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Lawrence of Arabia, Now in Blu-ray, Rides Again

Or, A Film Buff's Confession of Divided Loyalties

by Gary Crowdus

Ever since the advent of Blu-ray discs in 2006, *Lawrence of Arabia* has ranked high on film buffs' lists of titles most desired in the state-of-the-art video format. Recognizing that the film is the "crown jewel" in the Columbia Pictures library, however, Sony Pictures decided not to simply cash in by releasing a hastily prepared Blu-ray edition. Instead, they chose to take their time, looking toward November 2012, as Grover Crisp, Sony Pictures Executive Vice President of Asset Management, Film Restoration, and Digital Mastering explained, in order "to return this film to as pristine a condition as possible to honor its [fiftieth] anniversary release."

By using digital technology not available more than twenty years ago, Sony executives knew they would be able to achieve a visual quality for this new home-video edition comparable to that seen in 1989 in the 70mm "director's-cut" version produced by archivist, producer, and restoration specialist Robert A. Harris in collaboration with the film's director, David Lean, and its editor, Anne Coates. That restored 65mm negative, a mix of original camera negative and dupe negative, was digitally scanned in 2010 at 8K (equivalent to the resolution of the film negative). That digital preservation master was then used to make a 4K version, which provided digital technicians with workable files in the highest standard. When Sony executives and technicians viewed the 4K images, Crisp explained, two things were readily apparent: "One was how sharp and detailed the images were and, two, how much damage and wear and tear was evident on the film."

Much of that damage was corrected in 1989 by making wet-gate prints (in which the restored negative was temporarily coated with liquid to eliminate scratches and abrasions on the film's base and emulsion surfaces). But the digital "restoration" was a far more laborious and time-consuming process. Over the next two years, Sony technicians went to work, digitally eliminating dirt, scratches, chemi-

cal stains, and other damage visible on the untreated, nearly fifty-year-old negative, gradually inserting newly restored material on a scene-by-scene and even a single-frame basis. The six-channel stereo soundtrack masters created for the film's 1989 restoration were further restored and remastered. The fading color of the Eastman stock on which the film had been photographed was fine-tuned by color-grading specialist Scott

restored 70mm director's cut screened in 1989). Although I still believe that *Lawrence* should be seen whenever possible on a big theater screen, I found that viewing this Blu-ray disc (in my case on a 46" plasma high-definition monitor, complemented by a 5.1 surround-sound speaker system) is as close a visual and audio approximation of the theatrical viewing experience that one could ask for today in a home-theater setting.

An immaculate Blu-ray of a film classic draws technical praise from a fervent admirer, who also admits he can't ignore some troubling questions about its historical representations.

Ostrowsky (who previously worked on the Blu-ray releases of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Taxi Driver*), using previously approved 70mm prints as reference and regularly consulting with Robert Harris and Anne Coates.

As a result, *Lawrence of Arabia*, apart from the obviously reduced size of the image, looks nearly as good on this Blu-ray disc as I remember it during any of the film's previous theatrical exhibitions. I was also impressed with the new 4K DCP version screened at the New York Film Festival in September 2012 at Alice Tully Hall (on a screen nearly as big as that at the Ziegfeld Theater, where the

The level of detail now visible—including the colors and textures of everything from rock formations and sand dunes to tribal flags and flesh tones—is remarkable. David Lean

reportedly expressed disappointment that, even though cinematographer Freddie Young had supervised the laboratory processing of the footage, the Eastman color stock didn't reveal all of the subtle, multicolored gradations of the desert environment that the director had seen with his own eyes on location. As the film's preview trailers boasted, *Lawrence of Arabia* was "filmed against a canvas of awesome magnificence," and those scenes of the Jordanian desert, with their enormous, undulating sand dunes and massive, prehistoric sandstone and limestone rock formations—vistas that in comparison tend to make John Ford's images of Monument Valley rather prosaic panoramas—are now more impressive than ever.

