

The Ironies of T. E. Lawrence's Relevance and Reputation

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Abstract:

No figure in twentieth-century Anglo-American history is so mysterious, intriguing, and charismatic as Thomas Edward Lawrence of Arabia. Nearly every aspect of his rather short life has aroused contention. Yet, he surely once belonged in the company of Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee in America and Winston Churchill in England as a major iconic hero, all of whom have since had their posthumous reputations subjected to harsh revision. Many more books have been written about these others. To be sure, though, T. E. Lawrence has his impressive share-- from the journalist Lowell Thomas and Lawrence's close friend, the poet and novelist Robert Graves, to the more recent biographers, Jeremy Wilson and John Mack. Most of these writers have been positive or even reverential in their treatment. Some, notably the English poet and biographer Richard Aldington, were distinctly negative, and lately the analyses of Lawrence's war efforts and personality have made Aldington's accusations appear especially egregious and unjust.

The question arises, why should a subject so long worked over still engage interest? Several come to mind. The first is the very quality of Lawrence's mind, literary skill, and influence on other thinkers, both literary and military. His two major works, Seven Pillars of Wisdom (1926) and The Mint (1955) are both classics in their own right. He was not prolific, but his surmounting of Victorian convention and adopting of modern, psychologically rich insight affirm that his art belongs among the best twentieth-century examples.¹ Yet, the concentration of this exploration is devoted to his military relevance followed by analysis of his reputational complexity.

Lawrence as Strategist for our Time

Highly significant is Lawrence's relevance to events in the Middle East today. The American military is dealing with a people whose concept of honor differs entirely from its own. Tribal, face-to-face societies consider the preservation of high status and respect in the eyes of others, near and far, the prime means of upholding familial and self esteem. To be disrespected in such a Manichean culture is to be rendered vulnerable, impotent, until only revenge can redress the insult or wrong. The Middle Eastern expert Raphael Patai observes that the many shapes, in which honor is molded, envelop "the Arab ego like a coat of armor." Lawrence would have heartily agreed.² The late John Mack, Lawrence's chief biographer, writes, "He became thoroughly conversant with the intricacies of their tribal and family jealousies, rivalries and taboos." He had, the biographer continues, "the capacity for enabling." He understood and appreciated the ethic of honor by which the Arabs, then and now, judged their place in society and protected the integrity of their clan, tribe, family, and personal identity. Also, he learned from the British surrender at Kut in 1916 the futility and peril for all Middle Easterners of a western power's pursuit of national goals without regard for local custom and their feelings of helplessness. Consequently, Lawrence could handle disputes and grievances among the Arabs by showing them marks of respect and adherence to the protocols of the desert people. "Troubles seem to get settled magically" in his hands, Mack concludes.³ Lawrence understood and appreciated the ethic of honor by which the Arabs, then and now, judged their place in society and protected the integrity of their clan, tribe, family, and personal identity.

In contrast, only after five years of fighting a costly, devastating engagement have the U.S. armed services just begun to redraw counterinsurgency plans. According to the New York Times, the new doctrine at last incorporates the insights of such "classic texts" as T. E.

Lawrence's Seven Pillars of Wisdom.⁴ One military expert has written that he "should stand as a model for military officers as they prepare intellectually and emotionally to face the challenges of the twenty-first century." General David L. Petraeus would concur, being an avid student of Lawrence's Seven Pillars of Wisdom.⁵ Ambassador Ryan Crocker has been likewise astute, and one headline gave him this title: "Crocker: A Modern 'Lawrence of Arabia.'"⁶ Moreover, Lawrence's "Twenty-Seven Articles" for fighting insurgencies has become something of a bible for a few current American military experts dealing with the problems of Iraq.⁷ In fact, according to one source, Lawrence earned the compliment of being plagiarized without adequate attribution in the famous U.S. Army field manual for counter-insurgency.⁸

As early as 1920, Lawrence had written about the British occupation of Baghdad and Iraq. His words have obvious pertinence to more recent events: "The people of England have been led in Mesopotamia into a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honour. They have been tricked into it by a steady withholding of information. Things have been far worse than we have been told, our administration more bloody and inefficient than the public knows. It is a disgrace to our imperial record, and may soon be too inflamed for any ordinary cure."⁹

Lawrence went on to protest, "Our unfortunate troops. . .under hard conditions of climate and supply, are policing an immense area, paying dearly every day in lives for the willfully wrong policy of the civil administration in Baghdad." The Turks killed only 200 Arabs a year to maintain their control, but in a summer campaign, the British, Lawrence complained, have slaughtered some ten thousand. Nation-building, supposedly "for the benefit of the world" as well as the Arabs, Lawrence implied, was a cruel falsehood.¹⁰ Honor cultures change so slowly in the Near East that Lawrence's perceptions so long ago come back to haunt us.

Lawrence formed a successful Bedouin alliance by winning the loyalty of these honor-immersed warriors. Robert Graves remarked that the Arabs, in Lawrence's experience, saw "the world as a hard pattern of black and white (of luxury or poverty, saintliness or sin, honour or disgrace)."¹¹ The key elements in gaining trust, Lawrence proposed, were to show sincere respect, follow custom, and to defer to the local sheiks as often as it was appropriate. It was their country, their mistakes and successes to make, he reasoned. Above all, he advised, show no arrogant commitment to alien ideologies. Moreover, it was always best to let the Arabs act autonomously, even if westerners could do it better.

Nonetheless, Lawrence was skeptical that Iraq could ever become "an autonomous state." That notion was "unnecessary" and hopeless to try, he wrote General Headquarters in Cairo in 1915.¹² With regard to Baghdad, he confided to Charlotte Shaw in 1927 that his friend and ally King Feisel was doing his best. "I don't think," however, his government in Iraq "yet walks very well. Nor can any hand save it from making its messes: there is a point where coddling becomes wicked. All my experience of the Arabs was of the ex god-father role, and that can only do so much. The Iraqis can only create a modern state by virtue of their own desire and excellence."¹³ No matter how solid the plans of the occupiers might be "victory will rest with the insurgents."¹⁴

All "men dream," Lawrence writes in Seven Pillars. Those who dream in daylight and not at night, though, "are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes"--and with disastrous, bloody results.¹⁵ By contrast, in Iraq, Jay Garner and, still worse, Paul Bremer, the successive Coalition Provisional Authorities, smugly issued orders to impose their free-enterprise schemes and American ways of doing things. Bremer placed Bush campaign cronies in power rather than find Farsi and Arab-speaking professionals. The CPA functionaries seldom

consulted local leaders. They hired an insufficient number of translators, and luxuriously barricaded themselves in the so-called Emerald City, the Green Zone, Baghdad.¹⁶ Lawrence would have recoiled in dismay to watch this debacle unfold. Among the few to see the ignorance of the U. S. Military hierarchy, George S. Gawrych, who serves at the General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, argues, “In the spectrum of twenty-first century conflict, from conventional to unconventional warfare and peacekeeping operations, Lawrence offers a military theory that effectively addresses the nature of guerilla warfare.”¹⁷

Following the tactics of Belisarius, the Byzantine general, whose career he knew well, Lawrence practiced and refined the tactics best suited to an irregular force. Again in contrast to military leaders nowadays, Lawrence had long studied and criticized the works of the great military theorists--Maurice Comte de Saxe, Reveries, or, the Art of War, G. F. R. Henderson, Stonewall Jackson, Count Helmuth von Moltke, The Franco-German War of 1870-71; Carl von Clausewitz, On War, among many others.¹⁸ Lawrence’s shrewdest maxim was this: know your enemy and know your allies thoroughly. One can only hope that military planners at the Pentagon have taken that message to heart, belated though it may be. “Thanks to this war,” Lawrence wrote his brother Arnold, “I know an incredible lot about the Near East.”¹⁹

Away from the western front, he could see how both the Allies and the Germans in the First World War had tragically adopted all the wrong lessons about modern warfare and allowed the Great War to be fought incompetently. “The men were often gallant fighters,” he remarked bitterly, “but their generals as often gave away in stupidity what they had gained in ignorance.”²⁰ In contrast to the frontal assaults on the Western Front, he employed small groups who bluffed the enemy and moved swiftly, using light machine guns. Rejecting von Clausewitz with his doctrine of assaults en masse, he had concluded that his Bedouins were not culturally prepared to

serve in disciplined, large-scale armies. It was a fact of life that the coalition forces in Iraq lately come to recognize. The unhappy consequences of Prime Minister Maliki's recent en masse assault at Basra might not have surprised Lawrence. "Irregulars," the Arabist explained, "would not attack [fixed] positions." He argued that they could not be easily trained to the discipline of organized units, as in western armies. They fought best under their own tribal leaders since primary loyalty was--and is--tied to kinship and tribal allegiances. The eighteenth-century Marshall Comte de Saxe impressed Lawrence in particular. De Saxe stressed troop mobility, precise intelligence, surprise, and strict conservation of manpower. Lawrence successfully shunned outright battles. Given their few and scattered numbers, Bedouins could never welcome battles that led to high casualties. "Our tactics were tip and run, not pushes, but strokes," the expert theorist taught.²¹ Thus, Lawrence concentrated on raids against magazines, depots, and trains. Insurgents have done the same in Iraq, blowing up gasoline stations, storehouses, and truck convoys, an effective irregular warfare technique.

