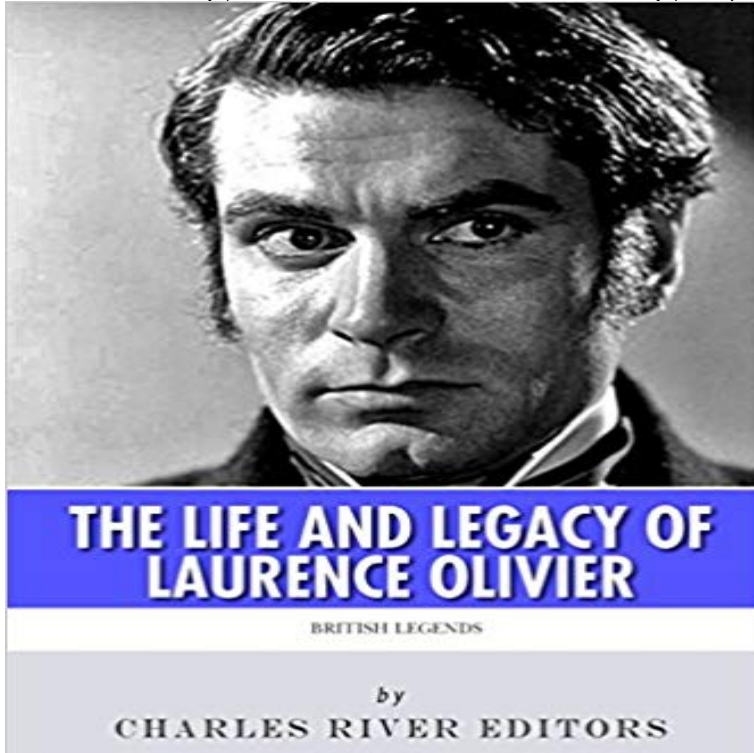


British Legends: The Life and Legacy of Laurence Olivier



*Includes pictures. *Includes a bibliography for further reading. If I wasn't an actor, I think I'd have gone mad. You have to have extra voltage, some extra temperament to reach certain heights. Art is a little bit larger than life—it's an exhalation of life and I think you probably need a little touch of madness. Laurence Olivier. A lot of ink has been spilled covering the lives of history's most influential figures, but how much of the forest is lost for the trees? In Charles River Editors' British Legends series, readers can get caught up to speed on the lives of Britain's most important men and women in the time it takes to finish a commute, while learning interesting facts long forgotten or never known. Of all the great actors of the 20th century, none personifies acting royalty more than Laurence Olivier, and some of this is simply due to the fact that he was actually knighted in 1947, along with a lengthy list of other honors that include being named a life peer in 1970 and admission to the Order of Merit in 1984. To speak of The Right Honourable Lord Laurence Olivier is not a figure of speech but rather a fact. Of course, in addition to the literal sense of the term, there is undeniably a manner in which Laurence Olivier qualifies as acting royalty, as it is not for nothing that Spencer Tracy once referred to Olivier as the greatest actor in the English-speaking world (Bacall). It is also important to note that Tracy refers to Olivier not as a film or theater actor specifically, because much of Olivier's lofty standing derives from his ability to successfully navigate different mediums like stage, film, and television. The breadth of mediums in which he worked, the various roles he inhabited within them (actor, producer, director), and the formidable time span of his career lend Olivier's career a scope of perhaps unmatched magnitude. Indeed, Laurence Olivier worked for so long and was so

successful that few actors receive the level of visibility that he still enjoys, even more than two decades after his death. While his theatrical performances exist only as memories, his cinematic adaptations of several of Shakespeares most famous plays remain the most canonical even to this day. Hamlet, for example, has been produced for the screen by several famous directors, but his version, released in 1948, is the most well-known and best-received. It is through his films that viewers also gain a full appreciation of his creative style, as Olivier assumed full authorial control (from actor to director to producer) over many of his films, particularly the Shakespearean ones. In this sense, it is appropriate to claim that Laurence Olivier was not only a storied actor but also an artist who worked best when enjoying full authority over his productions. Laurence Oliviers career was incredibly decorated, but questions still remain regarding the relationship between his career and his life outside of the stage and screen. To what extent do Oliviers upbringing and personal life cohere with or complicate the reputation he cultivated through his body of work? Other aspects of his life that are consequential and are yet often overlooked include his strict childhood, his experience fighting in World War Two, his discreet sexual life, and his troubled marriage to actress Vivien Leigh. British Legends: The Life and Legacy of Laurence Olivier examines the life and work of one of the worlds most critically acclaimed actors. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Olivier like never before, in no time at all.

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