The Editing of *Lawrence of Arabia:*

An Interview with Anne V. Coates

by Gary Crowdus

Lawrence of Arabia *would undoubtedly rank very high on anyone's list of the best-edited motion pictures of all time. Given its protracted, alternately notorious and celebrated editorial history, it would probably also win uncontested as the* most-*edited motion picture. That process began even before the film was cast, when in August 1960 producer Sam Spiegel and director David Lean shot five days of elaborate tests of up-and-coming young British actor Albert Finney for the title role. Testifying to the epic nature of the future classic film, this screen test was photographed by leading cinematographer Geoffrey Unsworth in 35mm, on sets built at the MGM-British Studios at Borehamwood, complete with a supporting cast of actors, using excerpts from Michael Wilson's early script for the film, at a cost of over £100,000, nearly the cost of some British feature films at that time.*

Surprisingly, Finney turned down the offer and the role of a lifetime went to Peter O'Toole. After a nearly three-year period of preproduction and shooting, the hundreds of thousands of feet of footage had to be edited in less than four months to meet the Royal Premiere date of December 10, 1962. The completed film ran 222 minutes.

Some five weeks later, following premiere screenings in London, New York and Los Angeles, in response to pressures to shorten the film, despite its having been critically acclaimed as a masterwork, twenty minutes were trimmed and that 202-minute version was thereafter used for the film's roadshow engagements and general release. For the film's theatrical rerelease in 1971 and first TV broadcast, another fifteen minutes was deleted, and what had once been one of the most honored screen spectaculars of all time had become, at 187 minutes, the Incredible Shrinking Epic. Finally, in 1989, thanks to the heroic efforts of film-restoration specialist Robert A. Harris, Lawrence of Arabia *was released in a glorious "Director's Cut" version of 217 minutes.*

Across the sands of time, a film editor's personal history of the shaping and texturing of a classic screen epic

The film editor involved in every one of those stages was Anne V. Coates, who won the Academy Award for her editing of Lawrence of Arabia. *In her twenties, Coates first gained experience as an uncredited editorial assistant on films such as* The Red Shoes *(1948) and* The Rocking Horse Winner *(1950). By the mid-Fifties she had become a highly regarded film editor in England, having edited* The Horse's Mouth *(1958) and* Tunes of Glory *(1960), but her work on* Lawrence of Arabia *vaulted her onto the A-list of international film editors. She subsequently edited films such as* Becket *(1964),* Murder on the Orient Express *(1974),* The Elephant Man *(1980),* Chaplin *(1992),* In the Line of Fire *(1993),* Out of Sight *(1998), and* Erin Brockovich *(2000).*

With her career now stretching over sixty years, Anne Coates remains active today as a highly sought-after film editor. She recently finished a "polish" job on a novice editor's work for a forthcoming feature and later this year will be editing Crowley, *starring Harrison Ford and Brendan Fraser, which will be shooting this spring. The now eight-three-year-old editing legend says she will retire only "when the phone stops ringing and when I stop enjoying my work."*

Anne Coates was the first name on the list of film editors we invited to contribute to this issue's Critical Symposium on "The Art and Craft of Film Editing." When we learned that she would be visiting New York in January, she agreed to meet with us in order to discuss the editing of Lawrence of Arabia. *This was a rare and exciting opportunity for me to get answers to some of my questions about how specific cuts and scene transitions in that film came about, in particular whether those cuts had been preplanned by David Lean (a former film editor himself) during shooting or whether they had been "found" and created in the editing room. I can only hope that a few* Cineaste *readers, outside of the community of fellow* Lawrence *obsessives, will find some interest in the following editorial microanalysis.*—**Gary Crowdus**

Cineaste: *How did you get your start as a film editor?*

Anne V. Coates: I was working as an assistant with an editor called Clive Donner, who was also a good friend of mine, who went on to become an interesting director. He was offered a film called *Pickwick Papers* but he couldn't do it because he was editing another film. The line producer on *Pickwick Papers* was actually a friend of both of ours, so I said, "Well, why don't you put my name forward??" You know, just like that, because I was a kind of spontaneous person.