Though needing 600,000 troops to cover the Ottoman territories--some 140,000 square miles or more--the Turks had only 100,000. Against Lawrence's inspired Arab revolt, the Turkish army simply lacked the manpower needed to subdue the seemingly limitless span from Sinai to Damascus or Aleppo to the north. Lawrence's nomadic tribesmen, like the Viet Cong, for instance, were used to deprivation. He explained, "We had nothing material to lose, so we were to defend nothing and to shoot nothing." Being volunteers, the tribesmen could come and go as they pleased. Yet, Lawrence added, "Our only contract was honour." That desert ethic held the unit together but not as in a regular army. In modern armed services, Lawrence explained, "The aim is to render the unit a unit, and the man a type, in order that their effort shall be calculable, their collective output even in grain and in bulk." Countless blood feuds taught

the Bedouins how to conduct their kind of war. It was a style which westerners could never fully grasp.²²

As a result of Lawrence's diversionary tactics, the regular British troops were freed by this move to head north and east from Egypt into Palestine and Syria. The Englishman, Feisal, and the Bedouins attacked the Hejaz railroad and other sites in the desert. During the campaign, Feisal suggested that Lawrence wear the Arab outfit he had given him. The garment was made of white silk embroidered with gold, a conspicuous contrast to the brown and indigo-dyed apparel of the Bedouins. Lawrence wrote, however, that he had first adopted Arab dress on the archeological dig at Carchemish before the war.²³ The robes strengthened his bonds with his Bedouin troops and lent him considerable prestige in that status-conscious society. More important, it strengthened his bonds with the Arab people. But it certainly made him an odd figure--wearing flowing white Sherifian robes, crimson head-ropes, a golden dagger at the waist--but clean-shaven when all the Arabs were bearded. His almost teenage love of flamboyant overdressing was part of his magnetic performance as if on stage. He even spoke of how he exploited the Bedouins with his fakery. Someone like himself, he wrote, "may imitate them so well that they spuriously imitate him back again. Then he is giving away his own environment: pretending to theirs." It was, he remarked, a conscious deception, "hollow, worthless."²⁴ But it paid off handsomely for the war effort. The scattered but valuable Middle Eastern engagements, in which Lawrence, Feisal, and their Bedouins took part, ended in stunning victories with relatively little loss of British lives.²⁵

Lawrence as Model Hero or Mythmaking Fraud

The ups and downs of Lawrence's reputation illustrate how both his own words and those of others can become entangled in diverse interpretations. Politics, class, gender, and moral

complexities all figure in these complications. Few heroes and autobiographers have had their credentials for integrity so savagely tarnished in the public mind as those of T. E. Lawrence. He was, it is alleged, not the man, not the hero, nor even the writer he thought himself to be.

Lawrence's mercurial temperament, sexual confusion, and suicidal inclinations made him an easy prey for the poet and novelist Richard Aldington, his bitter and yet influential detractor. In doing so, however, Aldington revealed on almost every page his own deep-seated prejudices and rage against the English social order. Aldington claimed he originally intended to extol Lawrence's life but reacted in indignation when he discovered all the alleged lies and misconduct.²⁶

As a symbol of manhood, honor, and imperial determination, Lawrence's career and personality was bound to lose its appeal, particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War.²⁷ Richard Aldington's malicious critique of Lawrence's life helped the modern world to abandon the notion of heroism so that it became an empty and even demeaning concept. A further sign of honor's decline appears in movie director David Lean's Lawrence of Arabia (1962). It is a profound cinematic rendering with one of the best assemblies of actors ever to be presented on the screen. Yet, Lawrence of Arabia is not entirely true to Lawrence's life and character. (What historical film ever is?) In any event, the film's anti-war message aided a growing popular and intellectual skepticism that wars could be necessary and inspirational.

During the first years after the First World War, however, Lawrence had few military rivals for public adulation. Certainly not General Haig or Marshall Foch. In this period, Lowell Thomas, an American reporter for the Chicago Evening Journal, made a hero larger than life out of the celebrated but diminutive British veteran. Without the enormous effort of Lowell Thomas's exaggerations of his exploits, Lawrence might have never become a transatlantic semi-

divine figure. Over a million English theatergoers watched in wonder Thomas's extravaganzas of lecture and film at Covent Garden, Royal Albert Hall, and Queen's Hall with royalty in attendance.²⁸ By his tours throughout the United States, Thomas also created an American celebrity as well. But his extravaganza at Covent Garden was a highlight.²⁹ As one of the earliest developers of the documentary film, he inspired the English nation with rekindled faith in the Empire by his representation of a Lawrence larger than life. Indeed, by the time the Turks surrendered on 30 October 1918, Great Britain was the chief power in the Middle East. Audiences rejoiced in a grand spectacle and celebration of Anglo-Saxon heroism.

One remembers that in the 1920s Americans, most especially, were intrigued with the Bedouin mystique, especially on the silent screen. The Sheik, the immensely successful 1921 movie, featured Rudolph Valentino, then the foremost matinee idol. The public was clearly starved for examples of old-fashioned heroism. Both British and Americans had all witnessed films and photographs of the "long drab pageant of the First World War," as an English paper put it.³⁰ At the same time, Lawrence's war memoir, Seven Pillars of Wisdom (1926), was published in part to furnish a more credible history of his role in the Near Eastern campaigns than the one that Thomas and newspaper articles had fabricated.³¹

Vexed to near madness by Thomas's super-hero fantasy, Lawrence found himself pursued by the journalistic paparazzi of the day. He wondered if he had not become another man's possession at the expense of his own identity. "Have I deserved a Lowell Thomas?" he bitterly wrote his friend, the English novelist E. M. Forster. Lawrence pointed out that Thomas had spent no more than three days in his company, had never accompanied him on desert campaigns, and only read reports of such operations later. In fact, Lawrence wrote indignantly to Forster, that Thomas was guilty of "red-hot lying." To another correspondent he complained,

“The Arab war was not nearly as silly as he makes out: and I was not in charge of it, or even very prominent. Only I was in fancy dress, & so made a good ‘star’ for his film.”³²

Not every Englishman, particularly those who served with Lawrence in the Middle East, however, was smitten by his valor and perspicacity. For instance, a Major R. M. S. Barton accused his onetime colleague in Egypt of being “an exhibitionist of the first water.” He and others complained that British gold, which Lawrence had much to distribute, was the chief reason the so-called “Prince of Mecca” won so great a following among the Arabs. It was “disgraceful” for Lawrence to glamorize “Arab garb” instead “of turning out in the King’s uniform.” Six years in the Near East convinced Barton that the Muslim “was a treacherous cut throat, a robber of the dead after desert battle, a mutilator and murderer of the wounded whom he robbed as well, hanger-on the flanks of armies in open desert battle with a wary eye in which way the cat was going to jump.” After running into Lawrence at Jiddah in 1917, Colonel Cyril Wilson reported to Cairo, “I look on him as a bumptious young ass who spoils his undoubted knowledge of Syrian Arabs &c. by making himself out to be the only authority on war, engineering, H. M.’s ships and everything else.” Everyone from generals and admirals “down to the most junior fellow” thought the same of him.³³

The most formidable and most public attack against Lawrence, however, came years later. Long proposed to the seeming needlessness of war, Richard Aldington spent years preparing after the Second World War. The author of T. E. Lawrence, A Biographical Enquiry was himself a Great War veteran, gassed on the Western Front.³⁴ Unlike the subject of his wrath, Aldington had no aristocratic lineage. No graduate of Oxford or Cambridge, he did not finish his studies at University College, Teddington. The problem was the sudden failure of his middle-class lawyer father’s finances. De-classed, so to speak, Aldington came to despise the English

establishment especially after the useless slaughter in the trenches. Nevertheless, he was proud to be one of General Sir Douglas Haig's "scourged." In 1919, he wrote Death of a Hero, a popular anti-war novel. It roundly censured the English upper classes, which he held accountable for the disastrous war.

