



Alec Guinness: The Authorised Biography

By Piers Paul Read

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Sir Alec Guinness was one of the greatest actors of the twentieth century. With a talent recognised by discerning critics from his very first appearance on the stage he gained a world-wide reputation playing roles on the screen such as Fagin in *OLIVER TWIST* and *THE MAN IN THE WHITE SUIT*. His performance as Colonel Nicholson in *BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI* won him an Oscar and in his later years he captivated a new generation of admirers as George Smiley in *TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY* and Ben Kenobi in *STAR WARS*. Guinness was a man who vigorously guarded his privacy and, despite publishing an autobiography, *BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE*, and two volumes of his diaries, he remained an enigma to the general public and a mystery even to his family and closest friends. After his death in August, 2000, his widow Merula asked the author Piers Paul Read, who had been a friend of her husband, to write his biography. Given full co-operation by the Guinness family and free access to Sir Alec's papers, including his private and unpublished diaries, Read has written a penetrating and perceptive account of an intriguing and complex man.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

When Guinness died in 2000, his widow designated Read (*Alive!*) as the actor's authorized biographer, and the results are mixed. Read doesn't allow his friendship with Guinness to interfere with an honest account of some unsavory aspects of the actor's personality (e.g., his frequent cruelty to his wife). But Read's treatment of his subject's professional career is spotty—while Guinness's early years in London theater are well represented, some of his best films from the 1950s are barely mentioned, and even his most famous role, as Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars* and its sequels, gets less than 10 pages. Instead, Read offers repeated, lengthy speculations about his subject's sexuality. Anecdotal evidence and cryptic diary entries do suggest Guinness may have wrestled with an attraction to men, and might even on occasion have acted upon it and felt guilty afterward, but the issue probably doesn't require quite so much attention. Read fares better in discussing other aspects of Guinness's emotional life, including his ambivalence toward the mother who conceived him out of wedlock, and an adult conversion to Roman Catholicism. Readers hoping for the usual celebrity biography filled with the star's encounters with other stars, however, will likely be disappointed. B&w photos.

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Review

"A deeply intelligent work, full of humanity and passion."-- "The Independent on Sunday"

About the Author

Piers Paul Read is the author of thirteen acclaimed novels, most recently *Alice in Exile*, and four works of non-fiction, among them a history of the crusading order, *The Templars*, and the international bestseller *Alive!* Past novels have won the Hawthornden Prize and the Geoffrey Faber, Somerset Maugham and James Tait Black Awards. He lives in London.

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