Reviews of the Blu-ray disc have been virtually unanimous in their acclaim, and those approbations have been echoed by no less an authority than Robert Harris, who hailed both the 4K DCP theatrical version as well as the down-rezzed Blu-ray: "Image quality in terms of overall resolution is other-worldly. Color is dead-on perfect. Shadow detail, superb, along with image steadiness. Grain structure represents the film elements....David Lean was not an easy man to please. Everything had to be perfect. And I can tell you, as an absolute, that he would be very, very pleased, were he able to place this tiny disc in a Blu-ray player that he never had the opportunity to see."¹



Sony Pictures has released *Lawrence of Arabia* in a superb new Blu-ray edition as part of a deluxe, four-disc box set with many supplementary features.



Peter O'Toole as T. E. Lawrence in *Lawrence of Arabia*: Lawrence was actually one of many British officers, several of whom were demolition experts who also wore Arab dress, who served with Feisal's army in the Middle Eastern Campaign during World War I (photo courtesy of Photofest).

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment has released the Blu-ray in two different editions, a basic two-disc version and a deluxe four-disc box set, which includes an additional disc of supplementary features as well as a CD of the film's soundtrack with two previously unreleased cuts, a 70mm souvenir frame from the film, and a nicely written (by Jeremy Arnold), lavishly illustrated eighty-nine-page coffee-table book, with some behind-the-scenes photos this *Lawrence* obsessive has never seen before. Many of the supplementary materials are carryovers from previous DVD editions, but new to the Blu-ray release, among other features, is a twenty-one-minute interview with O'Toole (who relates many amusing anecdotes about the making of the film), which makes me urgently wish that the now-eighty-year-old O'Toole, who recently announced his retirement from acting, will finally get around to writing the third installment of his autobiography, *Loitering with Intent* (following the first two volumes, subtitled *The Child* ([1992] and *The Apprentice* [1996]), which will hopefully offer a detailed account of his experience on *Lawrence of Arabia* and other key films in his career.

A third disc of supplementary features in the box-set edition includes the famous "seduction scene" on the balcony between General Allenby (Jack Hawkins) and Lawrence, which was among the twenty minutes or so of scenes trimmed following the film's premiere so the roadshow exhibitors could squeeze in an additional screening per day. Anne Coates explains, in an introduction to the scene, that it had to be left out of the 1989 restoration since the original soundtrack for portions of that extended scene could not be located and the attempt to have another actor dub Hawkins's performance proved technically and artistically unacceptable.²

This magazine scarcely needs to add its voice to the revived chorus of praise for this classic film, especially since *Cineaste* has almost certainly published more on *Lawrence of Arabia*—including feature articles, interviews, reviews, historical documents, and at least one editorial—than any other film magazine in the world. This is admittedly due to this editor's ongoing fascination with the film—okay, *obsession* (my colleagues' eyes roll in unison at editorial meetings whenever I announce another feature article I believe we should publish on the film)—ever since first seeing it in 1963 as an impressionable teenager. Longtime readers of *Cineaste* will not be surprised, then, to learn that this new Blu-ray edition provides us with an excellent opportunity to revisit the film, this time focusing on some of the more controversial aspects of the film's historical representations.

It is generally understood, even by the average moviegoer, that filmmakers who portray real-life people and historical events are, in addition to obvious considerations of running time, granted a certain amount of dramatic license in order to adapt characterizations and events for artistic purposes. After all, as Hayden White explained in *Metahistory*, even historians must create a narrative structure to write their accounts of history, no matter how extensively footnoted. Filmmakers must be ready to respond, however, to charges that they have abused this dramatic license when they misrepresent, or worse, grossly distort characters and events.

While it is naive to think that any historical film can be completely "accurate," it is not unreasonable—especially given that most people acknowledge learning history through movies or television—to expect filmmakers, as Robert Bolt explained was his aim in writing his *Lawrence of Arabia* screen-

play, to "get at least within hailing distance of the factual truth."³ As the editorial in our Spring 2004 issue, which introduced a forty-two page supplement on film and history, argued, "Ignorant or self-serving notions of past events, no matter how cinematically exciting, are a luxury that America—indeed, the world—cannot afford."

Recounting the challenge, Bolt explained that he very quickly stopped his background reading because he found "the authorities all contradicted one another, not only as regards opinions but also on matters of fact. So I put aside my tottering pile of books and returned to *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, even though it contains long passages of dubious veracity." In other accounts, Bolt stated more forthrightly that, "I am convinced...that [Lawrence] does tell lies in this book."

