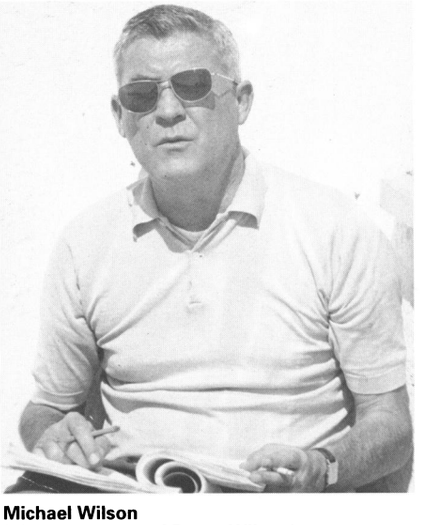
WHO WROTE *LAWRENCE OF ARABIA*?

Sam Spiegel and David Lean's Denial of Credit to a Blacklisted Screenwriter

BY JOEL HODSON

On two separate occasions—once during preproduction in 1960 and again during filming in 1961—the Sam Spiegel-David Lean production of *Lawrence of Arabia* nearly collapsed for lack of a script, coming perilously close to joining several predecessors as yet another would-have-been film on the WWI exploits of the controversial British scholar and soldier, T.E. Lawrence. Spiegel and Lean had hired Michael Wilson, a blacklisted American screenwriter then living in Paris, to write the screenplay. The Academy Award-winning screenwriter had earlier coauthored the script for the 1957 Spiegel-Lean production, *The Bridge on the River Kwai,* and had endeared himself to Lean for his willingness to work throughout the shooting of the film on location in Ceylon. Nevertheless, neither Wilson nor coauthor and fellow blacklistee Carl Foreman received screen credit.[1]

Wilson's employment for *Lawrence of Arabia* was initially questioned by the financing studio, Columbia Pictures, but they were reassured regarding his questionable political status by producer Sam Spiegel, whose September 1959 contract with Wilson included a clause stating that his company, Academy Pictures Enterprises, would give Wilson credit "as the writer of the screenplay on the screen" and would also "use its best efforts to secure similar credit for the writer on all exhibitions of said picture in the Western Hemisphere" on condition that "the writer furnishes the Corporation with a satisfactory statement as required by Mr. Spiegel." The contract does not specify exactly what sort of "statement" was involved, but later correspondence between Wilson's and Spiegel's attorneys make it clear that Spiegel had asked Wilson to recant his radical past, a condition often imposed on Hollywood screenwriters who had been members of the Communist Party.[2]



Michael Wilson (photo courtesy of Becca Wilson)

Between September 1959 and early 1961, Wilson completed three drafts of a screenplay for *Lawrence of Arabia.* Lean was ecstatic about Wilson's preliminary work, in early 1960 writing to him in Paris: "What a masterly job you are doing. Your extraordinary grasp and inventive appreciation of complex subject and character fills me with admiration and excitement."[3]

Wilson delivered his first draft of the script in August 1960 and, over the next several months, in working sessions in London, Paris, and Switzerland, Lean and Wilson (sometimes joined by Spiegel) toiled over the screenplay, with Wilson writing, rewriting, and rewriting again based on their discussions. By the end of the year, however, the two had fallen out amid mutual feelings of dissatisfaction. Wilson, after having worked on the script for over fifteen months, despaired of ever being able to satisfy Lean, who had a well-deserved reputation for his meticulous preparation of scripts, a niggling attention to detail, and a tendency to repeatedly rework and rewrite the same sequence. During a December 1960 script conference trip to Jordan, where Lean was engaged in preproduction and scouting locations, Wilson decided to bow out of the project, shortly thereafter informing Spiegel's New York lawyer, Irwin Margulies, of Margulies & Heit, that he wished to terminate his contract.

By this time, too, Lean's original enthusiasm for Wilson's approach had cooled and he now felt that the script lacked continuity, failed to capture the complex character of Lawrence, and was "too American." Later, writing privately to Spiegel, Lean spelled out his disappointment with what he called a "near disaster script":

> *I have read the script again and hope you realise how* very *far off we are…The character of Lawrence which was what fascinated us in the first place hardly peeps through at all—and I don't think it ever can with the present way of telling the story…The basic flaw is that in the present construction there is no margin for comment or kick-back off the main character. He just keeps on doing things and the audience watches and draws their own conclusions…I now see it for the dull diary-writing technique it is—and we've got to break it up and give the writer space to manoeuvre and spark. We were pretty tough on* Ross, *but it tells far more of Lawrence than we have with our screen technique advantages in the bargain.*[4]

Lean's comments suggest that a principal reason for the falling out of the two formerly successful collaborators—apart from Wilson's exasperation with Lean's exacting demands for continual rewrites—seems to have been that each wished to pursue a fundamentally different approach to the subject. Lean's interest in Lawrence was primarily psychological—"I've always been fascinated by these 'English nuts,'" Lean explained, "and Lawrence was a nut, of the most wonderful kind"—whereas Wilson wanted to situate Lawrence's exploits within the broader political context of Anglo-Arab

