

Today I thought I would tell you about the English movie actor ALEC GUINNESS. You may not know the name, but you certainly know the face because he was OBI-WAN KENOBI in the 1977 STAR WARS movie. Appearing in that film made him very rich. He was paid for appearing in the Star Wars in the following way. The film's writer and director GEORGE LUCAS was paid 20% of the gross box office takings. That means for every five dollars that someone spent on a ticket to see Star Wars, George Lucas got one of those five dollars. Star Wars made \$775 million worldwide (almost \$5 billion in today's money, thanks to inflation - and way, way more than a film like Marvel's Endgame made (over £2 billion)). So George Lucas got a fifth of that, which was almost \$150 million. (Which is about \$1 billion in today's money: George Lucas is VERY rich.) Alec Guinness' deal was - for every \$100 that George makes, the producers of Star Wars have to pay me \$2.25. So if George Lucas made about \$150 million from sales of tickets to see Star Wars, Alec Guinness made almost \$3.4 million - which is about \$20 million in today's money.



But George Lucas was happy to make that deal with Alec Guinness because he was desperate for the sort of class and distinction that his film would acquire from having a star like Alec Guinness in it. This Alec Guinness went back a long way in the film industry - his first proper film was in 1946 (when he was 32), starring as HERBERT POCKET in a film of CHARLES DICKENS' GREAT EXPECTATIONS - and he had appeared in a lot of great films. In 1999, the British Film Institute surveyed 1,000 people in the film industry to produce a list of the 100 greatest British films made in the 20th century. Alec Guinness was in nine of those 100 films: LAWRENCE OF ARABIA (which came in third on the list), GREAT EXPECTATIONS (fifth), KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS (sixth), THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI (eleventh), THE LADYKILLERS (thirteenth), THE LAVENDER HILL MOB (seventeenth), DOCTOR ZHIVAGO (pronounced 'Shiv - ah - go') (twenty seventh), OLIVER TWIST (forty sixth), and THE MAN IN THE WHITE SUIT (fifty eighth). And six of the top 20 films starred Alec Guinness. Four of those nine films were made by Alec Guinness in the 1950s for the EALING FILM STUDIOS, which turned out a huge number of classic films in the late 1940s and 1950s. His greatest performance in an Ealing film was in 'Kind Hearts and Coronets', where he played eight different characters - all members of the same family. But he was also fantastic in 'The Ladykillers' where he did such a brilliant impersonation of another great 1950s English actor - ALASTAIR SIM (who I mentioned to you last week as playing SCROOGE in the film of Charles Dickens' A CHRISTMAS CAROL) - that even today, people think that Alastair Sim was in that film:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuIvga5t_Hc

I'll tell you on Friday about another actor - PETER SELLERS - who WAS in 'The Ladykillers', and for whom that film was his first ever screen role. The other five of the nine 'top 100 British films' that Alec Guinness made were directed by the legendary film director DAVID LEAN, who I will tell you about some other week (along with two other legendary film directors). And if you ever get to see 'Lawrence of Arabia' you will see what 'legendary' means when it comes to directing films - a film so utterly epic in its scope and stunningly

beautiful in its shots that it is hard to imagine that any director could have put it together. Check this clip out, for example:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIUFxO0wxVQ>

So was Alec Guinness just very lucky? Was it the case that he happened to be in a lot of films made by a brilliant film studio, and in another lot of films made by a brilliant film director - and that's why he has the reputation of being one of the greatest film actors of all time? No - he was lucky to be able to star in the films he did, but no one else could have done what he did in those films. Here he is playing an English army captain who has lost his way: captured during WORLD WAR II along with his men by the Japanese, his men are forced - under his leadership - to build a bridge for the Japanese over a crucial river, and he falls in love with the project so much so that he forgets that in building the bridge and doing a great job of it, he is actually helping the enemy:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWJkPbBOXL4&list=PLZbXA4lyCtqpvlvxrwiqb9v6EYjGJFnI&index=4>

He also showed how good he was as an actor late in his life, appearing as the British spy master GEORGE SMILEY in two BBC series, TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY, and SMILEY'S PEOPLE. And here is Guinness applying his wonderful voice to reading TS ELIOT's 'FOUR QUARTETS' (it's too long for you to listen to the whole thing, but just try the first couple of minutes):

<https://youtu.be/ccupYGfiDEw?t=11>



The 'Four Quartets' poems are very spiritual, and Alec Guinness was a very spiritual person (maybe he was too connected to the spiritual side of things - he once warned the American actor JAMES DEAN never to get into a car that he was showing off to everyone else; and just a couple of days later Dean was killed while driving the car) and became a Roman Catholic (like me) in 1956, when he was 42 years old (when he was only 45, in 1959, he would be made 'Sir Alec Guinness' for doing so much for the film industry - but 45 is still pretty young to get that kind of honour, which shows just how important he was as an actor) and every day he would say the following prayer, from PSALM (pronounced 'Saam') 143 in The Bible:

Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning,
For in You do I trust;
Cause me to know the way in which I should walk,
For I lift up my soul to you.

Not a bad prayer, eh?