While detailing my praise for the film as outstanding cinema and compelling drama, I also examined Bolt's historical interpretation in a Fall 1989 *Cineaste* article, "*Lawrence of Arabia*: The Cinematic (Re)Writing of History." At that time, I was able only to refer in a footnote to an earlier screenplay for the film written by the Academy Award-winning but then-blacklisted screenwriter Michael Wilson (*A Place in the Sun*, *Friendly Persuasion*, *Salt of the Earth*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*). I've since been able to read Wilson's script, specifically his revised second draft of September 27, 1960, which led to his acrimonious falling out with David Lean and his withdrawal from the project. We won't go into that dispute again here, since Wilson's struggle for official recognition of his contribution to the screenplay, and his dispute with Lean and Spiegel, were covered in extensive detail in Joel Hodson's article, "Who Wrote *Lawrence of Arabia*?: Sam Spiegel and David Lean's Denial of Credit to a Blacklisted Screenwriter," which

appeared in our Fall 1994 issue.⁴ A brief consideration of Wilson's script, however, enables us to speculate on how it would have produced a far different film.

On the basis of Wilson's second draft—he also delivered a contractually required third draft on January 31, 1961, but Lean refused even to look at it since by that time Spiegel had hired Bolt to rewrite the screenplay—it is evident that Wilson's version of the film would have incorporated far more historical background and political context for the Arab revolt. This includes a greater sense of the international forces active in the Middle Eastern campaign; a much more politically aware Lawrence (as opposed to Bolt's naïve idealist), someone who was well aware of the Sykes-Picot Agreement as well as the Balfour Declaration; a greater emphasis on the stressful psychological nature (even dramatized in a hallucination scene) of Lawrence's dual but conflicting loyalties to British imperial aims in the region and Arab nationalist aspirations for independence; a humbler, more realistic assessment of Lawrence's own involvement in military actions, such as the taking of Akaba ("The Arabs took it; I went along for the ride"); greater discussion of Arab suspicions of the wartime political duplicity of Perfidious Albion and other Western powers; and a more explicit critique of Lawrence's conduct in discharging timeworn but still popular colonialist notions of the White Man's Burden.

Wilson's script often bursts with its ambition to broach more of the complexities of this crucial historical period, even inserting a few provocative if throwaway lines. In a scene late in the film, for example, when Lawrence tries to navigate his way out of the Town Hall through a mob of petitioners and protestors, a zealot in the crowd shouts out, "If the British settle Jews in Palestine, there will be war, God be my witness," to which Lawrence replies, "The British have made more promises than they can keep."

Certainly one of the principal reasons why Lean rejected Wilson's screenplay is that the director ultimately preferred a more psychological portrait of Lawrence, who he described as "an English nut," rather than a politically informative or provocative historical drama. During the early scriptwriting phase of the production, Lean's notes sent to Wilson indicate that the director was certainly not adverse to incorporating scenes dramatizing and even criticizing British colonial aims. It would have been virtually impossible to have

avoided such political issues in the film, since Lawrence—whose political perspective might be best characterized as that of a benevolently paternalistic colonialist or a neoliberal imperialist—played a particularly complicated role during this period. But overall, as Lean later commented, "The political arena was not our main concern."⁵

This directorial preference no doubt emboldened Bolt in his decision to primarily, even opportunistically, draw upon the more psychologically introspective portions of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, an ambitious work aspiring to the status of "titanic" literature, and therefore replete with dramatic embellishments and outright fabrications, for which its author frankly disavowed any claims to historical fidelity. As he acknowledged in his introductory chapter, "In reality I never had any office among the Arabs: was never in charge of the British mission with them." In his telling of the tale as "just a designed procession of Arab freedom from Mecca to Damascus," however, he nevertheless granted himself a "mock primacy." In its own way, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* perpetuated the romanticized, media-created mythology launched in 1919 by Lowell Thomas's lantern-slide/film/lecture show, "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia" as well as his book, *With Lawrence in Arabia* (1924), which often reads like an Eastern dime novel in its portrayal of Lawrence as a quick-draw, sharp-shooting "modern Arabian knight." Sam Spiegel perhaps best explained (or rationalized) the filmmakers' intentions: "We have not tried to resolve the enigma of Lawrence but to perpetuate the legend."