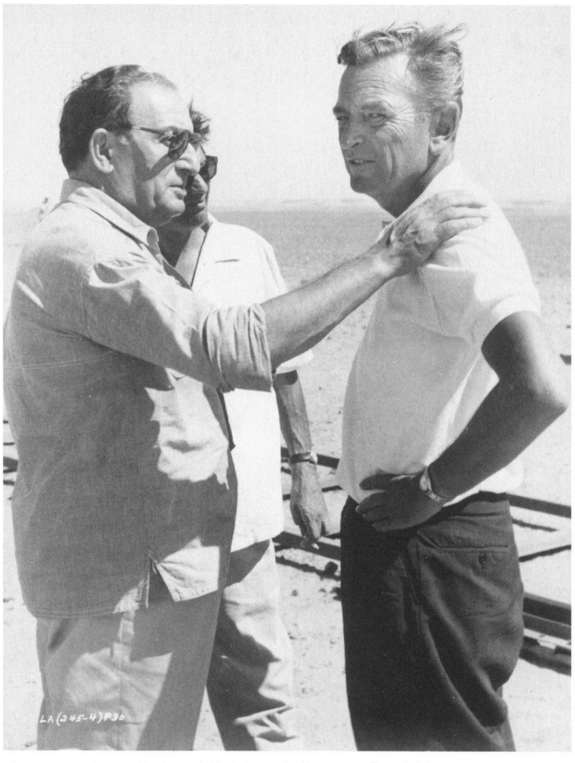
Robert Bolt (photo courtesy of Photofest)

and other international relations of the WWI period. As a filmmaker, Lean had never been interested in social and political themes and Wilson's script contained numerous politically charged scenes, including an Ottoman execution of Syrian rebels in the presence of Prince Feisal. Given his political orientation, Wilson may have been reluctant to eliminate such scenes, or to focus on a psychological character study at the expense of what he felt were more important socio-political aspects of the larger historical drama. In a 1964 interview with the French film magazine, *Positif*, Wilson explained why he dropped out of the project: "The film was at the point of being shot when I found myself again in conflict with David Lean over questions of the film's themes and the nature of the character. We had arrived at an impasse and I withdrew."[5]

Lean, of course, may also have been wary of the sensitive political nature of his subject which had undermined several earlier efforts to make a film about Lawrence's exploits in Arabia, including a production planned in 1936 by Alexander Korda. As Korda's nephew, Michael, wrote in *Charmed Lives* (1979), a collective biography of his famous filmmaking family, Winston Churchill did not want to alienate the Turks, potential allies in the event of another war with Germany. In the Fifties, a J. Arthur Rank production of *Lawrence of Arabia* also fell prey to politics. The film was canceled a month before shooting was to begin. The failure of the Rank production, like Korda's, was due in part to the legacy Lawrence left in the Middle East. As William K. Zinsser wrote about the latter project:

...the movie was to be made in Jordan with Glubb Pasha's Arab Legion [for extras]. *Then Glubb was ousted, and British prestige went with him. Next there was talk of making* [the film] *in Egypt, but the Suez crisis arose. Finally, it was to be made in Iraq, and the Iraqi revolution broke out, bringing as a last mockery the assassination of King Feisal, grandson of Lawrence's great friend and ally. Rank abandoned the film project, understandably.*[6]

After delivering his third and final draft of the screenplay at the end of January, Wilson's contract was terminated in February 1961. In accepting the terms of the settlement, which included his waiver of two and one-half percent of the film's net profits, Wilson wrote to Spiegel's attorneys that the termination agreement "in no way constitutes a waiver of my right to screen credit, because writer credit will be determined after the picture is completed, on the basis of my contribution to the shooting script, and in accordance with procedures established by writers' organizations in the United Kingdom and the United States for the determination of credit."[7]



Producer Sam Spiegel (left) and director David Lean on location in Jordan during the shooting of *Lawrence of Arabia*.

With preproduction already underway and a start date for shooting rapidly approaching, Lean urged Spiegel to find another screenwriter quickly, preferably someone who could explore the personality of Lawrence, as playwright Terence Rattigan had done in his controversial stage production, *Ross*, in 1960. It was on the London stage, in fact, that Spiegel and Lean found their new screenwriter. After seeing Robert Bolt's critically acclaimed play, *A Man for All Seasons*, at the Globe Theatre in London, both men were so impressed with the quality of the writing that they asked Bolt—a former history instructor and BBC radio playwright—to rewrite the dialogue for their *Lawrence* script, despite the fact that he had never written a screenplay before. As Bolt recalled the events some years later:

Sam Spiegel asked me to go and see him and said that he wanted me to rewrite the dialogue in a script which he had on Lawrence. I said, "No, I don't do rewrites and I know nothing about the film." He named a figure and I said, "Say no more, give me the script." I read the script in the train on the way home and rang him and said, "I can't do it, I don't know what you're saying about Lawrence and I don't know what the script's about." He said, "All we want is the dialogue." I explained that there was a close connection between the intention and the dialogue. But he's a very clever man. "Look," he said, "you've promised me seven weeks work, so why don't you just start? So I started and he brought David Lean back from Arabia. David Lean was refusing to shoot the script he'd got because he didn't like it.. They said, "We could find someone else to do the script but if you would like to go on with it..." I contracted for another seven weeks and finally crawled out, fourteen months later, more dead than alive.[8]

Working closely with Lean, Bolt produced a screenplay that, more to the director's liking, explored Lawrence's enigmatic personality, but which also drew heavily upon the way Michael Wilson had structured the film. Bolt began his work on the screenplay in January and by April had completed the first half of the script, enabling Lean to begin shooting the film on desert locations in Jordan the following month. Bolt continued frantically to work on the remainder of the screenplay but the film was eventually forced to shut down production at the end of September—largely due to the lack of a completed script—and was able to resume shooting only in mid-December in Spain.

The following year, as the shooting neared completion, Wilson learned he would not receive a screen credit for his contribution. In violation of the Screen Writers' Guild's established procedures for determination of credits, Wilson was not told Bolt had been hired to replace him nor was he given a copy of the final shooting script. He was unable to secure a copy until production of the film was nearly completed in November 1962. He then wrote to Spiegel, requesting joint listing in the film credits on the basis that Bolt had retained the structure of his earlier work and "most of my inventions."

I received from you a copy of the shooting script of Lawrence of Arabia. *I read it with interest and have studied it with care.*

It is clear at once that little of my dialog remains in this screenplay, certainly less than 10%. I assume that the dialog was written by Robert Bolt, and through you I must congratulate him on a job well done. He is a gifted man. If screen credit were determined on the basis of dialog alone, I could not claim recognition for this picture.