To summarize his case, three major issues stood out. As one of Lawrence's advocates summed it up as "(a) his illegitimacy; (b) suggestions that he was a homosexual pervert; (c) [the assertion that] he was a habitual and boastful liar."³⁵ Aldington claimed that Lawrence was affected from an early age by the family secret, about which T. E. only learned in 1919 when his father had died. That fact alone, Aldington contended, explained Lawrence's "abortive career and tortuous character."³⁶ Robert Graves, Lawrence's best friend and first biographer, called the notion sheer nonsense. Graves wrote that Lawrence had told him, "My mother was shocked" that he and his brother Arnold "weren't shocked at her news and that we took it so lightly."³⁷ Lawrence had not, however, wished the information to be made public. In fact, when Graves was preparing his biography of Lawrence, his friend wrote him, "There are certain things about my family, which must not be said. Not that I care, but other people had such odd views about marriage."³⁸ Mrs. Lawrence, a very devout evangelical Anglican, considered herself in a state of sin. She and her husband were not actually married because he already had a wife in Ireland. Victorian as she was, the old lady feared disgrace and exile from good society, even though by the 1950s few would give it a moment's thought. Indeed, Aldington may have scored a point on this issue. Beneath the surface of a "happy childhood," the boys had early recognized what Arnold Lawrence, T.E.'s younger brother, called "a spirit of sin, unnaturalness. Hush hush was great. It perplexed the children, leading to doubts and ultimately to a lack of confidence." Arnold thought his brother had been "injured by his mother."³⁹

As for the question of his homosexuality, the evidence, as it so often is in such cases, very problematic about how far he went in pursuit of satisfaction. Lawrence was more tolerant of homosexuals than most of his contemporaries⁴⁰

When reviewing Lawrence's sexual inhibitions, Graves had in mind, one must suspect, Lawrence's trauma when Turks had seized him at Deraa in 1918. It undoubtedly affected his sexual nature--if that is, if it happened at all. Contemporaries and historians offer different opinions on the misfortune: skepticism; outright denial that it took place; and sympathetic acceptance of his word. Lawrence himself presented differing accounts, understandably so, since it was matter of deep humiliation. "I went in to Dera'a in disguise to spy out the defences, was caught, and identified by Hajim Bey the Governor. . .Hajim was an ardent pederast and took a fancy to me." The Governor "tried to have me. I was unwilling, and prevailed after some difficulty."⁴¹

Suleiman Mousa, an Arab historian, argues that Lawrence could never have undergone the experience at all. The Arab writer insists that he recovered much too quickly for it to be true. Besides, Hajim Bey, Mousa contends, was no pederast. However, Raphael Patai points out that both Arabs and Turks considered the homosexual act "as an assertion of one's aggressive masculine superiority while the acceptance of the role of the passive homosexual is considered extremely degrading and shameful because it casts the man or youth into a submissive, feminine role."⁴² That cultural attitude would have made Lawrence feel even more brutalized and humiliated than if solely western standards were applied. Along with Aldington, Lawrence biographers A.N. Wilson, Lawrence James, Desmond Stewart, James Barr, and Adrian Greaves all have found reasons to doubt Lawrence's word about the rape.⁴³ None of their rationales is convincing. How often it is that female victims are slow to recount the experience. Rare it is for

a man, even one with masochistic tendencies, to confess such an experience.⁴⁴

The response to male rape, as prison researchers conclude, takes many forms: denial, anger, confessed guilt, repulsion, depression, and a lost sexual identity or confusion. At one time or another, Lawrence exhibited each of these characteristics.⁴⁵ But Aldington took the easy and conventional path of utter condemnation and ridicule about the episode and its psychological consequences.⁴⁶

Likewise, in the R. A. F., years later, Lawrence fell for an Apollo-like blond airman, R. A. M. Guy. "People aren't friends till they have said all they can say," he wrote Guy. "We never got to that, but we were nearer it daily. . .and since S.A. died I haven't experienced any risk of that happening."⁴⁷ Robert Graves learned from Lawrence that he had never much wanted sex. "1-3/4 minutes" of pleasure, as he described it, was simply not worth the trouble. Even the thought gave him "a dirty feeling."⁴⁸ Some of his friends commented that Lawrence hated to be touched in any intimate or even casual way. Lawrence's sense of guilt was so powerful that he took pleasure, not in delivering pain but receiving it. John Bruce, a Scottish Tank Corps chum, reported years later that Lawrence had him birch him severely some nine times. Lawrence mentions in the Oxford 1922 text of Seven Pillars that the flailing he had received at Dera'a had "resulted in a longing for a repetition of the experience." He continued, "It could not have been my defilement for no one ever held the body in less honour than I did myself." Instead it was "the breaking of the spirit by the frenzied nerve-shattering pain which had degraded me to beast level." The incident "had journeyed with me since, a fascination and morbid desire, lascivious and vicious perhaps but like the striving of a moth toward its flame."⁴⁹ To confess to sexual deviancy is quite singular at a time--the 1920s--when reticence about every sort of private feeling was still the convention. Depression, post-traumatic consequences of that rape, and sexual

disarray were probably responsible for this emotional aberration. Nonetheless, his openness rather resembled the penitential flagellations of an ascetic monk about which this student of gothic history well knew. Immersed as he was in the lore of the Middle Ages, Lawrence, as agnostic as his mother was pious, found in such a practice a form of spiritual cleansing. But it also signified the end of a literary Victorianism. This new and modern spirit contradicted the Stoic code of honor that Lawrence continued throughout his life to espouse. Lawrence, writes one historian, made “an anachronistic attempt at an honorable integrity of life that is doomed to failure in the postmedieval world.”⁵⁰

Finally, Aldington accused Lawrence of gross prevarications and outrageous overstatements.⁵¹ More seriously he mocked the very nature of Lawrence’s tactics in fighting a guerilla war. He claimed that the blowing up of trains (Lawrence had destroyed 79 of them) and munitions bunkers was among “the more inglorious forms of modern warfare.” It was particularly true, he sarcastically reasoned, for someone like Lawrence who was steeped in “the high principles of ‘manuals of chivalry.’”⁵²

Aldington’s misunderstanding of guerilla warfare is breathtakingly obtuse. Instead, Lawrence had wisely argued that “to make war upon rebellion [as the Turks had to do] is messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife.”⁵³ Lawrence knew that military victories were not enough, that diplomacy and a reaching out to the general populace were essential. Jeffrey Record, a U. S. professor of military strategy, argues, “Approaching war as an apolitical enterprise encourages fatal inattention to the challenges of converting military wins into political ones.” Lawrence made that point clear long before Americans applauded “Mission Accomplished” with the fall of Saddam Hussein.⁵⁴

Another charges was Lawrence’s claim to have been offered high positions in Egypt and later in

India, thanks to his great admirer Winston Churchill. The truth or falsehood of Aldington's opinion exercised Liddell Hart and many others who knew Lawrence and gave evidence that such allurements had been given Lawrence.

By this time, Aldington had begun to feel the weight of the entire British establishment descend on him. Liddell Hart organized a campaign to disgrace the biographer well before the book had reached the public. At first, the "Lawrence Bureau," as Aldington derisively called his opposition, sought to have his "Biographical Enquiry" totally suppressed. Arnold Lawrence very much wished the book never to appear, but despite his importuning, William A. R. Collins offered only sympathy but declared, "I don't think you understand what a terribly difficult position I am placed in."⁵⁵

Aldington reacted explosively to the assaults on his character and credibility. He complained that Lawrence's "fanatical admirers" had sought through friends to have the directors at Collins cancel the book. "I was betrayed," he stormed. But, still worse, the New York publishers "were even more endowed with the spirit of self-preservation than the British" and proved to be "moral cowards."⁵⁶ He was further distressed when he learned that Churchill, on 10 Downing Street stationery, had urged Collins to withdraw the book. The Prime Minister, Aldington surmised, wished to imply that the Empire's security would be compromised unless it were scuttled.

What incensed the "Lawrence Bureau" was not just Lawrence's diminishment but what they called the ungentlemanly nature of Aldington's disrespect for his mother. "The only thing I care in the least about. . .to the point of. . .physical violence," wrote Graves from Majorca, "is the business about Mrs Lawrence whom I know, loved, and admired, and who will be once more reminded of her sin--which was not a sin in my eyes, nor in those of Arnie or T. E., but was a

mortal sin in her own, which is what matters.”⁵⁷ Indeed, Lady Nancy Astor got the impression at one point that even the publisher had agreed not to produce the book until Mrs. Lawrence had died.⁵⁸

Aldington’s exposure of Lawrence’s sexual life was also a matter of great concern. Liddell Hart and others pointed out that previous biographers were aware of Lawrence’s peculiarities but forbore to mention them out of a sense of decency. Sarcastically, Aldington mocked such fastidiousness. He boasted to have “the toughness of a hippo’s hide.” He warned a friend, “Beware of offending the International Order of Pederasts!” In 1961, he wrote how pleased he had been to have exposed before Lawrence’s friends “their favourite (and most mendacious) pansy hero.”⁵⁹ Another factor in the establishment’s reaction to Aldington’s attack was his denigration of Lawrence’s military acumen and impact. There was hope for a time that a royal commission could investigate the facts and restore Lawrence’s credibility about affairs in the Middle East.⁶⁰ Actually, when the Foreign Office files at Kew Gardens were finally opened in the 1990s, they generally verified Lawrence’s desert narrative.⁶¹

Nonetheless, Aldington exulted that his pro-Lawrence opponents had failed to prevent publication. As he put it, they “were driven to plot the most dishonourable press campaign of the decade, in which one man had to face fifty screaming journalists!”⁶² Indeed, he was not exaggerating. The Lawrence collection at the Harry Ransom Humanities Archives in Austin, Texas, shows that months before the book was disseminated, Liddell Hart wrote to nearly every major English newspaper and magazine to counter the upcoming charges. He also apprised those who might be asked in future to review the book that they should expect scurrility and sensation on every page.