None of these criticisms are meant to deny or downplay the vast improvements that Bolt made to the film's final screenplay. The then-acclaimed playwright of *A Man for All Seasons* used his considerable dramaturgical skills and talents to rearrange and condense scenes, to conflate (or simply eliminate) an excessive number of English (as well as Arabic, French, and Australian) characters, and to not only prune but also to lend a sophisticated, theatrical quality to the dia-

logue, which even Wilson acknowledged as "a job well done," calling Bolt "a gifted man."

It is also clear, however, that, at Lean's urging, Bolt focused on the more sensationalistic, even disturbing psychological aspects of his protagonist, foregrounding a vainglorious personality easily swayed by flattery, intimations of homosexuality, and sadomasochistic tendencies. Indeed, what struck viewers at the time, especially since *Lawrence* followed in the wake of more conventional historical biopics such as *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Spartacus* (1960), and *El Cid* (1961), was the decidedly antiheroic trajectory of its protagonist, an initially quirky but sympathetic young scholar and soldier who, by film's end, has authorized and committed unspeakable wartime atrocities. The psychological, the personal, can also be political, of course, but too often Lawrence's aberrant mentality or excessive self-regard become the real focus of the story, displacing the social context in which he was acting. The screenwriter and producer Paul Jarrico (Michael Wilson's brother-in-law) explained the basic difference between Wilson's and Bolt's approaches:

The most significant difference between Mike Wilson's script and Bolt's script is thematic. Lawrence, in Mike's script, was increasingly torn by the contradiction between British imperial interests and Arab national interests. Both required the defeat of Turkish rule, so there was an ostensible unity. But the Arabs were not fighting to replace their Turkish masters by British and French masters, and Lawrence, identifying himself with the Arabs, found it impossible to resolve the contradiction, which exploded in the climax. His inner conflict and the objective political conflict are joined. Bolt and Lean didn't have to change the script a lot to emasculate it. Just substitute sadomasochism for politics.⁶

These distortions of character and the historical record did not go unnoticed among viewers in 1962, especially in England, where the film generated considerable controversy, even outrage, among those inti-

imately familiar with the man and the history, including contemporaries of Lawrence (such as his younger brother, Arnold, or General Allenby's widow), descendants of other historical figures portrayed (including family members of Auda Abu Tayi and Sherif Ali), military historians (notably Basil Liddell Hart), and authors (including David Garnett). Arnold Lawrence



Robert Bolt's screenplay, which portrayed Lawrence as a bloodthirsty sadist, generated numerous outraged protests during its initial release in 1962 (photo courtesy of Photofest).



Drama vs. History: Rather than crossing the torrid Nefud Desert to attack Akaba, just 250 miles away from their starting point, Lawrence and the Arab raiding party actually made a roundabout, 800-mile journey, only skirting the edges of the Nefud, to reach the port (photo courtesy of Photofest).

wrote numerous diatribes against the film in the British press, in particular criticizing the film's focus on Lawrence's "sadism" and "blood-lust" to create a portrait of a brother he did not recognize. While such critics of the film admittedly had their own agendas, above all protecting the reputations of family members, they were also, as Adrian Turner (author of *The Making of David Lean's Lawrence of Arabia*) wrote, "people with history on their side."

The relatives of Auda Abu Tayi, an ardent Arab nationalist, principal leader of the Arab revolt, and chief strategist of the plan to seize Akaba, protested the film's portrayal of him as a venal, amoral, and petty tribal chieftain. The descendants of Sherif Nasir Ibn Ali (on whom Omar Sharif's Sherif Ali Ibn el Kharish character was loosely based), filed suit for defamation of character, in particular for the film's portrayal of his murder of Lawrence's guide at the Masturah Well. Indeed, this scene in the script was vigorously protested during production by the film's political advisor, Anthony Nutting—Middle East expert, former British Prime Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and Lawrence biographer—as a blatant distortion of the nearly sacred Bedouin tradition of hospitality to travelers, but he was unable to convince the filmmakers to change or eliminate the scene. It should be noted here, so as not to make Michael Wilson the "hero" and Robert Bolt the "villain" of this article, that this scene was Wilson's invention, as was the distorted portrayal of Auda Abu Tayi.