However, more goes into the writing of a motion picture than the spoken word. Structure, selection, continuity, plot, invention and characterization—all these factors form and define the final product we see and hear. These factors are of special importance in a biographical or historical subject as vast, complex, and controversial as this one. Permit me

to summarize what I feel my contributions to be:

The overall structure of the shooting script is mine. This is easily proven, if one traces the course of development in my work from the time I wrote the first tentative outline to the moment when I completed the third draft screenplay. The selection of the material to be dramatized was also made by me.

From the millions of words written by or about Lawrence, we could glean only a minor fraction of the events in his life that might have been dramatized, and I made all the basic choices. To some people, selection may seem a simple task; to the few like yourself, who know the history of this project, it must surely be remembered as the most arduous phase of the writing process.

The continuity—by which I mean plot detail and the progression of scenes—remains my continuity. It is true that certain of my scenes have been deleted and other new scenes added—but this in no way affects the arc of development, the general story line, the points of climax or the dramatic goals. If one were to engage 100 writers—or 100 chimpanzees—to write a film about Lawrence, one would get 100 different screenplays.

Why, then, is the screenplay attributed to Mr. Bolt so much like mine, to a degree that it virtually coincides with mine in terms of continuity? The story that Robert Bolt tells is the story that I told. He has chosen different words with which to tell it.

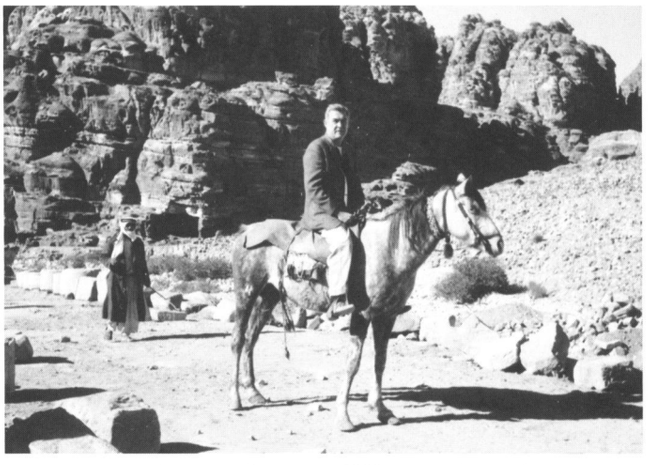
Most of my inventions have been retained in the shooting script, and this fact is of particular significance. By inventions I mean incidents, situations and events which are not to be found in Seven Pillars of Wisdom *or any other work about Lawrence—in other words, fictions created by me the better to dramatize this particular film.*

I could cite—and will, if necessary—a dozen or more such fictions which contribute importantly to story progression or character revelation. There isn't one chance in a 1000 that another writer could have independently created the same fictions...

I have been told that Mr. Bolt has never read my screenplay. I am prepared to believe this strange assertion. But if it is so, then certainly he must have been carefully briefed on its shape and content, as a junior officer would be briefed by his commander on a battle plan.

Perhaps my screenplay was recited to him, in paraphrase. I mean this literally. There is no other way to explain his having used my approach, my construction, my objectives, my characterizations—not to mention my inventions. It is as if my ideas, concepts and insights had been filtered through the prism of another man's consciousness, to emerge in a different style and in different words. Truly, my work has been altered. But my blueprint has been used—even if the interior decorator has changed the furnishings, the drapes and the color of the walls.[9]

Spiegel turned Wilson's letter over to Irwin Margulies, and an unpleasant correspondence between Wilson and Margulies ensued, Spiegel's attorney contending that Wilson was not due screen credit because the February 1961 agreement he had signed released the producers from "any and all claims, demands or obligations arising out of the original contract." Wilson then took his claim for equal credit to the British Screen Writers' Guild, which had jurisdiction in the matter. In a lengthy letter to James Johnson, General Secretary of the Guild, Wilson chronicled fourteen "inventions" he had created for the screenplay, fictions which were "not to be found in any source material," and which Bolt had appropriated:



Michael Wilson during his December 1960 visit to Jordan for a script conference with David Lean (photo courtesy of Becca Wilson).

1) Lawrence's first meeting with Ali, in which the stranger, later to become his closest friend, kills Lawrence's guide. This is sheer invention—mine.

2) Lawrence meets a British officer (Brighton) in the desert who tells him to keep his mouth shut about Arab affairs. When they arrive at Prince Feisal's camp, a Turkish plane is attacking the Bedouins. My fictions, these.

3) At his first conference with Feisal, Lawrence takes issue with the official British viewpoint. This did not happen in life.

4) After learning of Feisal's intention to retreat to the coast, Lawrence persuades Ali to join him in a Bedouin raid on Aqaba. This is not at all the way it happened in Seven Pillars of Wisdom. *I altered the events to suit dramatic purposes.*

5) While crossing the desert, one of the raiders is lost and forsaken, and Lawrence turns back to rescue him. A few days later, Lawrence executes the man he has saved. Both these events are recorded in Seven Pillars of Wisdom, *but at different times, different places, different persons. I conjoined them in order to dramatize (my invention) the conflict between Ali and Lawrence—predestination vs. free will, etc.*

6) Lawrence persuades Auda to join the raid by swearing that the Turks hoard gold in Aqaba; and when no gold is found, gives Auda a personal IOU for 5,000 guineas. This is invention.

7) Lawrence crosses the Sinai with only Farraj and Daud as companions, and Daud dies in quicksand. This is plain fiction. Check my screenplay.

8) Lawrence takes Farraj into the Officers Bar in Cairo, and is insulted there. (Only this idea is mine, not the scene that follows.)

