and strategic dilemma, since many in Britain and America rightly loathed the Communist regime. Churchill's masterly address of 22 June 1941, pledging full assistance to a fellow combatant against the Reich, even a Communist combatant, won praise in Britain, America, and even in the USSR, no small achievement and clear proof of the powers of a master's wartime rhetoric.

An appendix provides "listening figures" for the audience share that Churchill's BBC speeches attracted. Once the broadcasts became established, these shares were quite high and would have been higher yet had listeners in the armed forces outside Britain been counted. The included "List of Archival Collections" does not compensate for the omission of a full bibliography.<sup>2</sup>

Richard Toye has made a most welcome contribution to Churchill scholarship. "Of making many books there is no end" (Eccl. 12:12), but much study of *The Roar of the Lion* will bring no "weariness of the flesh." Quite the opposite.

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2. One also wishes Toye had somewhere itemized all the Churchill speeches he treats in the book, with their dates and locations.