Despite all their efforts, however, the “Lawrence Bureau” was only partially successful in

damaging Aldington's credibility. Lowell Thomas, meantime, was busy controlling damage in America. In a new 1962 edition of his 1924 book, With Lawrence in Arabia, he recalled that he had compared Lawrence to "Achilles, Siegfried, and El Cid" as another legendary hero. He was unrepentant about his own journalistic distortions of Lawrence's adventures and denounced Aldington for accusing him of "fanciful yarns."⁶³ Thomas cited major British officials in the Middle East who remembered and admired Lawrence: Storrs, Major General G. L. Verney, Colonel S. F. Newcombe, and others who had served with Lawrence in the Near East. Needless to say, he reported nothing from Lawrence's fellow officers in the Middle East who entertained a low regard for the hero.

So what was all the trouble about? We must remember that the decade of the nineteen-fifties was a time of rude awakening from imperial dreams. The country was no longer the power it had been. Heroes like Lawrence were in short supply. Lawrence himself had questioned the legitimacy of imperial rule and resigned from the Colonial Office.⁶⁴ Yet he had not publicly denounced imperial policies; he had turned his own sense of alienation inward in despair, not outward in rage. By the 1950s, the illusions that honor had so long exalted the glory of fighting, the nobility of self-sacrifice, and the comforting reward of long remembrance had long since vanished. Two world wars had made the concept seem obsolete. Even the word honor itself had lost its former distinctiveness in everyday life.

Soon the angry young poets like Ted Hughes and playwrights like John Osborne would challenge the old establishment that Liddell Hart, Storrs, Churchill, and the upper classes had so long dominated. Even the royal family was beginning to lose respect in the columns of the tabloids. Noel Annan, Provost of King's College, Cambridge, remembered that members of his generation were taught the ideals of the English gentleman--men dedicated to "an overpowering

sense of civic duty and diligence.” Their elders “were indignant when told that they exploited idealistic movements. . .or betrayed idealists such as E. D. Morel in the Belgian Congo or T. E. Lawrence of Arabia.” The leaders of the social order were a “cold-hearted” elite, Annan adds, but their regime between the wars was already “looking somewhat moth-eaten.”⁶⁵ Half-crazed with depression though he was, Aldington had touched a raw nerve. Liddell Hart and others recoiled from thinking that Britain no longer exercised dominion in the world as it had in their youth. Aldington had helped to strip illusion away.

What strikes one, however, is how Aldington and Lawrence shared some characteristics. Both had undergone appalling war experiences. So too had Graves and Liddell Hart, but Aldington and Lawrence both carried their alienation deep into their souls. Also, Lawrence as well as Aldington possessed extraordinary literary gifts. Neither one had ever made a secure living. Each of them felt isolated from the upper reaches of English society. In fierce rejoinder, Aldington, however, rebelled, shouted, and stamped his foot. Lawrence retreated into an oddly complex anonymity. In any event, something beyond the obvious explains Aldington’s malignance. Far below consciousness, Lawrence’s relentless critic may have seen something of himself in the subject of his biography. He shrank back in horror and fury. I can offer no evidence for that interpretation, but the rage he felt had to have some underlying motive, about which Aldington may not have been conscious.

Lean and Lawrence

The Lawrence that the public knows today owes less to the many biographies than to his representation on the screen. This Lawrence, who finally reached the masses, is perhaps no less intriguing in character than the one who died on his Brough Superior in 1935. There had been many attempts to recreate the drama of his life, beginning on the 1920s, with Lawrence

appalled at the very thought. Herbert Wilcox, Rex Ingram (The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse), Anatole de Grunwald, Alexander Korda, J. Arthur Rank, and Leslie Howard all took up the challenge without ultimate success. Yet, especially just after Lawrence's death, such a film would be sure to win a huge audience. Working-class Britons went to the cinema at least once a week. Most of them veterans of the Great War, they would have welcomed a film drama of England's most renowned hero in their lifetime. John Buchan, a well known writer then seated in the House of Commons, had gushed, "Whether we are interested in the film or not we cannot deny its enormous public importance." Such a "powerful engine of propaganda" would excite every class of patriotic citizens and inspire the next schoolboy generations across the nation.⁶⁶ After buying the rights from Korda, Sam Spiegel and David Lean enthusiastically took up the challenge. The undertaking would be most formidable because of the hostile environment of sand and heat that they would have to encounter, but the partners saw great possibilities. Lawrence's distant cousin, Peter O'Toole, won the leading role.⁶⁷ But he was not their first choice; instead Marlon Brando and then Albert Finney were offered the part. Finney had lasted only four days on the set. Neither of them relished months of work in the desert sun, and Brando was still occupied with a remaking of Mutiny on the Bounty.⁶⁸ After Brando rejected the part, David Lean then, on the advice of his friend Katherine Hepburn, picked the almost unknown O'Toole, a West End theater actor with only one low budget film entitled The Day They Robbed the Bank of England to his credit. O'Toole later declared Lean to be "the most important influence" in his life. The director gave him, he confessed, "discipline"--sorely needed given his alcoholic tendencies--and "tolerance."⁶⁹

The Columbia Pictures' box-office hit is as sweeping in scale and as compelling in theme as David O. Selznick's "Gone with the Wind." Lean and Spiegel had just won laurels for their

Bridge over the River Kwai and went on to garner seven Oscars with Lawrence of Arabia, although O'Toole was inexplicably passed over for "best actor."⁷⁰ The cast included Jose Ferrer as the pederast at Deraa, Alec Guinness as Lawrence's ally the Emir Feisal. In Rattigan's Ross, Guinness had played Lawrence. The climax of the play was a re-enactment of the rape incident at Deraa. The actor leaves the stage, crippled mentally and physically in the way that Lawrence in real life might have felt. Omar Sharif playing Sherif Ali, Lawrence's sidekick, Anthony Quinn as the Bedouin gold-loving Auda abu Tayi, and Claude Rains as Mr. Dryden, a fictional composite, but probably suggesting the highly gifted Sir Ronald Storrs, Oriental Secretary of the Residency in Egypt.

While no more unfaithful to history than most costume dramas, the Lean-Spiegel film could not possibly render all the intricacies of Lawrence's life. Partially influenced by Aldington's venomous reading of Lawrence's past, Robert Bolt provided the final script. A most successful author, Bolt had composed the play A Man for All Seasons (1960) and the screenplay for Lean's Doctor Zhivago (1966). Director Lean and producer Spiegel were intent on creating a less than sentimentalized hero. In the film, he is a man of paradox--heroic and sadistic, self-promoting and self-effacing, arrogant and penitent. The director explained his reading of Lawrence's character: "It's the story of a man who enters a dream, the dream becomes a nightmare, and he wakes up and runs away from it all." Others think the dream a huge triumph--"except him. He's an idealist who comes unstuck and is terribly ashamed of the unsticking."⁷¹ Lean's hero is vaguely homosexual insofar as movie censors would permit, and yet, in defiance of the stereotypical gay, he emerges as a bold leader of great strength. The result was dramatic ambiguity, but that may not have been far from the truth. Oddly, Lean's Lawrence came closer to the reality than Lawrence's many biographers. As Christopher Isherwood put it, the hero

“suffered in his own person, the neurotic ills of an entire generation.”⁷² Working with Lean, Bolt caught something of Lawrence’s spirit—perhaps despite his own feelings. He was far less smitten than Lean with the complicated other-worldliness of the Arab fighter. He once referred to Lawrence as “a romantic Fascist.”⁷³

Michael Wilson, screen-writer for the Bridge over the River Kwai and Oscar winner for A Place in the Sun (1951) had prepared the original Lawrence script. To a curious degree, he relied for a number of scenes on the prior work of John Monk Saunders, who had prepared the script that Korda had hoped to use. Lean thought the result was “awful.” Nonetheless, these parts of the film appear in the Lean-Spiegel final take, most especially the arresting scene when the mysterious stranger, Sherif Ali, encounters Lawrence at the well and a laconic dialogue ensues between them. Other moments are also clearly the work of Saunders.

The HUAC committee had placed Wilson on the Hollywood black list. Yet, he managed to write under pseudonyms for a time. His screenplay stressed the tribal rivalries and political tensions between the various parties--the English hierarchy, the Bedouins, and others. Unhappy with Wilson’s reading, Lean took little interest in politics and sought a psychological angle instead. Bolt, who replaced Wilson, provided it. The latter received no credit even though many scenes were his and not Bolt’s.⁷⁴

Son of a Midlands shopkeeper, Robert Bolt, like Aldington, was not to the manor born. He, too, warred against conventional assumptions and Cold War capitalism. Bolt was once arrested for protesting nuclear proliferation.⁷⁵ It is no wonder that Lean and Spiegel’s Lawrence depicted the horror, venality, and ugliness, not the romance of war. Their Lawrence is a troubled sadist with successive scenes to illustrate the hero’s half-disguised joy in giving pain or delivering death to others. True, Lawrence himself confessed to masochistic feelings: “pain, was

a solvent, a cathartic, almost a decoration to be fairly worn.”⁷⁶ But he was referring to self-inflicted agony, not a deliciousness in harming others.

