

Body Doubles

Churchill invented the term ‘Iron Curtain’ for Russia, received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953 (for books he didn’t write) and was knighted the same year. “He achieved a world reputation not only as a gifted strategist and inspiring war leader, but as a great orator, a talented painter, and a stylish writer with a profound sense of history.”¹

Churchill, a Freemason and Druid, was also an alcoholic and a manic-depressive who may or may not have achieved all of these things. From the early 1900s Churchill drank a mixture of champagne and brandy and lounged in his bath until 2 pm singing *Clementine* while his manservants kept the temperature just right.

Winston Churchill made his famous speeches in the House of Commons: “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat” (Inaugural Speech, 13 May 1940); “We shall fight them on the beaches” (Dunkirk, 4 June 1940); “This was their finest hour” (Battle of Britain, 18 June 1940); and “Never in the face of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few” (Battle of Britain, 20 August 1940) . . . but Parliament was not wired for sound at the time and the BBC had contracts for all *but* Churchill’s parliamentary speeches.

Straight after the 4 June 1940 “We shall fight them on the beaches” speech, Churchill went to the BBC studio at Shepherd’s Bush to deliver the same address to beam live to America and the Commonwealth. The recording equipment broke down and when the BBC asked Churchill to make the speech for a third time, he refused, saying, “I am rather busy, get an actor to do it”.

Norman Shelley (1903–80) was a BBC radio Children’s Hour actor for the BBC radio production of *Winnie the Pooh*. He was also a well-known Churchill impersonator and recorded the voice of ‘Churchill’ for all of the above speeches on 7 September 1942. He took his teeth out to correctly imitate Winston Churchill, something Churchill congratulated him on later.

There is still some debate amongst historians as to whether Churchill or Shelley did the live speech for BBC radio and which of them recorded “Never in the face of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to

¹ *The Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia*.