I had previously done some assembly cutting on *The Story of Robin Hood,* a film produced by Walt Disney with Peter Finch as the Sheriff of Nottingham and Richard Todd as Robin Hood. I'd done all the second unit work on that film, too, cutting all the action scenes, although not a lot of dialog cutting. The director of *Pickwick Papers* was Noel Langley, a writer who'd done the screenplay adaptation of the Dickens novel, and was a first-time director. So the Associate Producer, Bob McNaught, said, "OK, come up and meet with him." Langley was a well-known misogynist, so I thought, "Well, I don't stand much of a chance." But we had a very good meeting and I said something that he really liked, and they offered me the picture, but with the proviso that if I didn't work out they could bring in a supervising editor over me. It's not a great way to start because you know that's hanging over you all the time. And, of course, Langley hadn't directed before, so we had a few problems right up front, and I thought my job was hanging by a thread. When we did the courtroom scene, though, I did a really good cut on that and they were very impressed, so then my job was safe. Once they saw that I could cut, they were really with me, and it was no problem after that.

George Minter, who was the film's Executive Producer, liked what I did so much that he put me under contract for three films, another of which was *Grand National Night,* a murder story about Grand National horses, and the other was *Our Girl Friday,* but I had a falling out with them over that film, so I never finished it. But by that time Sydney Box had offered me a job on *Forbidden Cargo,* a thriller, so I kind of kept going. I had some ups and downs and I was doing fairly smallish pictures when Ronnie Neame was doing *The Horse's Mouth.* I was editing *The Truth about Women* at that time—which is quite a good film, with Laurence Harvey and a lot of attractive women—and Ronnie couldn't get an editor. He wanted Clive,

Anne Coates's initial challenge in editing *Lawrence of Arabia* involved trying to cut sequences, without any notes from the director, out of thousands of feet of footage then being shot by David Lean and his crew in Jordan (photo courtesy of Photofest).

but he wasn't available. I knew Ronnie slightly, so I had an interview with him. He didn't really want a woman editor. He thought women were too into their homes and their boyfriends, and he particularly didn't want a married woman. I wasn't married at that time, so that was all right, but I had a steady boyfriend, Douglas Hickox, who I married secretly, in a quiet wedding, during the film. That was quite fun, because I wanted to prove to Ronnie that I could work as a married woman. I used to take my wedding ring off and hang it around my neck when I went in to work. But it all worked out well, and Ronnie liked me. *The Horse's Mouth* was really my big break. Afterwards I gave birth to my eldest son, Anthony, and then Ronnie offered me *Tunes of Glory,* which I thought was an excellent film.

Cineaste: *How did you get the job to edit* Lawrence of Arabia*?*

Coates: I bumped into Gerry O'Hara, who was a first A.D. and a friend of mine, in Harrod's one morning. I asked him, "What are you doing at the moment, Gerry?," and he said, "I'm about to do a week of tests of Albert Finney for *Seven Pillars of Wisdom,"* as it was called then, "with David Lean. He's doing extensive tests with him over five days." So I said, "Well, do they need an editor?" Gerry said, "I don't know, but probably yes." John Palmer, the production manager, called me up and said, "Do you want to come in and cut these tests? It's £50 per week." I said, "Sure, I'll be there Monday morning." So I went in and cut the tests.

I knew David slightly, just having met him once or twice, but I had never worked with him. Anyway, they did the tests in two sections, and I cut the Arab section first, which he shot with Finney in Arab dress. When we were running dailies for the English section, David asked, "Have you cut the other sequence?" I said, "Oh, yes, I have. I'd like to show it to you tomorrow." He said, "No, no, I'd like to see it now"—in front of the whole unit. You know, he'd been a top editor, so I was extremely nervous, because I was very young really. I said, "No, no, David, I'd like to show it to you first." But he said, "No, no, Annie, don't be silly, go and get it and we'll run it." So while they all screened it, I just sat there. I was so terrified I don't even remember seeing the cuts go by. At the end of it, David stood up in front of everybody—it sounds sort of conceited to say this—and said, "That's the first time I've ever seen a piece of work cut exactly as I would have done it." So that was really, really nice.