In response to these and other complaints and protests, Bolt felt obliged to write a defense of his dramatic approach, entitled "Apologia," originally intended as a preface to the published screenplay, but Lean insisted he retract it, and in any event the screenplay was never published.

The film's portrayal of Arab culture was deemed so distorted and even disrespectful that *Lawrence of Arabia* was banned in most Arab countries, even in Jordan, where much of it was filmed, and, not surprisingly, the film remains banned to this day in Turkey. Critical assessments of T. E. Lawrence's actual role in the Arab revolt have been the focus of writings by a number of Arab historians and scholars, including Suleiman Mousa, George Antonius, Lucy Ladkioff, and Subhi Al-Umari. To the best of my knowledge, however, there has been little critical Arab writing on the film itself, save for some commentary in Jack Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, an article by Mehdi Derfoufi in a 2001 issue of the French magazine, *Tausend Augen*,⁷ and a 1989 *Wall Street Journal* article by *Orientalism* author Edward Said, who derided the film's reactionary views of Arabs and Arab nationalism as redolent with "the retrospective nostalgia of an imperial daydream." He focused his criticism on the film's portrayal of the raucous meeting of the Arab National Council in Damascus at the film's conclusion: "Mr. Lean's Arabs are shown in this depressing scene to be semi-barbarous children, garishly fighting over trifles, totally incapable of reason, debate, policy...Lean wants us to understand that serious rule was never meant for such lesser species, only for the white man."

Reading only that first line today, one could be forgiven for regarding it as an apt description of present members of the U.S. Congress. A closer examination of this scene in the film—which Said calls "the film's political payoff, its historical argument about the Arab revolt"—in contrast to the actual historical events, puts into sharp relief the worst aspects of the film, which caters to

prejudices about Arabs. Such denigrations of Arab culture were no doubt agreeable to or at least unquestioned by many Western viewers in 1962, just six years after the Suez Crisis, in which Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egyptian President and champion of pan-Arab nationalism, nationalized the Suez Canal, frustrating British geopolitical aims, and thereby hastening the postwar decline of the British Empire. In this regard, *Lawrence of Arabia* is as much a film of its era as it is a historical film.

At other times, the film shows considerable respect for Arabs and their political struggle, or uses Sherif Ali as a moral foil for Lawrence's worst behavior. Several scenes flatter Western viewers in their knowing awareness of the duplicitous nature of British politicians. But Bolt's version of these Damascus scenes dramatically condenses and politically simplifies Wilson's version, which makes clear the many political forces contending for power (Syrian and Iraqi nationalists, Bedouin sheikhs, Druse protestors, Lebanese Christians, and Palestinian fellahin, as well as British, French, and Australian troops, and Western interests seeking oil concessions in the newly liberated area). In these final scenes, Wilson's script has virtually everyone questioning Lawrence's motivations and aims, including Arabs who accuse him of acting as a British agent or spy and British officers who charge him with treason. Even Ali, in a final encounter with Lawrence, proclaims, "Arabs cannot be saved by a blue-eyed Messiah. We must save ourselves. We will make mistakes. Many of them. But we must have the right to make our own mistakes."

In Bolt's version of the Damascus episode, *Lawrence* descends to its most culturally reactionary, even racist level in portraying the seemingly inborn collapse of the Arab Revolt,



In its concluding scenes in Damascus, Robert Bolt's script for *Lawrence of Arabia* indulges in stereotypically racist attitudes toward Arabs and the Arab Revolt (photo courtesy of Photofest).

thus clearly demonstrating Arab unreadiness for self-rule. While it's understandable how the filmmakers would find that reliance on these stereotypes would provide them with a dramatically neater resolution of this otherwise complex historical and biographical drama, there's also no question that we should have been able to expect much better from filmmakers of this caliber. A comparison of some of the film's concluding scenes with the historical events is instructive.

