Heartbreak and Heroism: *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and Lawrence's Legacy in Arabia

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Abstract

While evaluating the deep impact of the First World War on the imagination of the modernist literature produced in the 1920s, critic Samuel Hynes was drawn to the abiding tension between the yearning for a Romantic semiotic structure for the conduct of the war and the grim realities of modern warfare and imperialism in Thomas Edward Lawrence's seminal Great War memoir *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, originally published in 1922. For Hynes, Lawrence's writing embodied one of the key conflicts within the experience of the Great War that would go on to play a seminal role in the shaping of the modernist imagination; the desire for a counter to the deracination produced by the organization of industrial society in the modern West and the imperatives of realpolitik. This article will analyze this most influential specimen of war literature from 1922 as a point of departure to both re-evaluate the continuing fraught legacies of the Great War in the Middle-East, whilst also attempting to deconstruct the tension within Lawrence's narrative of finding a means of return to a more authentic, affective and communal culture he felt he encountered in Arabia against the larger imperialist project of the British Empire. In this conflict of the legacies of modern civilization in the backdrop of a thoroughly horrific yet unfailingly modern world war, this article will aim to re-evaluate and relocate the legacies of the Great War in literary imagination while also locating Lawrence's memoir as a key entry point into conflicts shaping the modernist imagination, and of its continuing effects on geopolitics a century later.

Keywords: T.E. Lawrence, War Literature, Modernism, Postcolonialism, Great War

On 1st October 1918, the Arab Northern Army victoriously marched into Damascus signalling the final collapse of the erstwhile Ottoman Empire. It was the culmination of a three-year long campaign by Arab rebels and the British troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) which brought nearly five centuries of Ottoman rule in the region to an end. Accompanying the riotously celebrating Arabs that evening in Damascus was a British officer, Captain Thomas Edward Lawrence, a close confidant of the leader of the Arab Revolt, Emir Feisal, and a key force behind the campaign since its beginning in the Hijaz. Yet, what should have been a triumphant moment for Lawrence found him deeply disillusioned as he recounted in his memoir of the war, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, “Anyone who had like me, pushed through to success a rebellion of the weak against their masters, must come out of it so stained that nothing in the world would make him clean again” (761). Lawrence’s remarkable memoir is a fascinating work in its deployment of narrative strategies that come to reflect one of the thrusts of British modernist imagination grappling with the legacy of the Great War. The movement in Lawrence’s narrative from an initial wellspring of idealism to a disillusionment borne of the traumas of war and confronting the grim realities of imperial geopolitics makes his work a potent site for analyzing how he deploys modernist literary tropes to comprehend his role in the war and his complicity in its aftermath. More crucially, perhaps, it can arguably allow us to re-evaluate the fraught legacies of these events on the region today. Following on Neil Faulkner’s assessment that Lawrence acts as a metaphor for the imperialist violence that tore the region apart and continues to divide it today, the postcolonial approach to Lawrence’s book is imperative to ground his work in the historical development of the memories and geopolitics of the region he did so much to transform.

The roots of the Arab Revolt and the larger Desert Campaign lies in the vulnerable position that the Ottoman state found itself in at the turn of the 20th century. The Ottoman Empire was facing the brunt of Western colonial ambitions while steadily losing control over its vast multi-ethnic population, increasingly exposed to new ideologies and vulnerable to disruptions caused by the Ottoman Empire’s fitful attempts to adapt to a European standard of industrialized modernity (Fromkin 46). In addition to crippling debt, Constantinople was beholden to the Western powers through the humiliation of the Capitulations, a series of treaties which effectively granted Westerners legal impunity even on Turkish soil (Fromkin 48). As the anti-colonial intellectual Jamal al-Din al-Afghani noted, the fundamental problem faced by the Ottoman state was the same which had bedeviled most of colonized Asia in the past; the dilemma of adapting to European industrial modernity without fragmenting their own distinct body politic (Mishra 57). By the outbreak of the First World War, this central tension in Turkish politics had resulted in the abdication of Sultan Abdelhamid II in 1909 and the coming to power of the ‘Young Turks’ of the Committee of Union and Progress (C.U.P) under the triumvirate of Enver, Talaat, and Djemal Pasha (Mishra 68). Yet, the move towards a more modern, centralizing state underpinned by an evolving ideology of ethnic Turkish nationalism became the flashpoint for rebellious actions against Constantinople by other ethnic groups and local potentates. One such potentate was the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein ibn Ali.