Cineaste: *He was not a man easily given to making compliments.*

Coates: No, he wasn't. He was rather reticent about those things. So I was very pleased. A few days later he asked me to travel to London in Sam Spiegel's Rolls Royce with him and Sam. I rang my husband and said, "Do you think they're going to offer me the picture?" "Of course, they are," he said, "why else are they taking you to London in the Rolls?" And they did—they offered me the film. I didn't think they were going to because I thought Peter Taylor, who cut *The Bridge on the River Kwai,* was going to do it.

Cineaste: *When did your work on the film actually begin?*

Coates: I was on the film from the first day of shooting. At the beginning, with the very first sequences that they shot, I sent the dailies out to David in Jordan, while he was still sort of near civilization, so he could see them. He was able to see only about one week of work, however, before they moved further out and he couldn't run them any more. So only Sam Spiegel and I saw dailies, twice a week, and we would send reports to David. Usually it was Sam but occasionally I spoke to David, but not very often. There was talk of my going out there and running the material with David, but then they moved further out and there was no power to run the projectors. They gave me seven injections but I never actually went, and I was disappointed about that.

At first David sent me notes back on the work, so I was cutting the material at Shepperton Studios. After a while, though, he got so busy he didn't send any notes, and I was getting thousands and thousands of feet of all this desert stuff. So I started cutting some of that together on my own, which was quite a challenge!

After about eight months of shooting, Sam shut down the unit and told David he had to come back as they were way over schedule by then. He hadn't actually finished shooting in Jordan and he had wanted to shoot at Petra, the famous archaeological site, but Sam insisted that he'd shot long enough in the desert. Besides, the second half of the script hadn't been completed—we'd shot mostly the first half of the film in that shoot—so they really had to stop shooting in order to finish the script. During that time Robert Bolt went to prison, because he'd been arrested for civil disobedience at an anti-nuclear protest in Trafalgar Square and Sam had to get him out of prison to write the second part.

During that three-month period, David worked in the cutting rooms at Shepperton with me, which was wonderful. We ran the dailies and made notes and then I would cut the stuff. He never really saw any cut material because he only ever worked on getting an assembly together, and then they went off to Spain. While they were there I was able to go down about once a month and run the dailies with David, get his choices and make some notes and come back and cut. But, again, he never saw any cut sequences. He just saw the dailies and gave me the notes and I cut the stuff. Sam Spiegel saw quite a lot of it. I thought I would take cut sequences down for David to look at but he didn't want to see anything.

But I was keeping the cutting up to date. I had caught up while shooting was stopped and then I kept up to date until they went to Morocco to shoot the bloodbath, the very end, so by the time David came back to London, I was absolutely up to date. I had an assembly of the whole picture, except that big battle scene, the massacre of the Turkish troops, for which I hadn't received the dailies yet. So we were in a good position in that way. We'd also done some work on the sound—not very much, but some—and I was getting together quite a big sound crew and a music editor.

Cineaste: *Once shooting was completed, you had less than four months to complete the film—including a fine cut, sending it out for negative cutting, sound-effects dubbing, scoring, and all the rest—in order to meet the December 10th date set for the film's Royal Premiere. Would you tell us how you and Lean and your crew worked during that period?*

Coates: We worked night and day, seven days a week, for those four months. My basic crew included Willie Kemplin, my first assistant, and Roy Benson and Ray Lovejoy as second assistant editors. Roy Benson was our P.A. Ray was more like a second-first, really. Of course later he became a very famous editor on films such as *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Then I brought on Norman Savage, who later cut *Dr. Zhivago*, who'd been my assistant on many films, to work with David, who was going to work on some of the sequences. Willie ran the whole thing, though, and we'd never have met the deadline if he hadn't been so efficient.

We were based in London, at Warwick Films, a cutting and screening facility, just behind the Dorchester Hotel. But the sound crew of four or five people—ADR crews and music editors and things like that—were down at Shepperton, with Win Ryder in charge. So the material was going back and forth and Willie did a fantastic job of keeping tabs on all that.

