

VIVIEN LEIGH, LAURENCE OLIVIER,  
AND THE ROMANCE OF THE CENTURY

# TRULY, MADLY

STEPHEN GALLOWAY



## BOOK CLUB KIT

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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- 1) Olivier wrote that his romance with Leigh “sometimes felt almost like an illness.” Have you ever been overtaken by such passion and, if so, does this description feel accurate to you?
- 2) Olivier felt the loss of his mother deeply. How do you see that early tragedy shaping his life’s trajectory? If you suffered any losses as a child or young adult, how do you think they shaped you?
- 3) Losing Agnes was a watershed in the young Olivier’s life. Do you think being taken away from India and deposited in a boarding school at the age of six may have been the same for Leigh? How do you think life at Sacred Heart molded her?
- 4) When Leigh sees Olivier for the first time she says, “That’s the man I’m going to marry.” What do you think drew her to him? Do you believe in love at first sight? When did you know for certain that your significant other was the one?
- 5) At various points throughout the book, Leigh’s bipolar disorder flares up and no one knows quite what to make of it, blaming her for drinking too much or being difficult. If the action of *TRULY, MADLY* took place today, how might Leigh have been treated differently? And would her relationship with Olivier have changed?
- 6) How can you see the moral mores of England during this period affecting Olivier and Leigh’s relationship? Can you think of any parallels in your community or in pop culture today?
- 7) Earlier in his career, Olivier seems to look down on film, favoring theater instead. Do you agree with his valuation? Why or why not?
- 8) Both Vivien and Larry acted in numerous films and plays. How do you think their roles affected the public’s perception of them? What qualities do you think they shared with their respective characters?

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9) Several topics were deemed too taboo for the couple to discuss publicly, such as Leigh's mental health and Olivier's sexuality. Do you think they would have been more open today? How do you think celebrities' relationships with the public and press have shifted in the intervening decades?

10) Galloway uses the many letters sent between the couple to track their relationship over time. Now that letters have been almost entirely replaced by emails and texts, what do you think has been lost?

11) After *Gone with the Wind*, Leigh often put her career second to her husband's. Do you think she was right to do that? Would things be different today?

12) Many of Vivien's friends tried to come to the rescue when she had a psychotic episode while shooting *Elephant Walk*. Did they handle it the right way? Have you ever been in a situation like that and how would you have handled it differently?

13) Vivien seemed to suffer from a lot of loneliness and depression after her divorce from Olivier. Does divorce affect people the same way today?



# THE ESSENTIAL VIVIEN LEIGH & LAURENCE OLIVIER MOVIE WATCHLIST

*Fire Over England (1937)*

*That Hamilton Woman (1941)*

*Streetcar Named Desire (1951)*



*Spartacus (1960)*

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