For the Hashemite clan, whose patriarch was Sharif Hussain, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima, the traditional order which bound them to the holy city of Mecca was the basis of their political power and privilege among the tribes of the Hijaz. The increasingly centralized authority of the modernizing Turkish state was not merely a political challenge, but the disruptions that were unleashed on the Hijaz by the forces of industrialization by the putative Turkish nation-state seemed to be an existential challenge. For instance, the Hijaz Railway (a key target of Lawrence's guerrilla war) effectively rendered the traditional desert caravan routes of the Hajj pilgrimage obsolete, thereby severely damaging the local Bedouin economy which was dependent on the yearly pilgrimage for patronage and economic sustenance. Innovations like the Hijaz Railway, "pinned Hussein's medieval domain to the modern world of an increasingly authoritarian Turkish ethno-state that threatened to dissolve the age-old social order" (Faulkner 260-66). The modernity pursued by the ambitious Young Turks could only be experienced as a profound disruption and displacement by the Arab tribal clans of the Peninsula. It was into this political maelstrom that Capt. T.E. Lawrence entered in 1916.

As an Oxford graduate, Lawrence spent his early career as an archaeologist at a Hittite dig site in Carchemish, Syria. He was an avid student of Arab culture and developed a keen insight into and an abiding admiration for Arab society (Faulkner 50). Yet for all that, Lawrence's perception of the Arabs was deeply coloured by an Orientalist gaze. Lawrence makes sweeping generalizations about Arabs as essentially being irrational yet romantic figures driven by the hypnotic power of prophets and with an intimate communion with revealed religion. The Bedouin to him echoed images of the 'noble savage' and their communal culture seemed to denote an ideal, romantic pre-modern civilizational ethic which he believed was influenced by the close yet harsh relationship these communities shared with nature in the form of their geographic destiny of existing in the inhospitable Arabian desert (Lawrence 40-42). While Lawrence did not share the crude and blatant racism of his superior officers like General Sir Ian Hamilton, who once infamously remarked that one British life was worth several dozen Turkish lives (qtd. in Faulkner 128), Lawrence was very much a product of the missionary zeal encoded in the idea of the 'white man's burden'. He claimed, "Arabs could be swung on an idea as on a cord; for the unpledged allegiance of their minds made them obedient servants" (Lawrence 118). As an intelligence officer working for the Arab Bureau in Cairo, under the command of the spymaster Brigadier-General Gilbert Clayton, Lawrence was eventually able to leverage his knowledge of Arab culture to accompany Ronald Storrs to Arabia.

Upon arriving in the Hijaz Lawrence met Emir Feisal at his camp near Yanbu and immediately projects the figure of a potential prophetic figure to lead the developing Arab Revolt onto Feisal (Lawrence 66). His first meeting with Feisal is a prelude to the imagined space that Lawrence was projecting onto the Arab landscape, people and cause, since as Faulkner wryly comments, part of the reason why Feisal was the perfect desert prince instead of his brothers Abdullah or Zaid was because he, "looked the part" (Faulkner 603). Lawrence is able to impress Feisal and insinuates himself in the Emir's inner circle and in time became the chief liaison officer between the British and the rebelling Sharifian forces and would himself become one of the key commanders and tactical innovators of the Arab Revolt (Faulkner 176-180). Yet, what colours the early half of his memoirs is Lawrence's subconscious juxtaposition of Arthurian romance onto the Arab campaign. In leading the revolt, Lawrence was essentially fulfilling his boyhood fantasy of a return to the imagined, romantic, Arthurian past which is what he projected initially onto his narrative of the revolt. The fissures in this narrative project inevitably stem from the conflict of failing to resolve, "Arabia as occupied territory of desire and Arabia as uncontainable Other" (Kaplan 74).