Cineaste: *How did you collaborate with David Lean?*

Coates: We would work together on some sequences and at other times I would cut some stuff alone and David would cut some stuff, and then he talked to me quite a lot about it and we would work on it together. I'd already cut a lot of the sequences before he came back, and we really didn't do a lot to them, apart from tightening them up a bit. There were only one or two sequences that he didn't like the particular way I had cut them. He thought I'd cut one scene too sentimentally, and he made me harden it up. On a few of the scenes David worked with me just to polish them up a bit, and talked to me about doing this or that. But, basically, because I'd already gotten a lot of the work done, it helped us get through in the four months. If the film hadn't been in such a good state, I don't think we would have made it.

Cineaste: *Ideally, how long would you have liked to edit a film of that length and scope?*

Coates: Well, I'm a fast worker, so I don't believe in having too much time. I don't think you do any better work. Actually, by working against the clock, with your adrenaline going, I think you do really good work. I must admit that during that time I hardly saw my husband or my little boy, who used to have to come to the cutting room to see me! I was lucky because I lived only ten or fifteen minutes away from where we were working but my crew who lived in the country had to move into London because it was too dangerous for them to drive back at night.

David had a flat above the cutting rooms. When he came back to London, he hadn't anywhere to live, so we converted a very nice apartment for him upstairs at Warwick. The screening room was in the basement, I was in sort of the semi-basement cutting rooms, and David was above with his cutting room and living quarters. David didn't start too early—ten o'clock starts usually—but we worked until one or two or three in the morning. But I like to work really late into the night.

Cineaste: *Did you use a music temp track at all during the editing?*

Coates: No, we didn't much in those days, not like nowadays. That practice came in particularly when we went digital on the Avids. We put some music on, but not to the extent that we do today. We never really had time to put much of a temp track on. While we were cutting, Maurice Jarre was writing his music against the clock, which sometimes wanted changing. We were literally mixing the reels in the theater opposite, so he was having to rewrite and record his music almost overnight. Then the music editor would lay it and we'd dub it immediately. Sam Spiegel wanted more of a tune, so he could get a soundtrack out, and David wanted more violins, but Maurice Jarre is very much a tympani man.

Cineaste: *His specialty is percussion.*

Coates: Yes, exactly, and we were getting a lot more percussion than they wanted, so he was having to rewrite those bits. I know there's a lot in there still, which is very effective, but nevertheless he was doing a lot of rewrites. So I think it would have been great if Maurice had had a little more time.

Cineaste: *How much footage did you have to work with for the major action scenes? Andre Smagghe, Noel Howard, and Andre de Toth, who was uncredited, were second-unit directors and the second-unit cameramen included Skeets Kelly, Nicolas Roeg, and Peter Newbrook.*

Coates: There were two main cameras controlled by Freddie Young plus two hand-held cameras. Peter Newbrook sometimes worked with the first unit and other times he was going off and shooting stuff on his own. He was involved in a hilarious effort to photograph the sunrise for us. We wanted footage with the sun just as it popped up, but he could never time it right. He kept starting and stopping the camera, as the precise moment of the sunrise would get nearer and nearer, and of course the sun would always pop up when he was stopped. He had to shoot five or six sunrises before he ever got it. So Peter went off and did stuff like that for David, who had worked with him before. But Peter didn't work as a second-unit cameraman like the others, who actually had a director and would stage scenes. Peter was picking up stuff on his own.

Perhaps the most famous jump cut in *Lawrence of Arabia* was indicated in the script as a dissolve, but Coates and Lean saw the join in the editing room and decided to make a direct cut to the sunrise. After Coates trimmed two frames, film history was made.

The interior dialog scenes would be photographed with two cameras, but the big action scenes would use three to four cameras, so I had a lot of options on those, a *huge* amount of material. I could cut a whole 'nother film of *Lawrence of Arabia* from the out footage we had. Somebody, I don't know how they measured it, calculated that we shot thirty-five miles of footage.

Cineaste: *I'm curious to know how many of the most imaginative scene transitions were preplanned in the shooting and how many were found and created in the editing room? Many cuts, especially those involv-ing the juxtaposition of big close-ups with long shots, seem choreographed for precise editorial purposes. Let's start with one of the film's most famous cuts, from a close-up of O'Toole blowing out the match to the jump cut to the undercranked sunrise over the*

Arabian Desert. In the script that transition is indicated as a dissolve. So how did that cut—which is today recognized as one of the most memorable jump cuts in film history—come about?

