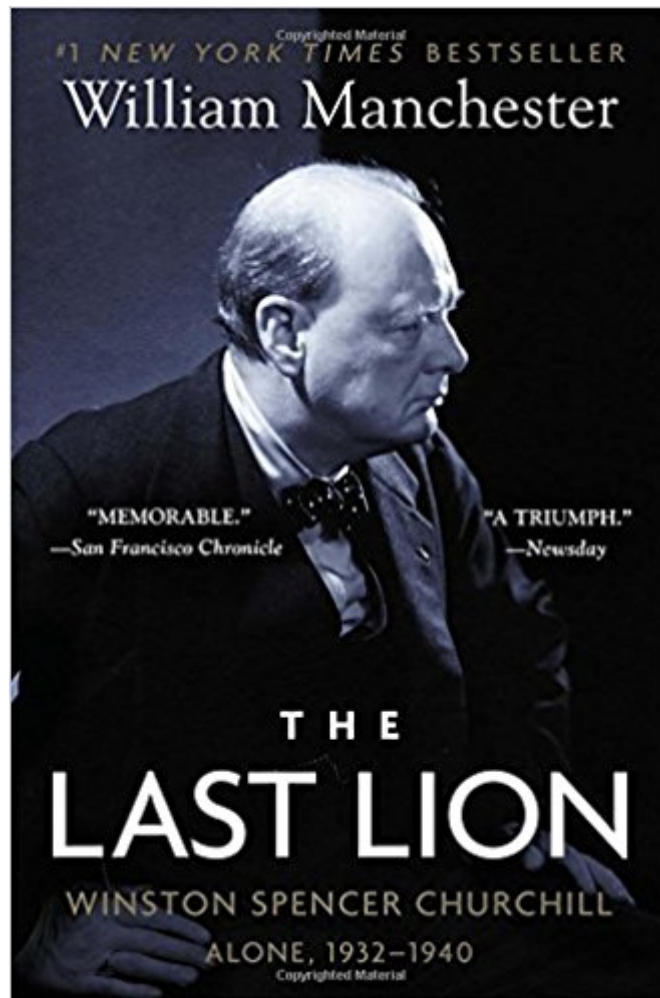




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The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill: Alone, 1932-1940



Synopsis

In this powerful biography, the middle volume of William Manchester's critically acclaimed trilogy, Winston Churchill wages his defining campaign: not against Hitler's war machine but against his own reluctant countrymen. Manchester contends that even more than his leadership in combat, Churchill's finest hour was the uphill battle against appeasement. As Parliament received with jeers and scorn his warnings against the growing Nazi threat, Churchill stood alone – only to be vindicated by history as a beacon of hope amid the gathering storm. *Alone* is a praise for The Last Lion: Alone. Manchester has such control over a huge and moving narrative, such illumination of character . . . that he can claim the considerable achievement of having assembled enough powerful evidence to support Isaiah Berlin's judgment of Churchill as "the largest human being of our time." The New Yorker "Memorable." San Francisco Chronicle "Stirring . . . As Manchester points out several times, it's as if the age, having produced a Hitler, then summoned Churchill as the only figure equal to the task of vanquishing him. The years *Alone* are the pivotal years of Churchill's career." The Boston Sunday Globe "The best Churchill biography [for] this generation . . . Even readers who know the basic story will find much that is new." Newsweek "A triumph . . . equal in stature to the first volume of the series." Newsday "Vivid . . . history in the grand manner." The Washington Post "Compelling reading." The Times (London)

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Customer Reviews

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—*The New Yorker*

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“Stirring . . . As Manchester points out several times, it’s as if the age, having produced a Hitler, then summoned Churchill as the only figure equal to the task of vanquishing him. The years Alone are the pivotal years of Churchill’s career.”

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William Manchester was a hugely successful popular historian and renowned biographer. In addition to the three volumes of *The Last Lion*, his books include *Goodbye, Darkness*, *A World Lit Only by Fire*, *The Glory and the Dream*, *The Arms of Krupp*, *American Caesar*, and *The Death of a President*, as well as assorted works of journalism. He was awarded the National Humanities Medal and the Abraham Lincoln Literary Award. He passed away in 2004.