9) The American journalist Lowell Thomas is nowhere mentioned in Seven Pillars. *In my screenplay there is such a character, and his is a special role in the story. The name and the dialog have been changed in the shooting script, but the journalist's function remains the same.*

10) When the revolt is at a low ebb, Lawrence persuades Ali to come with him to the Turkish garrison town of Deraa. Lawrence is arrested, Ali is not. (Here I altered the facts to keep alive the Ali-Lawrence relationship.)

11) Lawrence's decision to return to Jerusalem and throw in his hand is a direct consequence of his experience with the Turkish bey. This motivation is my invention, for it did not happen that way in life.

12) Key scene between Lawrence and Allenby has been thoroughly rewritten, but my idea (an invention) remains the point of the scene—that Allenby in effect challenges Lawrence and his Arabs to race the British to Damascus.

13) When Lawrence returns to the desert, there is a subtle change in his relationship to Ali. The destinies of the two men have crossed: Ali, once the feudal tribesman, is becoming the nationalist zealot; Lawrence, once the civilized Englishman, is becoming the primitive Messiah. Thus, in the massacre of the Turkish regiment, it is Lawrence who is swept away by the blood bath and Ali who tries to stop the slaughter. All this is my own contribution to the story line.

14) Superficially, this scene [in the Damascus town hall at the end of the film] *bears little resemblance to mine, but the basic personal solutions are mine: Auda returns to the desert; Ali remains in Damascus to "learn politics"; while Lawrence can neither stay nor go back to the desert.*[10]

The day after sending his letter requesting the Screen Writers' Guild arbitration of his claim, Wilson wrote to Robert Bolt.

I am your predecessor on the film Lawrence of Arabia. *As the first writer to be engaged on the project, I was also, for fifteen months, the only one until you took over the job. Unhappily, we have never met; yet when I threw in my hand my sole gratification was*

the knowledge that the writer to follow me was the author of A Man for All Seasons.

Yes, I threw in my hand. I felt I had gone about as far as I could go, that if I lived to be a hundred I could not fully satisfy David Lean. Frankly, I no longer cared about satisfying him, for in the main I had satisfied myself. Not that my work was the definitive "Lawrence," but like most writers who have a go at this subject, I developed a certain pride in my interpretation; and I suppose I began to behave more like a playwright than a hired screenwriter and director's right-hand man.

At any rate, something had to give. And so I resigned. And thus slipped into the limbo of non-persons the producers of this film chose to forget...

A few weeks ago, quite by accident, I learned that a solo screenplay credit on Lawrence of Arabia *had been assigned to you...I called Mr. Spiegel to register my protest...setting forth the reasons why I felt I deserved joint credit with you on the picture...*

Anyone who takes the trouble to read my stuff chronologically—from the time I wrote my first notes on Lawrence in 1959 until I wrote my third draft screenplay in 1961—will see where and how the basic ideas and overall conception of this picture germinated. If you were told, on taking over the assignment, that you were "starting from scratch," you were misinformed; if you were told to believe there was little to go on except for some technicolor blueprint in David Lean's mind, you were deceived. The blueprint was mine.

Wilson then went on to explain why he felt he had been given the run-around by Spiegel and his lawyers:

For the past eleven years I have been one of the blacklisted American writers. I have just begun to emerge from that shadowy realm, not through any abandonment of principle on my part, but because at long last I have found an American producer who has the courage to give credit to a writer he engaged, and the witch-hunters be damned.

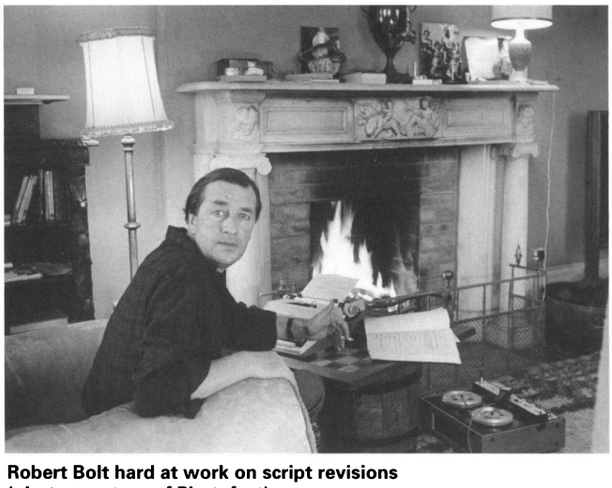
The men in control of Lawrence of Arabia *lack that courage. If I were "clean," my name would already be alongside yours as co-author of this picture.*

I implore you to believe this is not a paranoid assertion. I am not a man for all seasons; but while martyrdom ill suits me, there are aspects of the blacklist that do fill me with mirth. If I could tell you (and if you're interested someday I shall) the enormous pressures the top brass of this production put on me to "clear myself," you would see that this is the heart of the matter.

In view of the producer's violation of current procedure and his refractory position, I am impelled to turn the matter over to the British Television and Screen Writers' Guild for examination and probable arbitration.[11]

Although Bolt was sympathetic to Wilson, he did not want to share the screen credit, writing in reply:

Your letter came this morning as a bombshell. I had no idea that there was any question of my sharing credits with anybody. I was under the impression that the script was shot as my own work utterly...I cannot tell you how hard I have worked on this film. Some of it I have written five times over to meet the requirements of Sam and David. It has been back-breaking work...I am particularly sympathetic because of your particular political predicament. I have myself no objection to your receiving credit for 'preliminary work' or 'ideas' which are yours. But I'm damned if the screenplay is by anyone but Robert Bolt and that is what the Credit ought to say.[12]



Robert Bolt hard at work on script revisions (photo courtesy of Photofest).

Correspondence between Wilson and Bolt does not discuss exactly how much of Wilson's earlier work on the script had been appropriated, but it is evident that Bolt *had*, in fact, seen Wilson's screenplay. In discussing the general outline of the shooting script, Bolt wrote to Wilson that he would "look *again* at your script if Sam will give me one and see how closely you follow [the story-line being used] yourself"[13] (*author's emphasis*). Wilson had been told by Spiegel that Bolt had not seen his work at all.