Coates: To us it wasn't anything special, it just happened during the cutting. I doubt if it would have been seen the same way if one were working digitally but, because we were working with film, the two shots were joined together and, since the optical was going to be made later, the film had crayon markings indicating the dissolve for the lab. But when we ran it, we saw the cut and David and I got very excited about the fact that we could cut directly from the match to the sunrise. So we did a couple of different timings on it and then looked at it. We thought it was a great idea but David said, "It's not perfect. Take it away and make it perfect, Annie." So I took it away and literally took two frames out of it.

Cineaste: *From which shot?*

Coates: From the outgoing scene.

Cineaste: *You also use sound overlap on the cut of O'Toole's breath blowing out the match.*

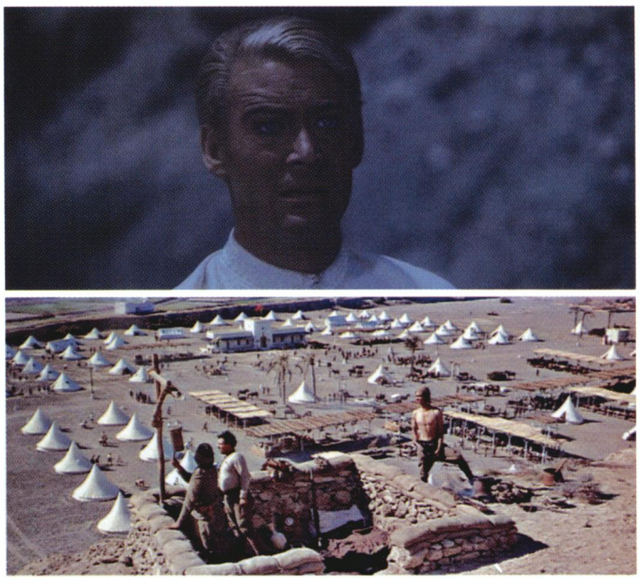
Coates: Yes, but that would have come when we did the dubbing. I can't remember if we did that on the Moviola or not, because we were cutting on both Moviolas and Steenbecks. Mostly on Moviolas but David liked flatbeds quite a lot for viewing stuff.

Cineaste: *I understand that when you started work on the film you had already seen some of the French New Wave films and had been very impressed with their innovative cutting and that you actually encouraged David to go see a few of them.*

Coates: Yes, that's true. I loved the cutting style that the French were doing—such as in Godard's *Breathless* and Chabrol's *les Cousins,* for example—and I thought it was very exciting. I'd been kind of doing some of that, but in a very simple way—jumping people across rooms or from one place to another—because I thought otherwise it was a waste of time. If you know someone is going over there, why not just cut out the bits in-between? In those days they'd show people plodding along and opening doors and all that sort of thing. I was already playing with the idea of cutting things like that out. So when I saw the French were doing it, way ahead of what I was doing, I got really excited. I suggested to David, who I knew didn't go to see films very much, that he go to see a few of them and he also loved the idea. And of course he eventually did those jump cuts better than anybody else.

Cineaste: Lawrence of Arabia *is also distinguished by other transitions involving the highly imaginative use of sound overlap: the sound of the Turkish alarm bell heard over the cut from Lawrence's face after his execution of Gasim to the assault on Akaba; the Cairo street noises heard over the close-up of Lawrence at the Suez Canal; the sound of the Arab tribes heard over the close-up of Lawrence on the balcony in Cairo, and so on. How did those decisions come about? Sound is often used editorially to smooth out a cut, but here the sound functioned much more dramatically as a way to propel the narrative forward.*

Coates: *[Laughs]* Not everyone thought it was so creative. The manager of the Odeon Leicester Square, where we held the London premiere, said to me, "I know you were in a hurry to get this ready but at least you could have gotten the sound in sync." I think he learned in time because people started writing about how creative it was to do that sort of thing.