Lawrence begins his narrative journey at the precipice of launching into a romantic Arthurian epic and sustains this narrative structure through the early years of the guerrilla war up to the conquest of Aqaba. The essential features of the personalization of the conflict as if it were an exalted personal quest for Lawrence (which to his mind it indeed was) is somewhat sustained throughout the text although it is necessarily overshadowed not just by the growing traumas of the violence he faces (and perpetrates) but also due to the difficult reality of his being an agent of British imperialism regardless of his inspiring tactical flourishes at Aqaba. In this regard, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is quite unlike most other Great War literature stemming from the Western Front. Samuel Hynes commented on the work being an 'anachronism'. Instead of the Great War being the epitome of armed conflict as senseless destruction, "Lawrence's Arabs are like Homer's Greeks and Trojans" (Hynes 94). Lawrence brings his characters to life like they were living embodiments of the fabled Knights of the Round Table. Men like Auda abu Tayi, the Howeitat tribe's warlord chief may well have sprung out of a medieval tale of warrior princes and is described as such by Lawrence (350). Tallal el-Hariedhin, the Sheikh of Tafas, is another example and certainly no one else is imagined as the embodiment of the prophet-prince as much as Emir Feisal himself and it is often noted how subconsciously Lawrence projects onto himself the ambiguous roles of a Lancelot or Galahad (Kaplan 77). These men are not just presented as heroic figures at the outset, but Lawrence's narrative affords them something the writers of the trenches never could aspire to: a sense of individual agency.

Each action they commit is significant, their deaths are imbued with meaning. For instance, Tallal's memorable death is depicted as a last desperate ride out directly at the Ottoman Lancers. The camel charge is suicidal as Tallal wantonly charges head first into the face of the Turkish machine-guns, yet his seemingly irrational actions are imbued with the symbolic significance of high romance as he commits to this action as an act of sheer grief, and as vengeance for the massacre of his village of Tafas by the retreating Turks (Lawrence 623). Unlike the unknown soldier of the mud filled trenches of the Western Front, Tallal has claimed his agency by enacting his own death in the most symbolic of gestures possible. Tallal has been afforded a chance at a personalized experience of conflict in a way that allows him to achieve the martyrdom denied to the European conscript faced with the erasure of identity in his machine-like 'modern' army followed by anonymous destruction as a statistic on an alien anti-landscape of the trenches. In Lawrence's world, Tallal can aspire to be a martyr, whereas in his world Wilfred Owen can only aspire to be a casualty. War is imbued with personal meaning and in doing so Lawrence seemingly rescues the fantasized heroism of mythic war which died in the Western Front, by resurrecting its ideals among the Arab rebels of the desert.

Yet, the underlying bloodshed and trauma of conflict cannot escape Lawrence's sensitivities. In the aftermath of Tallal's death, Auda darkly proclaims, "We will take his price" (Lawrence 643). Indeed, in vengeance for the Ottoman atrocities at Tafas, on this one occasion Lawrence orders his men to massacre a retreating column of Turks and refuses to take prisoners. The other side of romance is captured in Lawrence's gory admission, "There lay upon us a madness, born of the horror of Tafas or of its story; so that we killed and killed, even blowing in the heads of the fallen and the animals, as though their death and running blood could slake the agony of our brains" (649).This captures an essential loss of innocence in Lawrence's psyche that is reflected in other specimens of post World War I writing. Sarah Cole notes, "The Arthurian model of romantic warrior hero is replaced by a violent, anti-social combatant, who takes pleasure in the very destructiveness that has created him" (488). Echoes of this sentiment may be found in the following lines penned by Siegfried Sassoon:

> But now I've said good-bye to Galahad,
> And am no more the knight of dreams and show:
> For lust and senseless hatred make me glad,
> And my killed friends are with me where I go. (77)

The vision of an epic Arthurian romance is clearly unsustainable as the traumas of the violence begin affecting Lawrence. Periodically in the text Lawrence is confronted by the brutality of warfare in its most vulgar and tragic forms and within his text he manages to capture the narrative tensions of what he wished the conduct of the war would be and what it really was, in a clear echo of Lawrence's own deteriorating mental health in the later stages of the campaign. He is shaken by the brutal exigencies of guerrilla warfare particularly at the death of Uthman his beloved servant (named Farraj in the text). Whilst retreating from a raid on a Turkish supply depot, Uthman is grievously wounded by a bullet penetrating his spine which leaves him paralyzed and in hideous pain. Unable to move him, to allow the rest of the party to escape from the pursuing Turks and to prevent Uthman from being captured alive, Lawrence carries out his mercy killing by his own hand. Lawrence is so shaken by the experience that in his retelling he essentially subverts the relation of the master and servant as it is the English officer who seems to be rendered morally helpless and in need of comfort from the dying Arab teenager who wishes God to be with Lawrence in a symbolic gesture of absolution (550-555). The traumas of the campaign combined with Lawrence's increasing disillusionment with the cause and his role in it forms the basis for approaching the deliberate structure of the narrative that Lawrence constructs. By the culmination of the campaign, he is broken down by constant Arab infighting and his ever-present guilt at British perfidy. It is in this context that the quintessentially modernist tropes of Lawrence's memoir may be delineated.

When commenting on the canonical understanding of repeating tropes within the body of work defined as 'British modernist literature', contentious though the term modernist may be, Sarah Cole identifies certain key trends to make the case for a received understanding of the impact of the war on the writer's consciousness and the narrative strategies developed to address those fissures of experience. Cole notes the dominant thematic presence of the figure of the alienated wanderer, the permeability of the individual psyche, narrative discontinuity, images of fragmentation and loss and the use of irony as being tropes used to highlight destabilizing experiences of confronting the traumas of war (472). Lawrence begins to subtly undercut his own idealized narrative by the use of irony as he gets increasingly entangled in the internecine conflicts of the Arab tribes. For all his valorising of Auda abu Tayi, Lawrence relishes in lending his sarcasm to the ironically extravagant displays of Auda's loyalty to Feisal and the Sharifian cause. On one occasion, Auda theatrically pulls out the dentures from his mouth and shatters them on a rock claiming that he was mistaken to 'eat his Lord's bread' using dentures originally made for him by a Turkish dentist (Lawrence 398). Even after the conquest of the vital Red Sea port of Aqaba, Lawrence admits to his growing maturity in the art of the complicated political exigencies which were a feature of the Arab political sphere when he admits to the wisdom of his usual 'knight's errant' Auda in continuing to maintain secret channels of communication with the Turks as a 'necessary avenue' (Lawrence 467).

Lawrence's narrative form to fit these contradictory experiences essentially turns into a discontinuous agglomeration of episodes where Lawrence as a narrator is seemingly able to flit from one discrete narrative space to another which Carola Kaplan argues, "breaks and deterritorializes the plot into an accretion of events" (92). She claims this is one of the key reasons for analysing the unstable space that Lawrence occupied amongst the Arabs as well his increasingly fraught relationships with the British. In the process of capturing these conflicting textualities of being within the context of the Revolt, Lawrence's work delves into what could be termed a quintessentially modernist narrative structure that Kaplan describes as, "an artistic assemblage, a melange of discontinuous, sometimes conflicting narratives, related in a pastiche of styles" (94). It is evident that the tone of Lawrence's ruminations varies greatly over the length of the text. One reason for this Kaplan surmises is the problem of Lawrence occupying a 'third space'. Lawrence exists on an unstable plane with regard to both the Arabs and the British. He escaped the strictures of the stultifying social mores of Edwardian England and in the deserts of Arabia found a space and a cause on which he could imprint his own fantasies (Kaplan 81-83). Yet, his role as an imperial agent is never far from the surface. The ambiguities that Lawrence encounters as an Orientalist deciphering a mysteriously unattainable 'Orient' is a greater reflection of Lawrence's own ambiguities. A maverick within the British Army who conspicuously repudiates the stifling *esprit de corps* of the imperial enterprise, his donning of the silk Arab robes and his wearing of the British uniform when in the presence of General Edmund Allenby's (Commander-in-Chief of the EEF) HQ is a signifier of Lawrence existing in both the spaces of the Arab and the British, and being able to seemingly slip away from both. On the one hand, one could read this as the privilege of the white man who is able to appropriate the dress and mores of another culture without losing the privileges of whiteness in a racialized world. However, I would argue that ambiguities and tensions remain in this dynamic.