Nonetheless, O’Toole’s role comes close to some important aspects of Lawrence’s life. This is valid even though the actor was almost a foot taller than Lawrence and no natural blonde. We see Lawrence not just as a flawed and confused hero and as a demi-god on the order of the Greeks’ vision of Parnassus. But what sort of godlike figure is he? On the one hand, Lean has Lawrence with difficulty mount his camel in the blinding, oppressive heat of the desert. The scene suggests the sight of a wilderness anchorite or prophet receiving spiritual wisdom out of the barren, wind-swept surroundings. In the desert the psalmist Moses addresses God: “You turn men back to dust, saying, “Return to dust, O children of the earth.”⁷⁷ Lean may have had that idea in mind.

Yet, there are other scenes in which the issue of a questionable masculinity arises. In one of them, General Murray, who dislikes Lawrence, declares “You’re the kind of creature I cannot stand.” He sends him off to find the Arab leader Feisal, a dangerous task that leads Murray to mutter, “Who knows—might even make a man of him.” Thus, O’Toole’s Lawrence travels an arc from a fey aesthete playing at war into a superhuman warrior, and then, particularly after the scene at Deraa with Jose Ferrer playing the commandant, he gradually becomes, less of a white robed deity whom primitive Arabs worship. He is, after all, a man of ordinary stature, simply a member of the human race. After Ali, (Omar Sharif) spills flowers at his feet, and calling him a conqueror deserving “flowers for the man.” He replies, “I’m none of these things, Ali.”⁷⁸ His weaknesses as a man become his strength as a different and more authentic man.

Lean creates in the desert a character almost human in nature. When traversing Lawrence’s battles and train ambushes in the Arabian desert, Lean declared that he understood

how prophets emerged from such surroundings. “When you are there,” he said, “you feel terribly small and, in a strange way, also very big . Because this vastness. . .it’s a sort of pitilessness combined with enormous beauty.”⁷⁹ A vast space of sky and sand, bleak and dry as bones, complements O’Toole’s Lawrence in his affectless melancholy and yet magnetic wildness of spirit. This double representation of the hero as both human and half-godlike finally rakes him down to earth in his complexity and joyous killing. As Lawrence himself confessed to Graves, “I have two selves,” both of which, he added, were “mutually destructive.” “So I fall,” Lawrence grieved, “between them into the nihilism which cannot find, in being, even a false god in which to believe.”⁸⁰

Graves substantiated that self-assessment when he wrote Liddell Hart that “T. E. was an intuitive, affectionate, Galahad-like man of action who came a frightful crash before his War was over, and is to be judged therefore as a broken hero who tried to appear whole and make the best of it.”⁸¹ Yet, there was also truth in Liddell Hart’s praise of his “sense of personal honour,” which “was allied to a care for his country’s honour.”⁸² On the screen or in his actual history, we cannot identify with Lawrence. We can only take his sad, human measure and compare it to our own. As if Aldington’s earlier assault were not enough, Robert Bolt’s screenplay excited the anger of the Lawrence Bureau, especially T. E.’s brother Arnold. He wrote Sam Spiegel that the original treatment which Arnold had approved, had been scratched in the final script. Lawrence’s brother wrote, “as his literary executor, I have objections so strong that I may eventually feel obliged to consider whether to make them public.” He legally refused to permit Spiegel to title the movie as Seven Pillars of Wisdom.⁸³

Learning of Arnold’s distress from the producer, Robert Bolt wrote him before the film was distributed, “it is simply not in me to deploy twelve months of nervous effort and concern

about a figure to which my attitude was anything but of the deepest interest and respect.”⁸⁴ The reply could be read positively or negatively. Such was Bolt’s attitude itself. In a New York Times Magazine article in 1962, Bolt never alluded to Aldington’s biography. He followed, though, Aldington’s line both in content and theme. “Take a man born a bastard and unable to speak of it. Let him be clever, imaginative, and vain, and given to cruelty.” Then, Bolt continued, “endow him with courage, physical toughness and above all a capacity for stoic suffering.” In addition, “place him in the landscape and among the people where this minor virtue is so highly regarded that nothing else much matters. Give him gold to distribute.”⁸⁵

Are courage, physical toughness, and stoic endurance of pain merely minor virtues? Does honor in war mean so little? For Bolt, in his well known antipathy to war, clearly wished to send the same message that Aldington did. Like Aldington, Bolt suffered acutely from poor health and depression. While making a subsequent film with David Lean about the mutiny on The Bounty in Tahiti, he broke up with his wife, the actress Sarah Miles. He drank, smoked, and wrenched to the point of a later heart attack and stroke.⁸⁶

Arnold Lawrence issued his own reaction to the film in the New York Times. He claimed--with justice--that contrary to the film’s presentation, T. E. by no means killed out of delight.⁸⁷ A massacre of Turks had certainly taken place at Tafas, and T. E. never denied it. The situation, however, suggests no calculation but impulsive, uncontrollable revenge. About 2000 Turkish soldiers had just slain nearly forty women and twenty small children in the Bedouin village belonging to the same tribe as Lawrence’s men. Other British soldiers there defended Lawrence who had taken no pleasure in the violence, ghastly thought it was when all the prisoners were gunned down. The account of F. G. Peake, who visited Tafas not long after the incident, would seem to exonerate Lawrence from gleeful malevolence. He reported that the

Arabs were out of control over the slaughter surrounding them. They were determined to inflict vengeance against the Turkish perpetrators. Lawrence coolly observed that one had to see the atrocities of the Turks before condemning the Bedouins' reaction. "As for the villagers, he wrote, "they and their ancestors have been for five hundred years ground down by the tyranny of these Turks."⁸⁸ Later on, Lawrence himself explained, "'We do these things in sheer vapidness of mind, not deliberately, not consciously even. To make out that we were reasoned cool minds, ruling our courses and contemporaries is a vanity. Things happen, and we do our best to keep in the saddle."⁸⁹ He was not glorifying or even excusing such atrocities but simply stating what all too often occurs under the stress of war.

Further evidence of Lawrence's basic humanity comes from George S. Hynes. He was in the Royal Flying Corps, one of eight servicemen to have Lawrence as their superior officer. Hynes recalled how Lawrence had once been obliged to shoot a defenseless Bedouin. The Bedouin had murdered "an Ageli tribesman." Fulfilling the law of desert honor fell on Lawrence's shoulders. Having an outside authority to perform the act was the only way to prevent further blood feuding. Hynes declared that Lawrence performed the duty only reluctantly. It was the "most horrible ordeal he had to endure--and I believe Lawrence was very deeply agonized throughout his life by the incident." The veteran added, Lawrence was "a man who could not injure another" without due cause in war or peace. The killing solidified the sense of trust and confidence of the "nomadic tribes towards a perfect stranger--an 'infidel.'" Likewise, Hynes speculated that he had probably crashed his motorcycle in 1935 to avoid fatally injuring two school boys on their bicycles.⁹⁰

Bolt and Lean, though, portray a different Lawrence. Spiegel replied to Arnold Lawrence's protests by pointing out to the American press that the adoring brother sought "to

preserve the Lawrence of Arabia legend in Victorian cleanliness.” No one was more adept than T. E., he added, in “planting false footprints,” a reaction that indicates Aldington and Bolt’s influence.⁹¹ Spiegel then elaborated on things not too prominent in the film itself. He attributed Lawrence’s unrequited homosexuality to “all sorts of masochism” out of his conflicts and sense of guilt. Arnold had to admit defeat. He wrote his colleague Liddell Hart that further challenge to the film would be hopeless. Yet, Lawrence’s brother was not the only critic of the film. Lowell Thomas was portrayed as the bumptious journalist Jackson Bentley, well played by Arthur Kennedy. The fictional reporter, camera always in hand, trails after his hero. The depiction deeply offended Thomas. Out of prudence, however, he chiefly criticized the film’s distortion of the figure, General Lord Edmund Allenby, played skillfully by Jack Hawkins as a cynical manipulator.⁹²

For all the misrepresentations in the film, one must be aware that fiction and history are seldom compatible. The dramatic as opposed to the historical point of view has its legitimate claims. Bolt’s decision to create a flawed, wholly alienated, half-mad hero made for an arresting portrait. In this case, as Lawrence had often said about his own Seven Pillars, the film was more artful fiction than objective history.

One might wonder to know what T. E. Lawrence himself would have felt about the lengthy disputes about who he was, from his death to the making of Hollywood film. Melancholic, sensitive, and intellectual though he was, he would have had every reason to feel abused and humiliated. But doubts arise. Instead, this remarkable character, with all his faults and wild contradictions, would have laughed at the uproar and followed all its twists and turns with considerable pleasure. It was entirely fitting that his fame in our times should be represented not by Lawrence himself but by an actor in a film. After all, Lawrence himself

prided himself on his roleplaying in Arabia. His shade must be gratified that the actor, who took his part, is well over six feet tall, a height that Lawrence so much envied and wished he had achieved.