I have been nervously awaiting this book for years. My first encounter with Manchester came when volume one first came out. I was a child, and I went to visit my grandmother (who was in London during the Blitz); she held the book up to show me what she was reading. “The man,” she said. “The great, great man.” Years later, I read the first two volumes almost in one sitting - couldn’t put them down - and have reread large parts of them over the years (every time I looked some piece up I’d find myself sitting down for an hour or two because I couldn’t stop). I remember when *Finest Hour* reported that the trilogy would never be finished: it was like a punch in the stomach. I had my doubts about the ability of another author to write worthily of Manchester, and I was afraid this volume wouldn’t measure up. No need to worry: this is every bit as much a page-turner as the last two

volumes. It's not QUITE Manchester - I thought I could feel a bit of a difference in style, somehow - and yet it IS extremely good, much better than I had expected. Like the first two volumes, we begin with a preamble ("The Lion Hunted") in which we are (re-)acquainted with the book's subject. There is a certain amount of repetition of material from the two earlier preambles, but much good new material as well. I've read thousands of pages on Churchill, but even I found some good new anecdotes and quotations here. After that we're hurled right into the middle of the most dramatic days of World War Two. The unexpected, catastrophic defeats; the incompetence and perfidy of the people in charge of France - it doesn't take much from a writer to make this an exciting story, and yet I don't think it has ever been told better than this. Really, just what I had hoped for from Manchester himself. If the later parts of the book don't quite keep the same level of excitement, neither do the events they recount. My only complaint is the ending: really, the book just stops. Read the end of volume II: I would have expected Manchester himself to end with a climactic summary, perhaps returning to his major insight from the start: the central significance of Churchill in history is that he was a product of the late nineteenth century who was able to bring the virtues of the era of his formative years to life again at a time when they were needed, and when the British people were not yet too far from them. Actually, I do have one other complaint, and it's with the publisher: the dust jacket doesn't match the first edition dust jackets of the first two volumes. Doesn't look as good on the shelf as I would have liked. All in all, this is a worthy final volume. Manchester himself would be proud, and there can be no doubt that this trilogy would be Churchill's favourite biography. Highly recommended, to fans of the first two volumes and newcomers alike.

This is the last volume in a wonderful series of books on Winston Spencer Churchill. I am almost finished with this last book and have learned quite a bit about the man, the country he loved and lead through one of its most challenging times. When you read about all the people Churchill met and worked with or against you can't help but want to pick up more books to satisfy your curiosity that the book(s) generate. This book was rather big but well worth it. I don't understand reviewers who found it boring because of the details - you want the details. The details are written in an engaging style that actually have you wanting to know even more details (e.g. Roosevelt's history or Stalin's history outside their relationship with Churchill or his representatives). The book is about more than Churchill who was really a 19th century gentleman in the 20th century trying to keep the British Empire intact. The writing was on the wall when Churchill saw himself lose influence as the two super powers emerged from WWII - the Soviet Union and the

USA. I actually felt sorry for him! I also hated him for his myopic view of "brown" people and how they compared to Englishmen but his thoughts and ideas were quite understandable from reading the first two volumes. Was he a great man? He certainly was. Was he flawed? Of course. What great man isn't? The three volumes made learning about Churchill the man who steered, encouraged, and held the mantle for the people and government of England a total delight to read. This third volume was not written by William Manchester and does not have his enjoyable and delightful style of writing but it does hold its own and does a fine job of completing the history of WSC. I cannot recommend this enough for anyone who likes to read, wants the details (e.g. comments from others in their diaries on their feelings about Churchill) augmented by information about the wars and other historical information that took place throughout the life span of the man.

The century just past was a turbulent time and it drew the best and the worst out of many people. In Winston Churchill both aspects appeared frequently. At his worst he was a bigoted, imperialistic, pompous, vituperative windbag. At his best he was brilliant, farsighted, compassionate, heroic and possibly the finest practitioner of the English language since Shakespeare. He had the perhaps dubious fortune of being at the nodal point of so many of the crucial events in the first half of the last century. His life starts at the same time the British empire was reaching its peak and his career climaxed as the empire he loved was desperately over extended, but had one last hurrah before before it returned to being a small country on a small island. To read his biography is to immerse oneself into those times. The only question left is is the author up to the task. A frequent problem with biographers is that they fall in love with their subject. Manchester is certainly guilty of this and he skips over some of what could literally be considered crimes against humanity committed by a cold blooded and Machiavellian Churchill only to turn into a harsh critic a few sentences later. In Churchill's defense I could be writing this in German if not for those flexible morals, but Manchester also pointed out Mahatma Gandhi's principled stand against that same Churchill when it came to Indian self rule which arguably delivered as many people from tyranny as anything Churchill did or stood for. William Manchester had to be passionate about the subject to devote so much of his life to write this three part biography so I give him a passing grade because he seems to have held his tendency to gush somewhat in check. The only test left to pass would be the quality of his writing and on that I have few reservations, The Last Lion is on my short list for best modern biography. William Manchester was a gifted wordsmith and a treasure to

armchair historians like me.

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