Kaplan uses Stephen Greenblatt's concept of 'improvisation', wherein a role-player essentially appropriates the culture of another and uses their 'knowledge' as a site of power and performance to subvert their acquaintance for the achievement of their own ends (77). In this regard Lawrence was painfully aware of his role essentially as a play-actor and experienced an inner conflict in the very instability of the space he occupied. He considered himself a perpetrator of double deceit, being able to be neither fully honest with the Arabs (as he is well aware of Britain and France's imperialist designs on the Middle-East) nor is he able to fulfil his loyalty to Britain (for instance in his facilitating the surprise Arab assault and capture of Aqaba, which he knew the British had hoped to keep for themselves) in a way that could accommodate his fracturing conscience. The most telling aspect of Lawrence's liminal role in terms of the spaces he occupied would relate to his ambiguous perception of intimacy and sexuality during the course of his campaign. When Feisal gifts Lawrence his first silk Arab robes to wear it is to be noted that the robes given are wedding robes for a bridegroom given to Feisal by his Circassian great-aunt (Lawrence 136). Marjorie Garber comments on the interesting juxtaposition of Lawrence as Feisal's symbolic 'chosen' when he rides beside the Emir and his fearsome Ageyl bodyguard in the robes of a groom signifying a double identity of groom and warrior as she says, "Lawrence occupies the transvestite space of possibility, that rejects the binary sexual position either/or for the more appealing both/and" (qtd. in Kaplan 88). Lawrence can exist as both bridegroom and warrior, he is British and Arab and yet neither for his space yet again fractures and becomes slippery. While he may have appeared disturbingly alien in his Arab robes to his British superiors (as he documents he did), in his wearing a marriage costume as an Englishman riding with Arabs, he would also have appeared equally incomprehensible to the Arabs.

The ambiguity of Lawrence's position is further captured in the ambiguous depiction of sexuality in his accounts. While on the one hand, it is evident that some part of Lawrence's perception of the Arab homosocial bonding is coloured by his stereotypic expectations of a mythical 'sensuous' East, it is to be noted that Lawrence keenly observes the sexual practices and the interplay of intimacies as they are formulated around him in the exclusively male space of an active warzone. The spectrum of homoerotic bonds, such as those between his beloved servant boys Daud and Farraj, or Lawrence's understanding of the relationship shared between Sharif Ali ibn el-Hussein and his servant boy Turki, which he describes as, "the animal in each called to the other, and they wandered about inseparably" (qtd. in Kaplan 87), creates an alternate imagined space for the performance of masculine intimacy in a time of conflict, and for Lawrence, refreshingly, away from the glare of the overwhelming heteronormativity of contemporary England given his own non-conformist sexuality. Yet, it is a deeply traumatic sexual assault that seems to break Lawrence's psyche the most in terms of his understanding of the conflict that he had gotten involved in. On a reconnaissance mission to the Syrian town of Deraa, Lawrence is captured by Ottoman soldiers and subjected to torture and sexual assault. Lawrence is deeply disturbed by his own responses and the circumstances during the incident. He mentions that he felt a, 'delicious, probably sexual warmth swelling in me', as a defence mechanism to the violence he was subjected to.