What is most astonishing is that Lawrence was one of the most heroic of men. His devotion to an obscure life in the armed services undercut his further literary aspirations after the anguished writing of The Mint. Yet, when he did successfully bring honor, history, and creative art together, as he did in Seven Pillars of Wisdom, he achieved a grandness of spirit and a prophetic wisdom that speaks to our day from scores of years ago. We seldom encounter such whole-souled greatness and prophetic vision that transcends pain and doubt, particularly in these clouded times.

Endnotes

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1. He was part of an impressive community of writers that included, Thomas Hardy, George Bernard Shaw, Siegfried Sassoon, E. M. Forster, and Robert Graves. Lawrence and his friends found inspiration in their mutual association.
 2. Patai also notes, "The smallest chink can threaten to loosen all the loops and rings." Raphael Patai, The Arab Mind (New York: Scribner's, 1973), 146.
 3. John E. Mack, A Prince of Our Disorder: A Life of T. E. Lawrence (1976; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 88.
 4. Michael R. Gordon, "Military Hones A New Strategy on Insurgency," New York Times, 5 October 2006 A1, A19.
 5. "With his Princeton Ph.D. in international relations, Petraeus is the closest thing the Army has to its own Lawrence of Arabia, a comparison he does little to discourage, as he seems to identify with the British colonel's experiences in the region during the First World War and the enduring wisdom of his advice to those military officers caught in similarly trying circumstances (Lawrence's legendary book, Seven Pillars of Wisdom), which Petraeus appears to know by heart." Noah Shachtman, "Our New Man in Iraq (Updated Again)" <http://www.noahshachtman.com/archives/003130.html>; George W. Gawrych, "T. E. Lawrence and the Art of War in the Twenty-First Century," in Charles M. Stang, ed., The Waking Dream of T. E. Lawrence: Essays on His Life, Literature, and Legacy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 161.
 6. Barbara Slavin, "Crocker: the 'Lawrence of Arabia,'" USA Today 10 September 2007, http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-09-09-crocker_N.htm: "Crocker has made some headway since assuming the role of U.S. ambassador to Iraq in March, says Feisal Istrabadi, an Iraqi-American who recently served as Iraq's deputy ambassador to the United Nations. Istrabadi credits Crocker's knowledge of Iraqi culture and politics with helping to turn Sunni tribal leaders against al-Qaeda in Anbar and Diyala provinces." See also Mike Burleson, "Bush Finds a General," in 15 January 2007, Opinioneditorials.com, http://www.opinioneditorials.com/guestcontributors/mburleson_20070115.html. "Of all America's top leadership, Petraeus understand the new warfare in Iraq. Strategist Thomas Barnett (the Pentagon's New Map) in a March Esquire article revealed the general's respect for legendary British guerilla fighter T.E. Lawrence. According to Barnett, Petraeus believes 'Lawrence had it right. By this he means: it is their war, and you are to help them, not win it for them.'"

7. T. E. Lawrence, Secret Dispatches from Arabia (126-33), 142-47; and in Mack, Prince of Our Disorder, 463-67; also in Basil Henry Liddell Hart, T. E. Lawrence in Arabia and After (London: Jonathon Cape, 1934), 142-47.
8. Slavin, "Crocker:" "Some former colleagues call Ryan Crocker 'our T.E. Lawrence.' Like the famed British diplomat who lived among Arab tribesman in the early 20th century, Crocker, 58, is an accomplished Arabist accustomed to hardship — a fluent speaker of the language who has served in six Arab countries and survived war and civil strife in several of them." See "Plagiarism Watch: General Petraeus's Counterinsurgency Field Manual Edition," Rox Populi 31 October 2007: "Other sections of the Manual have unacknowledged borrowings from other sources. The anthropologist Roberto González found that the Manual's Appendix A was 'inspired by T.E. Lawrence, who in 1917 published the piece 'Twenty-seven articles' for Arab Bulletin, the intelligence journal of Great Britain's Cairo-based Arab Bureau.' González compared several passages of Lawrence with Kilcullen's Appendix A, and found parallel constructions where paragraphs were reworded but followed set formations between the two texts. González observed that while these parallel constructions can be seen, 'Lawrence is never mentioned in the appendix.' González shows that Kilcullen's other written work makes a passing reference, but does not acknowledge the degree to which Lawrence's ideas and style have been influential."
9. T. E. Lawrence, "III. Mesopotamia: The Truth about the Campaign, 22 August 1920," in Malcom Brown, ed., T. E. Lawrence in War and Peace (London: Greenhill Books and Stackpole Books, 2005), 245.
10. Yet, as both Lawrence and the New York Times columnist John Tierney would agree, Iraqi men "would rather have honor than peace." Brown, ed., Lawrence in War and Peace, 246; John Tierney, "Another Man's Honor," New York Times, July 25, 2006. Tierney relies on James Bowman, Honor: A History (New York: Encounter Books, 2006).
11. Robert Graves, "Introduction to 'Lawrence and the Arabs,' with T. E. L.'s comments," p. 7, BMS 1252-367, Kilgour Collection, Houghton Library.
12. T. E. Lawrence (as member of General Staff, Intelligence) to Foreign, Simla, General Headquarters, Cairo, 8 November 1915, copy, bms 1252, 372, Kilgour Collection, Houghton.
13. Lawrence to Charlotte Shaw, 18 October 1927, in Brown, ed., Selected Letters, 349. He added that one day the Iraqis would no longer want a king, "but whether 7 or 70 years or 700 years hence, God knows."
14. Lawrence, "The Evolution of Revolt," in Brown, ed., T. E. Lawrence in War and Peace, 273.
15. T[homas] E[ward] Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph (1926, 1935; New York: Random House, 1991), 24.
16. See Tom E. Ricks, Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq (New York: 2006); Rajiv Chandrasekaran, Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone (New York: 2006); Michael Isikoff and David Corn, Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War (New York: 2006).
17. Gawrych is quoted in Brown, ed., T. E. Lawrence in War and Peace, 50.
18. G. F. R. Henderson, Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War With an Introduction by Field-Marshal the late Right Hon. Viscount Wolseley and a Preface by Gen. Walter Bedell Smith 2 vols. (1898; New York: D., McKay, 1968); Maurice Count de Saxe, Reveries, or, Memoirs Concerning the Art of War (Edinburgh: Sands, Donaldson, Murray, and Cochran, 1759); Carl von Clausewitz, On War (1832; New York: Penguin, 1968); Count Helmuth von Moltke, The Franco-German War of 1870-71 trans. Clara Bell and Henry W. Fischer (New York: H. Fertig, 1988).
19. T. E. Lawrence to ?, 1 July 1916, in The Home Letters of T. E. Lawrence and His Brothers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 328.
20. Lawrence, Seven Pillars, 395.
21. T. E. Lawrence, "The Evolution of a Revolt," in Malcolm Brown, ed., T. E. Lawrence in War and Peace: An Anthology of

the Military Writings of Lawrence of Arabia (London: Lionel Leventhal, 2005), 269.

22. Lawrence, "Evolution of a Revolt," in Brown, ed., Lawrence in War and Peace, 271.

23. T. E. Lawrence to His Biographers Robert Graves and Liddell Hart (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1938), II, 85; James Barr, Setting the Desert on Fire: T. E. Lawrence and Britain's Secret War in Arabia, 1916-18 (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 80.

24. See T. E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph (1926; New York: Dell, 1967), 30.

25. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom, 126 (quotation), *passim*.

26.. Fred D. Crawford, "Richard Aldington's Biography of Lawrence of Arabia," in Charles Doyle, ed., Richard Aldington: Reappraisals (Victoria, Canada: University of Victoria, 1990), 66-67.

27. The military ethic of honor has fallen so drastically since the Great War 1914-1918, in which over nine million young servicemen—chiefly French, German, Russian, and English were killed. Besides the horrors of mass battlefield slaughters, there came the postwar disillusionments over the cynical handling of the territorial spoils at the Versailles peace table.

28. Philip Knightley, "Introduction," in Lowell Thomas: With Lawrence in Arabia (1924; London: Prion Books, 2002), x.

29. Lawrence was small, but he was very tough; he once rode a camel for a hundred miles, three days in succession. Thomas had a Welsh Guards band warm up the audience, followed by orientally costumed girls who performed the Dance of the Seven Veils. After a lyric tenor had provided a musically westernized version of the Islamic call to prayer, Thomas himself stepped on the stage. Meanwhile, the audience breathed in the aroma of incense arising from braziers strategically placed around the theater. Thomas then opened his account with the words, "Come with me to lands of mystery, history and romance." Phyllis Knightley, "Introduction," in Lowell Thomas, With Lawrence in Arabia (1924; South Wales: Creative Print, 2002), ix. Thomas ends his "romance," which greatly appalled Lawrence's sensibilities, by writing, "In habit, instinct, and mental outlook Europe is utterly at variance with Asia, and it is rarely, perhaps once in hundreds of years, that there comes forward some brilliant Anglo-Saxon, Celt, or Latin, who, possessing an understanding that transcends race, religion, and tradition, can adopt the Eastern temperament at will. Such men were Marco Polo, the Venetian, and General Charles Gordon. Such a man is Thomas Edward Lawrence, the modern Arabian knight" (p. 265).