Lean also insisted that Wilson's screenplay had not been used by Bolt. As late as 1988, he was quoted as saying, "I don't think a word of Mike's is in the film. I worked day and night with Robert and we never had Mike's script to work from. It was a completely new story."[14] But this statement contradicts Bolt's admission to Wilson as well as his formal contract with Academy Pictures, which stated that he was to write a "screenplay with reference to a script by Michael Wilson based upon the life and exploits of Lawrence of Arabia." It seems that, on this point at least, Lean and Spiegel were equivocating.

In fact, a side-by-side comparison of the Bolt and Wilson screenplays clearly indicates that the structure of Wilson's screenplay was appropriated by Lean and Bolt. The final screenplay for *Lawrence of Arabia*, as Wilson claimed when he argued for equal credit, did follow his blueprint closely. Dialogue was altered and notably improved, and scenes were moved, cut, or added. But the structure of the film, from beginning to end, was Michael Wilson's, as were many of the scenes and some of the dialogue.

The film begins in 1935 with Lawrence kickstarting his motorcycle and speeding along a country lane in Dorsetshire. He swerves to miss two boys on bicycles and is mortally injured in the ensuing crash. The scene then dissolves to St. Paul's in London for Lawrence's memorial service. Various dignitaries are interviewed about Lawrence on the steps of the Cathedral, their assessments mixed to indicate that in death, as in life, Lawrence was a controversial figure. Next follows a flashback to Cairo of the war years where Lawrence is serving as an intelligence officer. Lawrence, portrayed as an enigmatic and insubordinate junior officer, is summoned from the map room by the Chief of Staff and given leave to go to Arabia to assess the fledgling Arab Revolt.

This beginning, with considerable tightening but with some scenes intact, was originally written by Michael Wilson. Bolt ar-gued that when he wrote his screenplay for the film he had not used Wilson's earlier work but had merely followed Lawrence's own account, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926). Obviously, however, when writing *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence could not have predicted his own manner of death or the time and place of his memorial service, nor had he composed his own elegies. The use of an epilogue and then flashbacks for the opening scenes of the film are Michael Wilson's inventions.

In the film, Lawrence then travels to Arabia where he is to be led by a guide, Tafas, to the desert encampment of Prince Feisal, the Sherif of Mecca's third son and a field commander of the Sherifian forces. Lawrence befriends Tafas and gives him a pistol which, in the first of many ironic gestures, causes the death of the guide. At a well in the desert, where Lawrence and Tafas have stopped to drink, they are approached by a lone Bedouin who, in one of the film's most memorable scenes, materializes from an ominous dot on the horizon. Afraid for his life, Lawrence's guide draws the pistol and is shot to death by the approaching Bedouin, Sherif Ali (Omar Sharif). This scene sets up a soliloquy by Lawrence on the meanness of Arab blood feuds: "Sherif Ali! So long as the Arabs fight tribe against tribe, so long will they remain a little people. A silly people!

Greedy, barbarous, and cruel—as you are!"

As many others that follow, the scene comes straight out of Wilson's earlier screenplay and not from *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. In *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence is attended by two guides and does not give away his service pistol as a gesture of friendship. A guide is not killed at the well and, of course, Lawrence does not begin his Arabian adventure with an angry tirade on desert customs that, in reality, would have won him no friends and might have gotten him killed. A similar scene does take place in *Seven Pillars*, but Sherif Ali and a companion peacefully share the well with Lawrence, his guides, and with other Bedouin who happen to be watering their camels at the same time. In *Seven Pillars*, the well account is a humorous, rather than a deadly, encounter.

A comparison of the dialogue of the scene demonstrates how closely Bolt's screenplay follows Wilson's script. In the film, as Ali approaches, Lawrence asks: "Turks?" Tafas answers "Bedu," and Lawrence asks: "Who is he?" In Wilson's script, the exact exchange occurs, except Lawrence says "You know him?" instead of "Who is he?" After Tafas is murdered in the film, the following exchange occurs between Lawrence and Ali. Bolt's script reads:

Ali: He is dead.
Lawrence: Yes. Why?
Ali: This is my well.
Lawrence: I have drunk from it.
Ali: You are welcome.
Lawrence: He was my friend.
Ali: That?
Lawrence: Yes, that.
Ali: This pistol yours?
Lawrence: No, his.
Ali: Then I will use it. Your friend was a Hazimi of the Beni Salem.
Lawrence: I know.
Ali: I am Ali of the Beni Harish.
Lawrence: I have heard of you.
Ali: So, what was a Hazimi doing here?
Lawrence: He was taking me to see Prince Feisal.
Ali: You have been sent from Cairo?
Lawrence: Yes.
Ali: I have been in Cairo for my schooling. I can both read and write. Lord Feisal already has an Englishman. What is your name?
Lawrence: My name is for my friends. None of my friends is a murderer.
Ali: You are angry, English. He was nothing. The well is everything. The Hazimi may not drink at our wells. He knew that. Salaam.

This dialogue, like the scene, does not occur in *Seven Pillars*. It is a Wilson invention used to dramatize the divisiveness of the various Arab tribes when Lawrence arrived in Arabia. Wilson's script reads:

Ali: He is dead.
Lawrence: What was he to you?
Ali: A blood enemy. Of the Hazimi tribe. I am Ali of the Harith.
Lawrence: He was an Arab patriot. He fought Turks.
Ali: And so do I. But my people have been fighting the Hazimi for a hundred years. Have you traveled far?
Lawrence: From Cairo.
Ali: I have never seen Cairo. Have you far to go?
Lawrence: To the camp of Prince Feisal.
Ali: I will take you. [Lawrence gestures to Tafas's corpse] *Believe me, English—he was worthless.*
Lawrence: He was a man. And therefore precious.
Ali: Is a man so precious to you Christians, when millions die in blood feuds you call wars?
Lawrence: I'll ride alone.
Ali: You will not find Feisal's camp without a guide. There are no other wells. If you get lost...
Lawrence: I won't get lost.
Ali: God be with you, English!

second, Farraj, accompanies Lawrence to Cairo.

