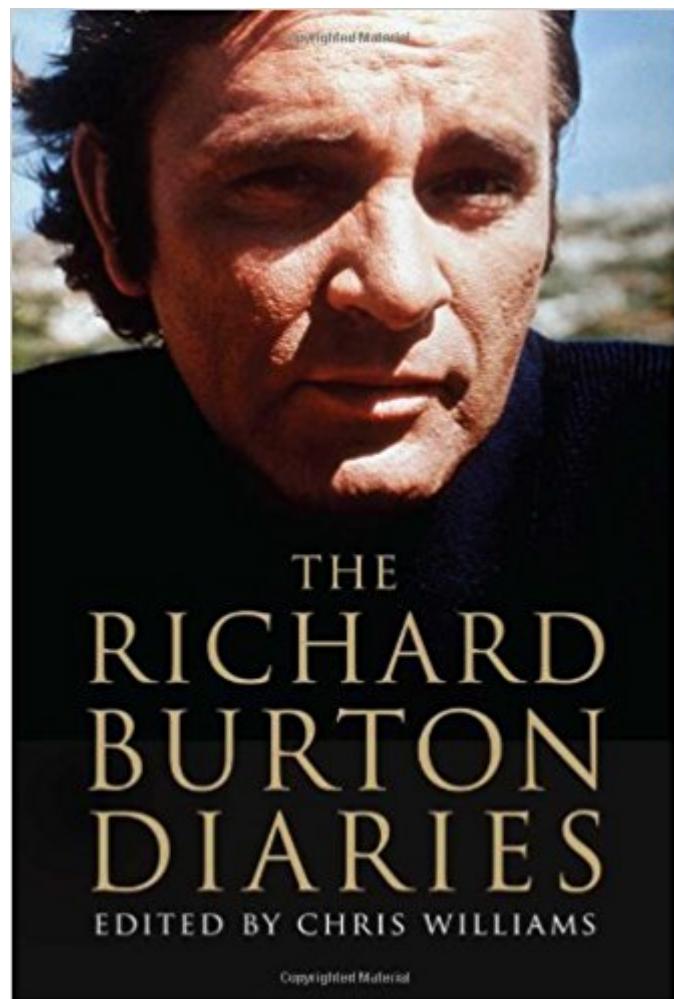


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The Richard Burton Diaries



Synopsis

Irresistibly magnetic on stage, mesmerizing in movies, seven times an Academy Award nominee, Richard Burton rose from humble beginnings in Wales to become Hollywood's most highly paid actor and one of England's most admired Shakespearean performers. His epic romance with Elizabeth Taylor, his legendary drinking and story-telling, his dazzling purchases (enormous diamonds, a jet, homes on several continents), and his enormous talent kept him constantly in the public eye. Yet the man behind the celebrity façade carried a surprising burden of insecurity and struggled with the peculiar challenges of a life lived largely in the spotlight. This volume publishes Burton's extensive personal diaries in their entirety for the first time. His writings encompass many years—“from 1939, when he was still a teenager, to 1983, the year before his death”—and they reveal him in his most private moments, pondering his triumphs and demons, his loves and his heartbreaks. The diary entries appear in their original sequence, with annotations to clarify people, places, books, and events Burton mentions. From these hand-written pages emerges a multi-dimensional man, no mere flashy celebrity. While Burton touched shoulders with shining lights—among them Olivia de Havilland, John Gielgud, Claire Bloom, Laurence Olivier, John Huston, Dylan Thomas, and Edward Albee—he also played the real-life roles of supportive family man, father, husband, and highly intelligent observer. His diaries offer a rare and fresh perspective on his own life and career, and on the glamorous decades of the mid-twentieth century.

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Customer Reviews

As the title states, this is a collection of Richard Burton's Diaries, annotated and presented in book form. It is not a biography, but does have autobiographical elements. The diaries have not been prettied-up, nor is the editor even certain that Burton intended to publish them. If you're expecting a smoothly written biography you will be disappointed. If you'd like a peek at Richard Burton's introspection you are in for a treat. Credit must be given to Burton's widow Sally. She generously donated the set of diaries to Swansea University and made this book possible. She knew how much of the content referred to her husband's (in)famous marriages to Elizabeth Taylor; a lesser woman might have destroyed the diaries out of jealousy. Sally receives the editor's highest praise for her donation and her "wonderfully supportive" assistance. Many members of the Jenkins-Burton-Taylor families are also credited, and the list shows what a work of love this book is. Chris Williams, a professor of Welsh history and former director of the Richard Burton Centre for the Study of Wales, has taken on the mammoth task of making the diaries more accessible to the general reader. He footnotes the first mention of people, places and things, providing dates of birth (and death) and a brief line or two of biography; locations, full titles, dates of publication, translations, etc. Burton was extremely well read, and the footnotes provide detailed info about the books Burton casually refers to. Williams admits uncertainty in a few spots, but his devotion to the task is unquestionable. He usually corrects Burton's spelling, but there are a few very minor blips (e.g. Burton refers to "Barbara Streisand" in April of 1969 and Williams' footnote also has "Barbara"...

Outside it is drizzling, sleetting, raining. It is January in New England, a winter full of discontent, and therefore the perfect season for reading and escaping. And this is the perfect book with which to do so. Escape, that is. Reading the diaries of the peripatetic Burton -- actor, icon and bon vivant -- I am transported to the sunny coast of Italy, to a trattoria in Portofino, a movie set in Rome, a late-night cabal with film and stage luminaries; and to a quiet beach in Puerto Vallarta on which to stroll with pet dogs, nannies, children and wife -- "en famille," as the great orator might say. I can almost hear his voice. Speaking of that voice, Burton's command of the language, in fact, many languages (Welsh, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Latin, to name a few) is marvelous. Readers are treated to snippets of classics from Shakespeare to Pepys to The Bible served up as commonly and elegantly as rich, homey soup. Good enough to eat and to keep warm by. (Did I mention the weather outside?) But let me get back to Burton -- when he sizzles. As he does with his various nicknames for Elizabeth, which are marvelous, too, and hilarious. To wit: Cantank, Shumdit, Quick Take, Short Take, Bon Apetito, Booby, Milady, Glorious, to name but a scant few. I fell out of bed laughing. Here is a man in love with his wife, his children, his animals. He has the charm and

innocence of a boy, not quite grown up, who continually takes himself to task for not doing a better job as husband, father, caregiver. One loves him all the more for it. He is exceedingly honest about his vices, as when he mentions how much he drinks (3 bottles of vodka one day, which was often par for the course), what diet he's on, whether E (Elizabeth) is looking fat.

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