

Robert Bolt

Playwright

Robert Oxtan Bolt was born in Sale in Manchester on 15 August 1924, the son of a shopkeeper. Early education at Manchester Grammar School was followed by a history degree at Manchester University. After serving in the Royal Air Force in World War II, Bolt qualified as a teacher and taught English at the prestigious private school Millfield between 1950 and 1958.

It was here that, in his spare time, he wrote both radio and stage plays. Many of his radio plays received an airing and he also did some producing. In 1958, encouraged by the London success of his play *Flowering Cherry*, he gave up teaching to concentrate full time on his writing. In 1960 he had two plays running in London, *The Tiger and The Horse* and *A Man for All Seasons*. The eponymous role of Sir Thomas More shot actor Paul Scofield to stardom, and *A Man for All Seasons* proved a huge hit both in London's West End and on Broadway, where in 1962 it was voted Best Foreign Play of the Year.

This success attracted the attention of Hollywood, and producer Sam Spiegel approached Bolt to revise Michael Wilson's script for *Lawrence of Arabia*. Directed by David Lean, it was Bolt's first successful screenplay and he received an Academy Award nomination for it. Bolt won his first Oscar for his next collaboration with Lean, *Doctor Zhivago* in 1965. In 1966 his screen adaptation of *A Man for All Seasons* won him a second Oscar.

Meanwhile, on stage, Bolt produced *Gentle Jack* in 1963 and a play for children, *The Thwarting of Baron Bolligrew* at Christmas 1965. In 1970 another historical play, charting the relationship between Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I, *Vivat! Vivat Regina!* played to full houses at the Chichester Festival and later enjoyed a long run in the West End – when it transferred to Broadway two years later, it was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Play.

Meanwhile, Bolt wrote the screenplay for two films starring his then wife, Sarah Miles: *Ryan's Daughter* in 1970 and the historical costume drama *Lady Caroline Lamb* in 1972. Sarah was both his second and fourth (last) wife; they first married in 1967, but divorced in 1976 then, after a third marriage ended in divorce in 1985, Sarah and Bolt remarried in 1988. In 1972 Bolt was appointed a CBE.

In 1976 David Lean approached Bolt with an idea to rework the story of the infamous Bounty mutiny and, for two years, he worked on this epic project, creating two versions. Before he could complete the second, however, Bolt suffered a massive heart attack in April 1979, followed by a stroke. His one completed script was made into the film *The Bounty* five years later in 1981, directed by Roger Donaldson. His final film script, for *The Mission*, was produced in 1986. Robert Bolt died on 12 February 1995 at the age of seventy.

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