Lawrence's encounter with General Allenby in Cairo is a pivotal sequence in the story because the meeting determines whether Lawrence will remain liaison officer to Feisal's forces in Arabia. The encounter is hardly dealt with in *Seven Pillars*. By contrast, the episode occupies twenty pages in both the Wilson and Bolt scripts and is substantially prefigured by Wilson. In the film, the sequence begins comically with Lawrence, in soiled Arab robes, bursting into the British officers' club and ordering a lemonade, over the objections of his fellow officers, for his young Arab companion. In *Seven Pillars*, Farraj did not accompany Lawrence to Cairo, nor would Lawrence have taken a child with him on such an important mission. But Wilson uses the scene in order to comment upon British racism, and Bolt keeps it intact.

A final example of Bolt's appropriation

Lawrence (Peter O'Toole) and Farraj (Michel Ray) at the Officers' Bar in Cairo are somewhat skeptically greeted by Colonel Brighton (Anthony Quayle).

Much of the rest of the film uses altered dialogue and scenes taken directly from Wilson's screenplay and which do not occur in *Seven Pillars*. Several other sequences perhaps suffice to demonstrate this use at a detailed level. One sequence occurs after the taking of the Turkish fortress at Aqaba, when Lawrence must cross the Sinai Desert to report the Arab victory to British Headquarters in order to get needed arms and money to carry on the revolt. In *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence makes the expedition with a band of eight bodyguards. In the film, as in Wilson's screenplay, Lawrence travels instead with two Arab youths. The first, Daud, dies when he is swallowed up by quicksand (in Lawrence's account, Daud dies from exposure long afterward) and the of the Wilson script is the film's concluding fade-out, which evokes Lawrence's alienation as he is driven out of Damascus after the Allied-Arab victory over the Turks. In *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence ends his account in Damascus. His departure from the city is not described. In the film, as in Wilson's screenplay, Lawrence, having been dismissed by Allenby, is driven out of the city by a chauffeur. Along the road toward Beirut, they pass a group of Bedouin on camels who have abandoned their victory to British administration of the city and are returning to the desert. In the final scene, Lawrence is shown slumped in the passenger's seat. He strains to identify the Arab tribesmen as he passes them in the car. Failing to do so, he stares vacantly ahead as the

car speeds past the Arab riders and off into the dust.

These various incidents, and the opening and closing scenes of the film, are inventions directly attributable to Wilson's screenplay. It is not likely that Bolt would have dramatized these scenes, and many others, exactly as Wilson had. They indicate that, despite statements to the contrary, Lean and Bolt had not relied only on *Seven Pillars* but had in fact seen and relied heavily upon Wilson's script.

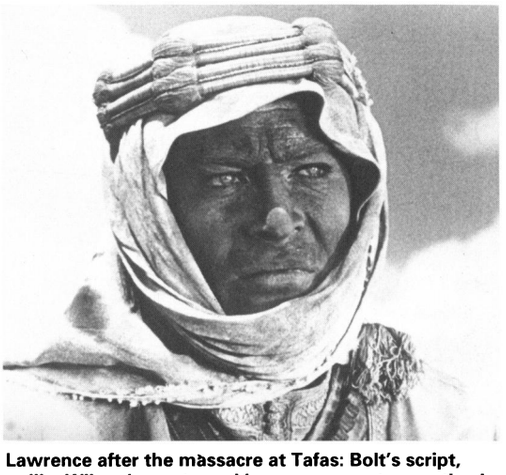
Although the Wilson and Bolt screenplays are structurally similar, thematically the two screenplays differ significantly. As Wilson pointed out in the *Positif* interview:

My version of Lawrence's character was more social and political than that of Robert Bolt, who preferred the psychoanalytical side—the sadistic, masochistic, homosexual aspects of his character. I believe that at the end of the film one confuses the two conceptions and it is not clear for most viewers. Many people have told me: "Lawrence is crazy." But Lawrence was not crazy. He was a very complex and interesting man. [His story] *is the tragedy of a man who tried to serve two masters. On one hand, he wanted to become an Arab but could not. On the other, he was ashamed to remain English. This is what is tragic for Lawrence, and not the rape by the Turk.*[15]

For example, although the scene of the Cairo meeting between Lawrence and Allenby was retained from Wilson's script, Bolt interpreted it quite differently. In Wilson's version, Lawrence does not take personal credit for the Aqaba victory, reporting that "The Arabs took it. I went along for the ride." In Bolt's version, Lawrence responds egotistically. When Col-onel Brighton comments in disbelief that the taking of Aqaba is not possible, Lawrence answers, "Yes it is. I did it."

Similarly, Bolt borrows Wilson's invention of having General Allenby preview Lawrence's dossier, but again he reinterprets it. Bolt uses this scene and others to set up a neurotic character study. In the twenty page sequence in Bolt's script, in fact, Lawrence becomes a highly capricious, traumatized sadomasochist, a man who (Bolt presumes) enjoyed killing. Portrayed as a pathetic and obsessed figure, he is hardly a likely candidate for a pragmatic commander like Allenby to send back into the field. Wilson, by contrast, used the scene to portray Lawrence as a rational, albeit independently-minded, amateur soldier. The scene also provided needed background to explain why Lawrence, only a Second Lieutenant at the time, was used as a liaison officer to the Arabs.