The Film: The concluding scenes begin with the arrival of General Allenby and the British Army in Damascus, where they learn that Lawrence and his Bedouin army have arrived in the Syrian capital a day and a half earlier and have set up the Arab National Council in the Town Hall. Allenby explains to Dryden (Claude Rains) that, as requested, he is delaying Prince Feisal's arrival in the city by two days, an amount of time that the Arab Bureau's representative feels should be "ample" for their purposes.

The History: While the Arab Northern Army did arrive a day and a half before the British Army, General Allenby and Feisal actually arrived in Damascus, just hours apart, on the same day. As the result of a British government pledge made in July 1918, which agreed to recognize the com-

plete and sovereign independence of any Arab territory liberated from Turkish control by the force of Arab arms, General Allenby had ordered all British troops to remain outside Damascus until the Arab Army had entered and occupied the city. This was a geopolitical ploy by Great Britain aimed at denying or at least forestalling French claims to Syria as a French Mandate under the provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

"Films such as *Lawrence of Arabia* raise the perennial question of whether the competing demands of (at least reasonable) historical fidelity and compelling drama can be reconciled."

The Film: At an unruly meeting of the Arab National Council, Lawrence, leading the meeting as Prince Feisal's deputy, is unable to prevent petty personal arguments between Auda, Ali, and other tribal chieftains, who are also unable to understand the nature or need for electrical generators or telephones and incapable of responding sensibly and urgently to the news that fire has broken out elsewhere in the city.

The History: The chaos and dissension in the newly liberated Damascus, something not at all unusual in any revolutionary situation, had far less to do with bickering between "primitive" Bedouins than with

political disputes between the representatives, respectively, of a temporary government hastily installed the day before by France and the former Turkish government, the Syrian national liberation movement, King Hussein's Hashemite Arab Government, and Damascenes fearful of political domination by the newly arrived Sherifian forces. Within a day following the withdrawal from the city by Turkish and German troops, and by the time Allenby had arrived, Arab forces had restored electrical power (which had actually been inoperative for several weeks before their arrival), public sanitation and transportation, as well as police and fire services.

The Film: Allenby and Dryden, back at their HQ, waiting patiently for the Arab National Council to self-destruct, discover that electrical power has failed and then watch from their balcony as droves of camel-mounted Bedouins leave the city. Back at the Town Hall, Lawrence goes through the motions of government by himself, continuing to sign official decrees, as Auda tries to convince Lawrence to return with him to the desert and a dispirited Ali bids him a tearful farewell. Shown as a defeated, broken man in his final meeting with Allenby and Feisal, Lawrence is granted leave to return to England.

The History: The departing irregular Bedouin troops, the “marvelous looking beggars” disparaged by Allenby in the film, comprised only one component of the Arab Revolt, which also included uniformed Arab infantry and cavalry from numerous countries as well as Syrian, Egyptian, and Saudi nationalists, intellectuals, politicians, and a wide variety of professionals. Although the film’s final meeting between Allenby and Feisal dramatizes only the Anglo-Arab rivalry, the major political obstacle confronting Feisal’s claims for a Hashemite kingdom in Syria was the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which promised the country as a French protectorate.

Throughout 1919 and 1920, while a Hashemite government ruled Damascus, Feisal waged a political struggle for Arab independence at peace conferences in Paris, London, and San Remo, which repeatedly denied his claims. The Syrian National Congress proclaimed Feisal as king in March 1920. The French then intervened militarily and, after defeating the Syrian Army at a major battle near Damascus, Feisal was forced into exile.

When obliged at last to confront his divided loyalties during his first meeting with both of his “masters,” Allenby and Feisal, in attendance, Lawrence knew his political game was up. After refusing Allenby’s directive to serve in Damascus with a French liaison officer, Lawrence requested the leave he was due, and returned to England, where he prepared to defend Arab interests at the Paris Peace Conference the following year.⁸

Films such as *Lawrence of Arabia* raise the perennial question of whether the competing demands of (at least reasonable) historical fidelity and compelling drama can be reconciled. Even a masterwork such as Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers*, one of the most politically sophisticated and morally challenging films ever made, simplifies many important aspects of the Algerian national liberation struggle. As for *Lawrence*, over time I have gradually been able to develop a happily schizophrenic attitude to the film, one in which I am still able to admire it purely as *cinema*, despite the fact that extensive readings about T. E. Lawrence and the historical period have made clear to me the vast distance between the film and historical or biographical factuality.