While he is obviously traumatized by his experience in Deraa, a town he declaims as, "inhuman with vice and cruelty, where the citadel of my integrity was breached" (Lawrence 519), what jars Lawrence just as much, if not more, is why he was sexually targeted. He is taken by the Turks to be a suspected conscript attempting to desert and given his appearance is taken as a 'gift' to their commanding officer. The Turks never realized who they had really captured. Lawrence realizes, as he is told by his tormentors who are the ones who tend his wounds after they carry out their orders, that sexual exploitation was a given between the power hierarchies between officers and men (Lawrence 511). Lawrence is sickened by the fact that his unstable space had finally marked his very body (as he is not made out as either Arab or English, but as a Turk/Circassian accused of dereliction of duty). The overwhelming horror Lawrence faces is the breaking of his myth that through the insurgency and the mode of what he called 'irregular warfare' he had managed to attain a degree of individual autonomy for himself or his fighters. At the end of the day, his body was still marked physically by the atrocious power dynamics of the repressive state and in this he saw no distinction between the subjection of bodies to sexual or military servitude in the industrialized West, as he declaimed that upon being impressed into the army the individual is clothed in 'death's livery' (service uniforms) and that one way or another, every soldier, "had sold their wills and bodies to the state" (qtd. in Kaplan 90). It is perhaps not coincidence that Lawrence's atrocity of massacring surrendering Turks occurred in the vicinity of Deraa.

The critical reason why Lawrence was wrestling with his conscience regarding the insurgency was directly linked to the British imperialist designs on the former territories of the Ottoman Empire. By the time the Sharifian forces had captured Aqaba and Lawrence was leading the effort to cross the Wadi Sirhan into Syria he was already plagued by doubts about the endeavour and the aftermath of the ‘Arab’ victory. He considers himself a fraud who is fully cognizant of his naïve fantasies of Arab independence and glory on the battlefield in stark contrast to the secret machinations of the Western powers. Contrary to whatever assurances Sharif Hussein thought he received from the British via the McMahon Correspondence of 1915, by 1916, the British had concluded a secret treaty with the Russians and the French delineating the partitioning of the Middle-East into respective spheres of influence, enshrined in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, signed by Sir Mark Sykes and the French diplomat Georges Picot (Faulkner 250). Syria and Lebanon were to become French colonies while the British would gain control of Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), Transjordan (Jordan) and Palestine. The vision of a unified Arab state that the Hashemites envisioned (and that Lawrence fervently sold) was ultimately a figment of imagination.

But the tragedy of the riven politics of the Middle-East carried to this day is not merely of the Arab Revolt that did happen, but of all the possibilities that could not. “The Sharifian vision of Arab independence was ultimately a limited one. The aims were Arab independence under Hashemite rule…a Hashemite political elite was to replace an Ottoman colonial administration…the revolt, from beginning to end, was to be an artefact of British imperialism” (Faulkner 271-272). The Ottomans, through brutal police repression, by 1915 had destroyed the nascent liberal Arab nationalist movement which had started forming in Syria through organisations such as Al-Ahd and Al-Fatat (Faulkner 292). The chaos of the World War and the intervention of foreign powers (the British in the case of the Arabs and the Germans on the side of the Ottomans) essentially brutally precluded any possibility of a true grassroots revolution of the subjugated Arab peasant on the land (the suffering *fellahin*). This essentially left the bearers of Arab nationalism to be the most reactionary and conservative political forces in the region, whose conception of revolution precluded any possibility of true social change or even a meaningful decolonization. It was, to echo Neil Faulkner, fuelled by British guns, gold and to an extent the efforts of a man essentially trying to play out his own fantasy. Contextualizing the Arab Revolt in history is essential to understanding the geopolitical developments that continues to render the Middle-East a restive and tragically unstable region. The perfidiousness of the British lay the roots of long-standing conflicts such as the long-drawn agony of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the brutal dictatorial regimes that held sway through much of the Arab world, and in the final ironic culmination of the Arab’s ‘revolt’, it was the warlord of Riyadh, Abdul-Aziz ibn Saud, from the House of Saud, who would eventually seize power from the ineffectual Hashemites, once the latter had been abandoned by their British sponsors, to establish one of the most repressive and reactionary regimes today, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

