

British Theatre Guide

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A Man for All Seasons

Robert Bolt

Theatre Royal Bath and Jonathan Church Theatre Productions

Grand Opera House, York

29 July–2 August 2025

Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* trilogy has done much to bring Thomas Cromwell into the public spotlight, shedding light on the life and downfall of Henry VIII's formidable adviser, executed in 1540. Yet, well before Mantel's literary acclaim, Robert Bolt had already brought another of Henry's ill-fated Thomases to the stage. First performed in 1960, *A Man for All Seasons* explores the final chapter in the life of Sir Thomas More, who fell from royal favour over his principled opposition to the King's divorce.

More—an erudite figure, statesman, and Lord Chancellor—is pushed to endorse Henry's bid to end his marriage to Catherine of Aragon in favour of Anne Boleyn. The play centres on this moral and religious struggle, a quiet yet intense clash of beliefs that can lead only one way.

Jonathan Church's production offers a clear and compelling rendition of Bolt's drama, bringing together a superbly crafted script and a uniformly impressive cast. Though much of the play consists of dialogue and debate, it never becomes dry or didactic. The ensemble ensures it remains engrossing throughout, deftly avoiding the stiffness that historical drama can sometimes bring.

Martin Shaw returns to the role of More, having played him previously in 2006, and his familiarity with the character is evident. As the play delves into More's personal and political world, Shaw portrays him with both warmth and gravity. His performance balances calm resolve with occasional flashes of intensity, making the audience both exasperated by his unyielding nature and admiring of his unwavering moral compass.

As The Common Man, Gary Wilmot is an audience favourite from the outset. Adopting multiple roles—servant, ferryman, gaoler—he acts as both narrator and comic relief. His charming presence and impeccable timing lighten the mood just when needed, his every appearance a welcome breath between the play's weightier moments.

The rest of the cast shine just as brightly. Edward Bennett is cold and calculated as Cromwell, while Abigail Cruttenden and Rebecca Collingwood bring depth and pathos as More's devoted wife and daughter. A standout moment comes from Huw Brentnall, the understudy stepping into the role of Henry VIII. His youthful bravado masks a more sinister undercurrent, and though the King appears in only one scene, his presence lingers ominously over the remainder of the play.

The visual design is understated but effective. Simon Higlett's sliding panels and regal costumes serve the narrative without drawing attention away from it. Mark Henderson's lighting subtly heightens the drama, casting a fittingly sombre tone as the story nears its tragic conclusion.

As More's fate unfolds, the audience becomes complicit observers, particularly during Cromwell's damning monologue on the perils of silence. That moment resonates powerfully, especially when viewed through the lens of today's turbulent political landscape.

Reviewer: [James Ballands](#)