When *Lawrence of Arabia* premiered in December 1962, it was widely hailed as a superb cinematic spectacle, an unusually literate film epic, but more than one reviewer also commented that Lawrence, as a controversial historical figure, had become "more of an enigma than ever." Even a notoriously apolitical critic such as Andrew Sarris pointed out that the film's sadomasochistic sensationalism obscured more important political issues.[16] It certainly distracted from what many scholars view as the essence of the Lawrence story: his predicament in serving two contradictory masters—Arab nationalism and British colonialism. It would be interesting to speculate on the different portrait of Lawrence and his exploits that would have resulted if Wilson's rather than Bolt's interpretation of Lawrence had prevailed—certainly it would have given audiences a more historically accurate and politically contextualized understanding of the period and the enduring fascination with the Lawrence of Arabia legend.[17]



Lawrence after the massacre at Tafas: Bolt's script, unlike Wilson's, portrayed Lawrence as a traumatized sadomasochist, a man who enjoyed killing.

Partial vindication for Wilson came a year after the film's release, when the British Screen Writers Guild, in a December 18th, 1963 statement, declared that, "After an exhaustive enquiry lasting many months, during which time all versions of the script and other relevant documents were studied, the arbitration committee upheld Michael Wilson's claim, and ruled that he was entitled to an equal credit with Robert Bolt for the screenplay of *Lawrence of Arabia*." It was a largely moral victory, however, since the Guild had no means to enforce its ruling, although it did award to Wilson—as it had earlier to Robert Bolt—a Screen Writers Guild plaque for "The Best British Dramatic Screenplay" of the year.

Today, with three of the four principals now dead, and Robert Bolt not inclined to answer any questions about Wilson's contribution to the film, any attempt to sort out the conflicting claims or discern the personal motivations involved in this dispute would be largely conjecture. Did David Lean, perhaps because he felt 'betrayed' by Michael Wilson's walking off the picture, continue to hold a personal grudge against the screenwriter? Did Sam Spiegel believe he was contractually justified in denying Michael Wilson a screen credit or was he simply taking advantage of a blacklisted screenwriter? Had Robert Bolt gone through so many rewrites for David Lean that he honestly felt the final shooting script was entirely his own creation? Was Michael Wilson correct in his suspicion that he was denied screen credit not simply because of David Lean's dissatisfaction but because of Sam Spiegel's discomfort with his HUAC "unfriendly witness" status and his refusal to "clear" himself?

What is beyond debate is that Michael Wilson was denied a screen credit he clearly deserved. The 1989 restoration of *Lawrence of Arabia* and its rerelease in a new "director's cut" version represented an ideal opportunity to finally place Michael Wilson's name next to that of Robert Bolt on the screen. In 1988, in fact, as the film was being restored, friends and family of Michael Wilson, who had died in 1978, approached the Writers Guild of America to enlist its support for formally recognizing Wilson's screenplay credit. Writer and producer Paul Jarrico, Wilson's brother-in-law, made an impassioned presentation to the Guild's board of directors in Los Angeles and received a favorable, highly sympathetic response. Brian Walton, the board's Executive Director, however, cautioned against publicly demanding that Columbia Pictures restore the screen credit and instead offered to make a quieter, behind-the-scenes effort among studio executives.

Whatever effort that might have been made, however, came to naught, presumably because of Columbia's fears of angering David Lean, who adamantly continued to deny that Wilson deserved any credit for the film's screenplay. Restoration supervisor Robert A. Harris says he tentatively broached the screenplay credit issue at one point, but Lean stuck to his story that he and Bolt had not used Wilson's screenplay at all. Since Harris needed to stay on the director's good side, he opted to stay out of the dispute. Unfortunately, as author Larry Ceplair has commented, "David Lean literally went to his grave refusing to allow Wilson to share the credit with Robert Bolt."[18]

Cheryl Rhoden, Public Affairs spokesperson for the Writers Guild, explained recently that the Guild today continues to regard the Michael Wilson claim as an "open matter" which, along with other unacknowledged or pseudonymous credits for blacklist-era films, is reviewed "from time to time" by an ad-hoc committee.[19] Clearly, then, with David Lean no longer an obstacle, the time has come for the Writers Guild of America, in recognition of its sister guild's 1963 ruling, to officially acknowledge Michael Wilson's coauthorship of the screenplay for *Lawrence of Arabia*.[20] ■

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Michael Wilson's family for permission to use a copy of his script for *Lawrence of Arabia* in the Wilson Collection at the UCLA Theater Arts Library. The script is the revised second draft of September 27, 1960. With the exception of the January 5th, 1961 letter from Lean to Spiegel, provided by Kevin Brownlow of Photoplay Productions in London, correspondence quoted from or referred to in this article is housed at The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, at The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and in the Wilson Collection at the UCLA Theater Arts Library in Los Angeles. Thanks to Larry Ceplair and Gary Crowdus for research for this article.

1. Since Carl Foreman and Michael Wilson were blacklisted at the time, Sam Spiegel decided to give credit for the screenplay to Pierre Boulle (1912-1994), the French author of the novel on which the film was based. When the film won the Academy Award for Best Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium—along with six other Oscars for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor (Alec Guinness), as well as for Cinematography, Editing, and Music—the award was accepted on behalf of Boulle (who didn't even speak English) by David Lean. In a special ceremony at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1985, the widows of Carl Foreman (1914-1984) and Michael Wilson (1914-1978) were presented their husbands' posthumous Oscars.

2. In 1951, during the height of the anticommunist witch hunt in Hollywood, Wilson was subpoenaed to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). He refused to testify, citing his First and Fifth Amendment privileges, and, after being branded by the Committee as "a communist, past or present," was promptly blacklisted by the Association of Motion Picture Producers. Barred from employment by the major studios, Wilson joined the ranks of blacklisted screenwriters working pseudonymously on scripts at a fraction of their usual fees. He and his family left the U.S. in 1956 and lived in France for eight years, during which time he worked, uncredited, on numerous films in addition to *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia*, including *The Tempest* (1958) and *Five Branded Women* (1958).