It is revealing that the historian David Fromkin picks the year 1922 as his seminal year to understand the development of the geopolitical catastrophe that has metastasized into the modern Middle-East, as it was also the year that the Oxford unabridged edition of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* was first published (Fromkin 14). After the war Lawrence was turned into a discursive legend, as a national hero and the embodiment of the imperialist fever dream in the figure of ‘Lawrence of Arabia’, first by Lowell Thomas and eventually by the famous Hollywood cinematic adaption starring Peter O’Toole. Today Lawrence continues to be an evocative symbol who as a signifier leaves the gaps open to pierce through the hypocrisy of a West stridently declaiming Islamic fundamentalism while attempting to uncomfortably look away from their own colonial complicity in the region. In 2003, the Bush administration's Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz, after the Iraq invasion, was hailed as 'Wolfowitz of Arabia', while President George W. Bush was imaged in *The New York Times* wearing Lawrence's Arab headdress (Lynden). Clearly, the power of Lawrence as a vehicle of imperial aggrandisement is alive and kicking. In Arab nations today he is received with a greater degree of hostility as the Jordanian photographer Jaradat criticizes Lawrence's incarnation as the stereotypic white-saviour erasing the possibilities of Arab agency (Stanton). Thus, the heroism referred to in the title of this paper is an analysis of the way in which Lawrence gave a radically honest account of the impossibility of that hero figure to exist except as a mere play-actor in the modern nation-state. His account elucidates the mangled consciousness of a man who is at least brutally honest about his culpability in the shoddy aftermath of the 'peace' he left behind in Arabia and in stubborn resistance to popular reconstructions, refuses to sanitize the brutal reality of the European program in the region.

The tragedies that developed in the aftermath of the Ottoman collapse encompass the rise of chauvinistic Turkish nationalism and the violence of the Greco-Turkish War to the beginnings of the Palestine conflict and the British atrocities committed in Egypt and Iraq as London stubbornly held onto its imperial mandate for another few decades, leaving behind a litany of seeds for future conflicts (Faulkner 666-70). The true tragedy of the Arab Revolt probably lies not in what did happen but in contemplating what might have happened, and in so doing beginning the process for re-imagining the lost futures of Middle-Eastern modernity. Piercing through the Arthurian façade of Lawrence's imagination one cannot help but see the lost historical moment as the weak and vacillating Feisal waffled when a true Syrian revolution did indeed form to resist yet another in a long history of colonial aggressions by Europeans when the French under General Gourand forcibly landed to occupy Syria in 1919 and slaughtered the resisting poorly armed Syrians at the Battle of Maysalun (Faulkner 670). Feisal refused to aid the Syrians in their fight, since the Arab landlord class always feared their own marginalized more than the foreign oppressors and in being groomed into a client of the colonial powers, he was the true embodiment of all that the Arab Revolt really was, and more importantly, what it was not, and could not be due to the crossfire of imperialist ambitions. The explosive situation that continues to grip the region is more reason why a century on it behoves us to revisit not the mythical Lawrence *of* Arabia, but the ugly realities of Lawrence *in* Arabia.

Notes

[1] One of the books Lawrence carried with him throughout the campaign was in fact Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*

[2] The Ottoman Lancers had brutally slaughtered every man, woman and child they found in the village of Tafas. Lawrence was traumatized by the obscene public display of the corpse of a pregnant woman by the marauding Turks, but in doing so seems to forget the fact that he had also displayed the bodies of the Ottoman dead after blowing up a train at Hallat Ammar.

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