Sound overlap on some of the film's cuts, when sound from the following scene is heard before it appears, was often used in *Lawrence of Arabia* as sort of an "aural dissolve," as Coates describes the technique, to link the two images together.

Cineaste: *Do you remember any specific discussions about that technique?*

Coates: No, I don't! Isn't that terrible? I could pretend that I did but I really don't remember how those transitions came about. I remember some of them we did in the cutting room and others might have been done in the dubbing theater, but I don't think we ever made a definitive decision to do them. We weren't thinking, "Let's be really clever and overlay the sound ahead of the picture," or anything like that. Each time it came up it just seemed the right thing to do, or we felt the cut needed it.

Cineaste: *Many of those transitions involve striking juxtapositions of image size, from close-up to long shot.*

Coates: Yes, and I think cuts like that are helped with sound, which functions almost like a dissolve, as opposed to a pictorial dissolve.

Cineaste: *Not many editors think in both visual and aural terms.*

Coates: I believe editors should be thinking both about sound and the music. Sometimes I've cut scenes in a particular way because I'm thinking how a music cue or the theme will work really well there, so I'll allow a little pause in that spot. I don't think you should cut for music but you should certainly consider the music when you're cutting.

Cineaste: *One of my favorite cuts introduces Lawrence and the Bedouin army as they come upon an Arab village where the Turks have committed atrocities against the civilian population. A panning shot shows the retreating Turkish army in the background and the devastation they have wreaked in the foreground, including raped women and mutilated bodies. Then a jump cut reveals an Arab tribal flag billowing across the screen, which quickly reveals Lawrence, seething with anger, as he surveys the scene. Could you describe how that particular transition, which uses a natural element within the frame to create a "wipe," was created? Was it planned during the shooting or created in the editing room?*

Coates: I don't remember David ever saying it was planned, but of course I wasn't there when David shot it. I remember it being something we found in the material and thought it would be great. You often do find—not just in *Lawrence* but also in other films—really interesting "wipes" in your footage, which you can use to wipe to something in a very effective way. But the one in *Lawrence* was a really special one.

Cineaste: *Another imaginative series of cuts in that sequence involves the view of the underside of a Turkish military cart hauled by a donkey, with a pair of hanging water ladles banging together slowly and rhythmically. Later, as the Arab army begins its assault, you cut back to those same ladles, now suddenly and loudly banging together, as the cart is jerked forward. Could you describe how that bit of editing came about?*

Coates: That was found in the editing room, among the thousands of feet of footage. Those were almost certainly shots from a second camera that would have picked them up. I think the clanging noise reflected the discordant sounds of the battlefield and then the louder jarring noise in the later close-up echoes the jarring in Lawrence's mind, which sets him off on a path of destruction.

Cineaste: *The film often uses natural elements—the sky, sandstorms, and so on—to provide seamless transitions from one scene to another.*

Coates: I think David had cut some stuff in his head and some of it worked but some of it didn't, so we had to improvise and do other

things. He shot quite a lot of variations, even on the dialog scenes, but certainly some cuts—such as the use of Bentley's business card—were planned.

Cineaste: *Another characteristic of the film is that you were not afraid to let a shot or sequence run long, such as the departure of the Arab column for Akaba, with Lawrence beaming, Auda's men singing, and the women ululating from atop the cliffs of Wadi Rumm, all complemented by Jarre's score, with the scene building its own rhythm, for nearly four minutes, which in screen time is an eternity.*

Coates: Well, if I had been on my own, especially being quite young then and as an editor having pacing on my mind a lot, I wouldn't have dared cut that scene for quite so long. But David taught me to hang on. He said, "If you really believe in a scene, hang on to it, hold it until the bitter end. Wait until we get the music and the sound effects on it and it will be perfect." And of course it was. But I was worried about the length of some of those scenes.

Cineaste: *Most people would look at a scene like that and say, "Well, we're not advancing the narrative here."*

Coates: Not much—a little bit, not a lot—but you were creating a lot of atmosphere and some tension. David taught me to be brave and I think it's stood me in good stead throughout my editing career. If you believe in something you should go for it.