30. Thomas, "Foreword," in ibid., xiv.

31. The original edition of Seven Pillars in a run of only 200 copies, which appeared in a run of 200 handsome, well designed, came out in late 1926. Today these first editions can sell for over \$100,000.

32. Lawrence to Ralph Isham, 22 November 1927 in David Garnett, ed., The Letters of T. E. Lawrence (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1939), 545. Similar statements are made by Lawrence in letters to Sir A. J. Murray, 1 October 1920, Kilgour Collection, BMS 1252, Houghton Library, Harvard University; and to Fareedah El Akle, 3 January 1921, in Malcolm Brown, ed., T. E. Lawrence: The Selected Letters (New York: Norton, 1989), 183; Lawrence to Forster, 17 June 1925, in Brown, ed., Selected Letters, 283.

33. Wilson quoted in A. N. Wilson, After the Victorians: The Decline of Britain in the World (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), 142. Indeed, Lawrence's arrogance was a source of considerable irritation for many who knew him in the Middle East. For instance, he indulged himself in a wrongheaded monologue to the dismay of Aaron Aaronsohn, a Palestinian Jewish agronomist. The subject was wild desert wheat, Aaronsohn's specialty. "As I was listening to him" expound in ignorance on Galilean wild wheat, "I could almost imagine that I was attending a conference by a scientific anti-Semitic Prussian speaking English." Ronald Florence, Lawrence and Aaronsohn: T. E. Lawrence, Aaron Aaronsohn, and the Seeds of the Arab-Israeli Conflict ((New York: Viking, 2007), 307.

34. In 1913 Aldington had married Hilda Doolittle, a once famous American poet of the Imagist school, to which Aldington himself belonged. Their marriage broke up in 1915 not long after their only baby was delivered stillborn. The couple eventually

divorced in 1938, a decision that seemed to improve their relationship. Fred C. Crawford, Richard Aldington and Lawrence of Arabia: A Cautionary Tale (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 6.

35. S. F. Newcombe to Liddell Hart, 28 June 1954," Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center.

36. Aldington wrote sarcastically, "'Call me Ishmael!'—the opening words of the Moby Dick he took as one of his literary idols--suited him quite as much as Melville." Richard Aldington, T. E. Lawrence: A Biographical Enquiry (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955), 23.

37. Robert Graves to Liddell Hart, c. March 1954, Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center.

38. Lawrence to Graves, 9 June 1927, fms Eng 1252 (368), Kilgour Collection, Houghton.

39. Arnold Lawrence to Jim Ede, 1937, quoted in Michael Asher, Lawrence: The Uncrowned King of Arabia (Woodstock, N. Y.: Overlook Press, 1993), 30; Arnold Lawrence to Charlotte Shaw, 30 May 1928, British Museum Add MSS 35904, as quoted in Mack, Prince of Our Disorder, 33.

40. He was probably smiling when he read E. M. Forster's note: "Women are everywhere. . . I struggle not to dislike them." Both Lawrence and Forster had troubled relationships with their overpowering mothers, a similarity that drew these sons together. Even Robert Graves, who defended Lawrence against all comers, remarked, "'A brilliant mind, noble principles, but suffering from intense erotic fancies as a result of impotence incurred by a violent shock.' These erotic fancies. . . it seems infiltrated into the Seven Pillars and Mint and are what clouded his style." Graves continued in a letter to his friend, the military historian, Captain Basil H. Liddell Hart. "(Entirely between you & me I thought it rather sick for Aldington to say that E. M. Forster has once been shocked by some of T. E.'s (homosexual?) Associates. T. E. loved 'suffering' but he would never have gone for a fraternal hike in Spain with a young policeman as E. M. Forster has just done!). Lawrence to Forster, 8 September 1927, in Malcolm Brown, ed., T. E. Lawrence: The Selected Letters (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 147; see also, Asher, Lawrence, 26, 233; Graves to Liddell Hart, 10 February 1955, Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center. Lawrence refused to read Forster's Maurice, his homosexual novel, written in 1913-14. He told the author that he feared he would not like it. "I'm so funnily made up, sexually," Lawrence admitted.

41. T. E. Lawrence to Deputy Chief Political Officer, Cairo, 28 June 1919, in Malcolm Brown, ed., T. E. Lawrence: The Selected Letters (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 165-66.

42. Suleiman Mousa, T. E. Lawrence: An Arab View (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 116-18, Patai, Arab Mind, 143-44.

43. Following Aldington's example, the biographer Lawrence James in The Golden Warrior asserts that the rape story was sheer fabrication. He cites a British Artillery unit's service diary, compiled six months later, to prove his point. In an authorized biography, however, Jeremy Wilson shot that misinterpretation down with far more convincing evidence. It seems that Lawrence actually went missing the very week of his capture in Deraa, November 1917--much to the worry of his superiors. Jeremy Wilson, Lawrence of Arabia (1989; New York: Macmillan 1992), 411-14. A.N. Wilson contends that Lawrence was a fraud of the first order, a man who could only achieve orgasm when "as an aircraftman under an assumed name--John Hume Ross--he got men to cane him." Wilson, After the Victorians, 145. Likewise, Desmond Stewart insists on the mythical quality of Lawrence's rendition in Seven Pillars, which, he writes, was the climax of the book though largely untrue. As recently as 2007, Adrian Greaves found it "distinctly puzzling that Lawrence didn't mention his . . . ill-treatment until long after the event." Desmond Stewart, T. E. Lawrence (New York: Harper Row, 1977), 240-44; Andrew Greaves, Lawrence of Arabia: Mirage of a Desert War (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007), 146. On that basis, he denies Lawrence's veracity. Likewise, in 2008, James Barr has also rejected the authenticity of the incident. Barr, Setting the Desert on Fire, 203-06. Following Richard Aldington's example, the biographer Lawrence James in The Golden Warrior asserts that the rape story was sheer fabrication. Lawrence James, The Golden Warrior: The Life and Legend of Lawrence of Arabia (New York: Marlowe, 1994). He cites a British Artillery unit's service diary, compiled six months later, to prove his point. In an authorized biography, however, Jeremy Wilson shot that misinterpretation down with far more persuasive evidence. See Jeremy Wilson, Lawrence of Arabia (1989; New York: Macmillan 1992), 411-14.

44. In contrast to skeptics like these, a letter to Charlotte Shaw provides a most persuasive account. In it, Lawrence indicates that Hajim Bey did rape him with devastating emotional effects on his sexual psyche. He explains that he gave away because he

was in such agony from the beatings that he needed some moments of relative relief. Rather than treating the psychological injury sympathetically, Aldington claimed that it indicated Lawrence's pleasure in receiving pain. Others, too, have totally misconceived the incident. As recently as 2007, Adrian Greaves found it "distinctly puzzling that Lawrence didn't mention his . . . ill-treatment until long after the event."

45. On Islamic and Arabic attitudes about homosexuality, see Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature (New York: New York University Press, 1997). To take the role of the female in the sexual act when an adult is the height of shame and humiliation, the situation in which Lawrence was forced to undergo. See also my paper, "The Humiliation of Male Rape: The Case of T. E. Lawrence," presented at the Human Dignity and Humiliation Conference, Columbia University, 10 December 2008. For work on male rape, see Arthur Kaufman, "Male Rape Victims: Noninstitutionalized Assault," American Journal of Psychiatry 137 (February 1980):221-223; Michael Scarce, Male on Male Rape: The Hidden Toll of Stigma and Shame (New York: Plenum, 1997); Sandesh Sivakumaran, "Male/Male Rape and the 'Taint' of Homosexuality," Human Rights Quarterly 27 (No. 4, 2005):1274-1306; Ann Burgess and Larry Holmstrom, "Rape Trauma Syndrome," American Journal of Psychiatry 131 (1974):981-987. Following Richard Aldington's example, the biographer Lawrence James in The Golden Warrior asserts that the rape story was sheer fabrication. Lawrence James, The Golden Warrior: The Life and Legend of Lawrence of Arabia (New York: Marlowe, 1994). He cites a British Artillery unit's service diary, compiled six months later, to prove his point. In an authorized biography, however, Jeremy Wilson shot that misinterpretation down with far more convincing evidence. See Jeremy Wilson, Lawrence of Arabia (1989; New York: Macmillan 1992), 411-14.