Viewing the film innumerable times over the last several decades has thus become a continually fascinating exercise in appreciating the interplay between film and history, in recognizing the ways in which dramaturgy either enhances or distorts its subject, including the occasional necessity to conflate several real-life historical figures into one fictional character, or the need to forgo invariably futile attempts at literal depictions of “historical accuracy” in favor of dramatizing “larger historical truths.”⁹

Anthony Nutting perhaps best described how these tensions between artistry and history ultimately resolved themselves in *Lawrence of Arabia* when, asked for his opinion of the film, he commented: “I thought it was magnificent. Perhaps this is being a little frivolous, but in a sense it is a picture not so much about Lawrence as about a love affair between a director, a cameraman and a desert.” ■

End Notes:

¹ “A Few Words about *Lawrence of Arabia* in Blu-ray” discussion thread on *Home Theater Forum*, November 12, 2012, <http://www.hometheaterforum.com/t/324904/a-few-words-about-lawrence-of-arabia-in-blu-ray>.

² Additional supplementary features on the Blu-ray include a Secrets of Arabia: Graphic-in-Picture Track, which relates interesting facts about life in the desert and the making of the film and, on the four-disc box set, a fascinating feature-length documentary, *In Love with the Desert*, produced by Alain Littaye, in which property master Eddie Fowlie visits the various locations where the film was made. This documentary had previously been available only with May 2001 special issue of the French magazine, *DVDvision*.

This Blu-ray edition of *Lawrence*—which follows in the wake of previous VHS, laserdisc, DVD, and Superbit DVD editions—is unlikely to be the last home-video version of this classic film, so let me suggest to Sony that, among possible new “extras” for a likely “Super Hi-Vision” edition (a format now being developed by NHK in Japan), they consider a 2008 one-hour French documentary entitled *Once Upon a Time...Lawrence of Arabia*, which includes interviews with Anne Coates, Omar Sharif, Peter O’Toole, authorized Lawrence biographer Jeremy Wilson, historian Henry Laurens, and Lean’s widow Sonda Lean.

³ *The Journal of the Society of Film and Television Arts*, No. 10, Winter 1962–1963.

⁴ We’re proud that Joel Hodson’s article in *Cineaste* proved instrumental in persuading the Writers Guild of America in 1995, thirty-two years after the Writers’ Guild of Great Britain had done so, finally to recognize Michael Wilson’s coauthorship of the screenplay for *Lawrence of Arabia*. The WGA even reprinted an abridged version of Hodson’s article in the March 1995 issue of its own magazine, *The Journal*.

One of the most moving accounts of Wilson’s long struggle for official film-industry recognition of his contributions as a blacklisted screenwriter, one that succeeded only posthumously in the United States, was related to me years ago by his daughter, Becca, who recounted going as a youngster with her father to see *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. As the end credits started to roll, she looked over to see tears streaming down her father’s face, a reflection, no doubt, of his admiration for the film he had just seen combined with the painful awareness that his contribution to it was completely unacknowledged.

⁵ “Out of the Wilderness,” an interview with David Lean, *Films and Filming*, January 1963.

⁶ Paul Jarrico letter to Gary Crowdus, May 13, 1994.

⁷ “L’Occident regarde l’Orient: à propos de *Lawrence d’Arabie*” by Mehdi Derfoufi, *Tausend Augen* #24, December 2001.

⁸ In this regard, the 1992 Anglia Television film, *A Dangerous Man: Lawrence After Arabia*, starring Ralph Fiennes as Lawrence, portrays Lawrence and Feisal’s pleas for the Arab cause at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, thus making an interesting political bookend to *Lawrence of Arabia*.

⁹ These issues were examined in two interviews with Oliver Stone—“Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies” by Mark C. Carnes and “History, Dramatic License, and Larger Historical Truths” by Gary Crowdus—in our Spring 1997 issue, Vol. XXII, No. 4.

For a recommended bibliography on Lean’s *Lawrence of Arabia*, visit our Website at www.cineaste.com.

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