Cineaste: *The extraordinarily high level of creativity in* Lawrence of Arabia *is reflected not only in the direction, cinematography, and editing but also in production design and set decoration. One example of such a creative detail is seen during the Arab assault on Akaba, in the split-second shot from the interior of a Turkish military tent, with the Arab forces seen through the opening of the tent, riding through the encampment in the background, while in the foreground of the shot we see a Turkish soldier's pin-up of a belly dancer.*

Coates: That was not necessarily a second-unit shot, but probably second camera.

Cineaste: *Was that detail courtesy of Property Master Eddie Fowlie?*

Coates: I'm not sure. It could be. It sounds like Eddie Fowlie. But the fact that we managed to get it into the cut, without slowing the film down at all, was remarkable. If you can pick out those little things, you can cut them in so quickly.

Cineaste: *Details like that enrich a scene and take it out of the ordinary.*

Coates: I don't know whether or not David asked for the shot of the pin-up to be photographed, but the fact that he used it is interesting.

Cineaste: *Within five weeks of the film's December 1962 premiere about twenty minutes were removed from the film. How did that come about?*

Coates: There was all sorts of talk about the film being too long, for various reasons—like they were missing a screening a day so exhibitors were losing money, or how couples with babysitters couldn't get home in time. They would never admit it—well, they're all dead now, anyway—but I know that Billy Wilder and other directors who were great friends of David, thought it was too long and those are the people that David respected and listened to. He listened to them more than he listened to distributors or exhibitors who complained about losing a screening per day. And it was those same directors who praised David when he did the restoration!

An Arab tribal flag seen billowing in front of Lawrence, an image found in the editing room, was used by Coates as a natural "wipe" to dramatically introduce a key scene in *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Cineaste: *Another fifteen minutes were then cut for the film's theatrical rerelease and television broadcast in 1971. Were you involved with that phase of the editing?*

Coates: Yes, I also did that edit as well. I remember that Sam Spiegel paid me really badly on *Lawrence.*

Cineaste: *You weren't the only one.*

Coates: No, exactly. One of the things he said to me when I was first hired to edit the film was, "Well, you know after you've done *Lawrence,* you'll be able to ask any money you like." So when I went back years later to do the cutdown for television, I asked for quite a lot of money. Sam blew up and I said, "Well, you said after I cut *Lawrence* I could ask any money I'd like, and I'm asking it." I knew nobody else could do it because the only other person who could have done it was Norman Savage, who was in the middle of some other huge film and couldn't do it, and I was available.

Cineaste: *Sam Spiegel was notorious for being a tightwad.*

Coates: And yet if he was late for dailies—as he often was, he kept us waiting for hours and hours sometimes—he'd occasionally send my crew and I for lunch to the Mirabel, which is one of the most expensive restaurants in London, and we'd be treated to a lovely meal and the boys were given cigars and things.

Cineaste: *You were also involved*

in the editing of the restored version in 1989. How did that come about?

Coates: I was actually the one they contacted first. I don't know why, but they were too terrified to tell David they were going to do it. Apparently Bob Harris was looking all over for me. It's an extraordinary story because one of the phone calls he made was to Jon Davison, who was working on *Robocop* at that time, and he asked him if he knew where I was. "She's next door," he said, because I was actually in California at the time, cutting *Masters of the Universe.* So I phoned Bob back and he explained their plans to restore the film and asked if I thought David would like the idea. I said, "Well, I think he'd love the idea, he'd be only too happy, because he never wanted to cut it down." Bob said, "Well, we're not sure how we should approach him. Would you like to call him and ask if he'd like to do it?" "Sure," I said. At that time David was working on the first script of *Nostromo* with Christopher Hampton. "If you get me his phone number, I'll give him a call," which I did. David said, "Oh, what a wonderful idea, that's terrific." He asked the same thing that I did, which was could they find all the material? Studios usually dump original materials but because it was 70mm they hadn't.