Before being blacklisted in 1951, Wilson won the Academy Award for his screenplay for *A Place in the Sun* (1951) and an Academy Award nomination for *Five Fingers* (1952). He was later denied a second Academy Award for *Friendly Persuasion* (1956), a film he had scripted some years earlier, because in 1957 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences had written a new bylaw stating that no person who admitted he was a Communist or who refused to answer questions before "any duly constituted Federal legislative committee" was eligible to win an Oscar. As a result, no screenplay credit at all appears on the film! Wilson's post-blacklist credits include such films as *The Sandpiper* (1965), *The Planet of the Apes* (1968), and *Che!* (1969; a film he disowned). His most famous credit is for the blacklist-era labor and feminist classic, *Salt of the Earth* (1953).

3. Telegram to Michael Wilson from David Lean, February 3, 1960.

4. Letter to Sam Spiegel from David Lean, the Philadelphia Hotel, Amman, Jordan, January 5, 1961.

5. Interview with Michael Wilson, *Positif* #64/65, 1964, p. 94 (translation by the author).

6. "In Search of Lawrence of Arabia" by William K. Zinsser, *Esquire*, June 1961, pp. 101-104.

7. Letter to Irwin Margulies of Margulies & Heit from Michael Wilson, March 7, 1961.

8. Interview with Robert Bolt in journal of the British Association of Cine, Television & Allied Technicians, May 1975.

9. Letter to Sam Spiegel from Michael Wilson, November 7, 1962.

10. Letter to James Johnson, General Secretary of the British Screen Writers' Guild, from Michael Wilson, November 28, 1962.

11. Letter to Robert Bolt from Michael Wilson, November 29, 1962.

12. Letter to Michael Wilson from Robert Bolt, December 3, 1962.

13. Ibid.

14. Telephone interview with David Lean by David Robb, quoted in his article in *Daily Variety*, October 25, 1988.

15. *Positif*, op. cit., p. 94 (translation by the author).

16. *The Village Voice*, December 20, 1962.

17. Robert Bolt's controversial interpretation of T.E. Lawrence is one of a number of aspects explored in "*Lawrence of Arabia*: The Cinematic (Re)Writing of History" by Gary Crowdus, *Cineaste*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, 1989, pp. 14-21.

18. "The Writers Guild Agrees to Correct the Historical Record" by Larry Ceplair, letter, *Cineaste*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, 1991, p. 3.

19. Phone interview by Gary Crowdus with Cheryl Rhoden, Director of Public Affairs, Writers Guild of America, west, August 18, 1994.

20. The story of the writing of both Michael Wilson's and Robert Bolt's screenplays for *Lawrence of Arabia* is examined in detail in a chapter of Adrian Turner's forthcoming book, *The Making of David Lean's "Lawrence of Arabia,"* to be published in the U.K. this fall by Dragon's World. Turner's book also includes never-before-published documents such as Michael Wilson's "*Lawrence of Arabia*: Elements and Facets of the Theme" and Robert Bolt's "Apologia," originally intended to accompany and explain the published screenplay of *Lawrence of Arabia*, which was never published.

Additional light may also be shed on this episode in the career of one of England's greatest filmmakers in Kevin Brownlow's forthcoming biography of David Lean, due for publication later this year in the U.K. and the U.S.

Homevideo (continued)

dlers keep trying to send Ivan off to a children's home or a military school, the frail youngster, driven by his desire to avenge the Nazi murders of his parents and sister, pleads to remain at the front.

The film is especially notable for the way in which it contrasts Ivan's carefree boyhood memories to the most horrifying aspects of the war-torn landscape—the editing sometimes effecting seamless transitions and at other times shocking us with violent juxtapositions—with the resultant synergy building to an emotionally powerful climax. The film's stark black and white cinematography is well preserved on this laserdisc transfer of a generally clean and crisp print.

Tarkovsky went on to refine his distinctive visual style in such epics as *Andrei Rublev* (1966) and *Solaris* (1971)—both of which are also now available on laserdisc—and honing his religio-philosophic vision in such somber and spare works as *The Mirror* (1975), *Stalker* (1979), and *Nostalgia* (1983).

His last film, *The Sacrifice*, a Swedish-French-English coproduction shot in Sweden, stars Ingmar Bergman favorite Erland Josephson as Alexander, an aging literary intellectual whose birthday is being celebrated by family and friends at his home on a desolate island in the Baltic Sea. That evening, after what appears to be a possible nuclear holocaust occurs, Alexander falls to his knees and prays to God, offering a personal sacrifice if he will restore the world. The film's laborious exposition and resolution of this fanciful if earnest scenario does have a bizarrely engaging quality, and some viewers may well be moved by the film's lofty thesis, but most are likely to find it a load of pretentious twaddle and religious mumbo-jumbo.

Sven Nykvist's cinematography, with a dramatically subdued color palette and low key, natural illumination of both interiors and exteriors, perfectly matches the film's emotionally somber tone, which is enhanced by the soundtrack's persistent and eerie background noises. The laserdisc transfer features a slightly letterboxed image with the subtitles beneath the image.

Tarkovsky always denied any interest in using the cinema to influence social or political change, aiming instead at the presumably more modest goal of developing individual minds. He believed that the role of art was not to teach but simply to show life as it is. The evangelical missionary spirit of much of his later work, however, represents merely the flip side of the doctrinaire Socialist Realist coin he so vigorously rejected. On the evidence of these two films, in fact, reflecting nearly diametrical poles of his career, one suspects that Tarkovsky would likely have had greater impact as an artist had he stuck to the broadly humanist concerns of his first film rather than having gotten so heavily involved in trying to peddle spiritual salvation to the benighted masses.—**Gary Crowdus**