



Image from: [Laurence Kerr Olivier, Baron Olivier by Walter Stoneman, Mar-50 in National Portrait Gallery Image Collection](#)

Summary Article: **Olivier, Laurence Kerr Baron Olivier of Brighton**
From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(ōlīv'ē-ā''), 1907–89, English actor, director, and producer. He made his stage debut at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1922 and soon achieved renown through his work with the Old Vic company. Noted for his remarkable versatility and striking features, he enjoyed universal admiration for his work in the classics, in modern realistic plays, and in comedy. His films include *Wuthering Heights* (1939), *Rebecca* (1940), *Pride and Prejudice* (1940), *Henry V* (1944), *Richard III* (1956), *The Entertainer* (1960), *Othello* (1965), and *Three Sisters* (1970). In 1948 he won an Academy Award for his portrayal of Hamlet in the film that he also produced and directed. In 1962, Olivier was appointed director of the National Theatre of England, which became one of the finest repertory companies in the world. In the 1970s and 1980s, he was a highly prized character actor, appearing in such roles as the Nazi villain in *The Marathon Man* (1976). Olivier was knighted in 1947 and in 1970 was made a life peer, the first actor to be so honored.

Olivier often costarred on stage and screen with his second wife, **Vivien Leigh**, 1913–67, a delicate brunette who made a spectacular American film debut in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), winning the Academy Award. She followed this with *Waterloo Bridge* (1940), *Lady Hamilton* (with Olivier as Nelson, 1941), and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), for which she won a second Academy Award.

See Barker, F. , *The Oliviers* (1953);

Gourlay, L. , ed., *Olivier, a collection of memoirs by his friends* (1973);

Olivier's own disquisition on acting (1986);

biographies by A. Holden (1988), H. Vickers (1989), A. Walker (1989), D. Spoto (1992, repr. 2001), T. Coleman (2005), and P. Ziegler (2014).

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