46. The legend of a relationship between Lawrence was totally false; they actually never met. Anthony Nutting, another Lawrence biographer, claims that the initials "'S. A.'" were nothing more than an imaginary conception, unrelated to a particular person or place." Nutting also disbelieved the validity of the Derra torture and rape. Anthony Nutting, Lawrence of Arabia: The Man and the Motive (New York: Bramhall House, 1961), 113-15, 241. But "S. A." was really Sheikh Ahmed. Dahoum, as he was called, was a good-looking fourteen-year-old camel driver. In 1911, Lawrence found him among the native workers at an archeological site in Syria. Tribesmen were concerned about the nature of the relationship, but it is doubtful that Lawrence ever touched him inappropriately. See Stewart, Lawrence, 104-18, 125, 178, 209-10, , 251-53. Lawrence, a fine photographer, did have Dahoum pose in the nude before the camera. The boy and another Arab youth accompanied Lawrence back to Britain in 1913, where Lawrence's mother found the youngster a delight. When in 1918 Dahoum died of typhus behind Turkish lines, Lawrence was thrown into the deepest kind of grief. The dedicatory poem, "To S. A." opens the Seven Pillars. The first lines declare, "I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands/ and wrote my will across the sky in stars." He had undertaken his mission, he wrote in the poetic epigraph, "To earn your Freedom.." "To S. A.," Seven Pillars of Wisdom; Stang, "The Many Ways of T. E. Lawrence," in Stang, ed., The Waking Dream of T. E. Lawrence, 4-6; Philip Knightley and Colin Simpson, The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 237. Readers of Seven Pillars will readily apprehend Lawrence's tendency to grandiosity but also his very human side.

47. Michael Asher, Lawrence: The Uncrowned King of Arabia (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1998), 366.

48. Lawrence to Graves, 5 November 1928, Kilgour Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

49. Mack, A Prince of Disorder, 428. Lawrence quoted in Nutting, Lawrence of Arabia, 244. See also Lawrence to Charlotte Shaw, 19 August 1924 in Brown, ed., Selected Letters, 270.

50. M. D. Allen, The Medievalism of Lawrence of Arabia (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 119; It is most unlikely that Lawrence ever translated the erotic fantasies that Graves mentioned into any gratifying indulgence. He was too puritanical and careful of his reputation for that, even though explicitly homoerotic passages appear in Seven Pillars and The Mint, his account of his R.A. F. years. Alec Dixon, another of Lawrence's Tank-Corps mates, was very skeptical that Lawrence was a practicing gay. Aldington's book, he fumed, "was a problem for psychiatrists, rather than for historians." Instead, what Dixon noted was Lawrence's astonishing impact on his fellow soldiers. Whenever he appeared, they even stopped swearing. The men suppressed the usual mean-spirited "backchat when in his presence," he recalled. "Never," Dixon insisted, "was there a hint of sexual impropriety in the barracks."

51. He disparaged his early archeological efforts. Aldington wrote a friend in 1953 that "the lazy little bastard (literally) never troubled to write any paper on Carchemish," the Hittite dig that Lawrence's Oxford tutor, D. C. Hogarth had organized in 1910. Richard Aldington to Alan Bird, 4 February 1953, in Norman T. Gates, Richard Aldington: An Autobiography in

Letters (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1992), 58-59

52. Surely Sir Gawain would not have found glory in “upsetting an enemy market-cart in a ditch and leaving the wreck of humanity and goods to the tender mercies of the local villeins,” Aldington sneered. Richard Aldington, Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Enquiry (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955), 200.
53. Lawrence, “Evolution of a Revolt,” Brown, ed., Lawrence in War and Peace, 265.
54. Jeffrey Record, “Why Americans Keep Losing ‘Small Wars,’” Baltimore Sun, 15 October 2006, 23A.
55. William A. R. Collins to Liddell Hart, 25 June 1954, Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center.
56. Richard Aldington “Set of Proofs,” fms Eng 1252 (358), Kilgour Collection, Houghton.
57. Graves to Liddell Hart, 25 April 1954, , Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center.
58. Liddell Hart to Kennington, 17 September 1954, Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center.
59. Richard Aldington to Harry T. Moore, 23 October 1959, and John Gawsworth, 11 March 1961, in Alister Kershaw and Frédéric-Jacques Temple, Richard Aldington: An Intimate Portrait (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 34 and 88.
60. T. S. Denham to Liddell Hart, 21 February 1955, Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center.
61. T. E. Lawrence, Secret Dispatches from Arabia (126-33), 142-47; and in Mack, Prince of Our Disorder, 463-67; also in Basil Henry Liddell Hart, T. E. Lawrence in Arabia and After (London: Jonathon Cape, 1934), 142-47.
62. Richard Aldington, “Definitive [Biographical] Draft of T. E. Lawrence,” fms Eng 1252, Kilgour Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
63. Thomas, “Foreword,” in Thomas, With Lawrence in Arabia, xiii, xvii.
64. T. E. Lawrence to Sir John Shuckburgh, 4 July 1922, in Gilbert, ed., Churchill, Companion Volume 4:1925-26; Lawrence to M. R. Lawrence, 15 February 1922, 4:1775-76.
65. Noel Annan, Our Age: Portrait of a Generation (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1990), 19, 35.
66. Buchan quoted in Goldstone, Aaronsohn’s Maps, 272.
67. Perhaps more important with regard to Lawrence’s blemished reputation is a classic film that reader will most likely have seen and, as a result, had fixed in permanent memory the idea of who Lawrence was. Producer Sam Spiegel and director David Lean presented “Lawrence of Arabia” in 1962. But Lean was not the first to put Lawrence on the screen. Alexander Korda had approached Lawrence and then, after his death, the Lawrence Trustees about a film of his Arabian exploits. They had agreed to permit it chiefly to avoid a Hollywood distortion for commercial purposes. Had the effort materialized, though, Korda would have promoted a most heroic Lawrence. He had vainly planned to enlist Lawrence Olivier for the chief part. After buying the frustrated Korda’s rights, Lean had something quite different in mind.
68. The film was also at locations in Morocco (with the aid of the Moroccan army), Spain, Jordan, Wales, and at Shepperton Studios, Surrey, England. See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056172/locations>. Michael A. Anderegg writes that Lean, not Spiegel, had first chosen Brando for the role. See Michael A. Anderegg, David Lean (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 105.

But actually Spiegel was no less interested in Brando's selection than Lean was.

69. Sandra Lean and Barry Chattington, David Lean: An Intimate Portrait (New York: Universe Publishing, 2001), 71.
70. Murray Schumach, "'Lawrence of Arabia' Wins Top-Film Oscar," New York Times, 9 April 1963, p. 75.
71. Lean quoted in Zinsser, "In Search of Lawrence," 104.
72. Isherwood in Samuel Hynes, ed., The Auden Generation (New York: Viking, 1977), 191.
73. Michael A. Anderegg, David Lean (Boston, Mass.: Twayne, 1984), 108-16; Alain Silver and James Ursini, David Lean and His Films (1974; Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1992), 154. See Hodson, Lawrence of Arabia, 110-18.
74. Hodson, Lawrence of Arabia and American Culture, 110-15.
75. Silverman, David Lean, 131.
76. Lawrence quoted in Nutting, Lawrence of Arabia, 242.
77. Psalm 90:3. See Richard Nysse, "The Dark Side of God: Considerations for Preaching and Teaching," in Word & World, 17 (Fall 1997):437-46.
78. I borrow from the insights of Anderegg, David Lean, 108-11.
79. Silverman, David Lean, 132.
80. Graves, "Introduction to 'Lawrence and the Arabs,' with T. E. L.'s comments," p. 7, BMS 1252-367, Lawrence MSS, Houghton Library. In this case, T.E.L.'s note on the text is quoted.
81. Graves to Liddell Hart, 29 June 1954, , Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center.
82. Liddell Hart, Lawrence, 328.
83. Arnold Lawrence to Liddell Hart, 11 October 1962, Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center. A. W. Lawrence had sold Spiegel the rights largely because Terrence Rattigan had produced a script that the director Herbert Wilcox bought, one in which Lawrence's homosexuality was featured. See Hodson, Lawrence of Arabia, 109.
84. Arnold Lawrence to Sam Spiegel, 1 August 1962, Robert Bolt to Arnold Lawrence, 5 September 1962, Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center. See also Sam Spiegel to Arnold Lawrence, 22 August 1962, *ibid.*
85. Robert Bolt, "Clues to the Legend of Lawrence," New York Times Magazine, 25 February 1962), 16, 48, 50.
86. See Lean and Chattington, David Lean, 28-29.
87. "Brother Rejects Lawrence Film: Professor Says Movie Gives False View of the Man," New York Times, 5 January 1963, western edition., p. 7.
88. Ruth R. Brown to The New York Times Magazine with reference to Robert Bolt's article of 25 February 1962, a copy, Lawrence Papers, Ransom Center. Lawrence, Seven Pillars, 633; Mack, Prince of Our Disorder, 237; Lawrence, "Secret Dispatches from Arabia," 22 October 1918, in Brown, ed., Lawrence in War and Peace, 172.

89. Lawrence quoted in Wilson, Lawrence of Arabia, 383.

90. George S. Hynes, "Synopsis of T. E. Lawrence," 10 September 1961, pp. 1, 2, and 5, bms 1252, 368, Kilgour Collection, Houghton.

91. Murray Schumach, "'Lawrence of Arabia' Producer Defends Film Story of Hero: Spiegel Charges Professor Wanted to Hide Facts about His Brother," New York Times, 26 January 1963, p. 5.

92. Hodson, Lawrence of Arabia, 58.