A split-second shot from inside a Turkish tent during the assault on Akaba provides a poignant visual detail in *Lawrence of Arabia.*

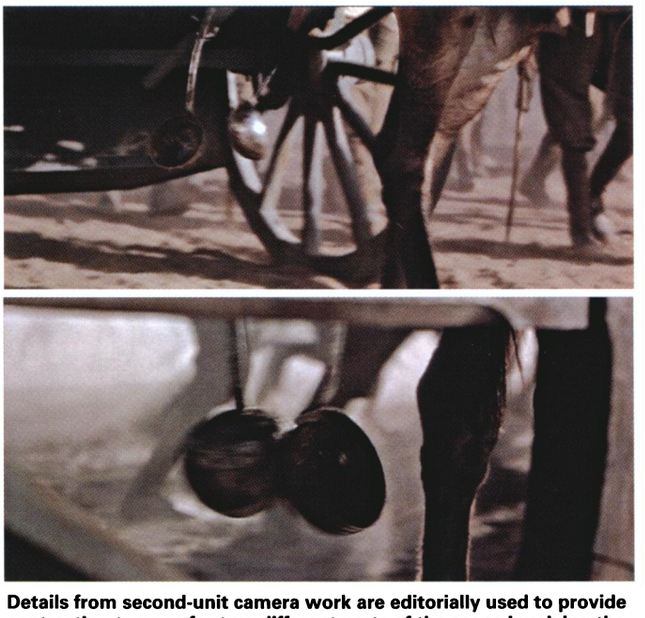
"I hated having to cut the film down. In a way, I think I hated it more than David did. I was definitely more demonstrative about my hatred of cutting it down."

I was worried about whether they'd be able to find the material and what condition it would be in and all sorts of things. Bob said, "Well, it's all there with your writing and the elastic bands that you put around the reels." He said they'd found most everything. So when I spoke with David, we both said, "Whoa, we can put back the goggles." I can't think how we ever removed that shot, as it was only a tiny cut, but it was obviously something we both loved and we were so happy to be able to put it back in.

I hated having to cut the film down. In a way, I think I hated it more than David did. I was definitely more demonstrative about my hatred of cutting it down. David sometimes said that great editing is what you leave out, not what you put in. I've always remembered that as I've torn out sequences I really love.

Cineaste: *It was disappointing for many fans of the fim that you were unable to completely restore the "seduction" scene between General Allenby and Lawrence on the balcony. Was that largely a technical problem because the soundtrack on much of that scene couldn't be found?*

Coates: There was no guide track but the problem was more of a dramatic than a technical one. Jack Hawkins had a delivery all his own, with some humphs and breaths and things like that. So, although we mostly knew the dialog, we didn't know the rhythm of the way he played it. Charles Gray was able to do a very good imitation of him, but actually to lip-sync him, to make it sound real, with all those pauses and gulps and things, it just didn't work dramatically. Everybody else that we looped afterwards, like Alec Guinness—although I can hear the difference in Alec's voice—worked out fine, but the Jack Hawkins scene just didn't, so it seemed better not to put it in half-cocked, as it were. I was disappointed.



Details from second-unit camera work are editorially used to provide contrasting tempos for two different parts of the scene involving the massacre of the retreating Turkish Army in *Lawrence of Arabia.*

Cineaste: *There were also a few technical glitches that I gather couldn't be repaired, such as a slight jump as Lawrence starts up the stairs from the basement for his meeting with General Murray.*

Coates: Yes, we were missing three frames, so it jumps a bit. But it's amazing how most people don't notice that. When they're scenes where there's not much movement, you don't notice a few missing frames so much, but in a scene of movement like that, where you've got him running along, you notice it. The negative had been cut through on those three frames, so they couldn't be restored. In those days you cut through the center of the frames, so whenever you did a join, you lost a frame. Nowadays we could put it back perfectly.

I'll tell you an interesting thing about the restoration. As you've pointed out, we really didn't have enough time to finish the picture and to do as much polishing on it as we would have liked. I said to David, as we were talking about it, it does strike me that some of the scenes are a little long and maybe we could trim them up a bit. I mentioned the scene where they ride into Auda's camp, after he says, "Dine with me," and Lawrence is really happy and Sherif Ali is really nervous because he thinks it's a trap, with all of Auda's men riding around them in a big circle, shouting and firing their guns. I said, "That's too long, I'll try cutting it down." "OK," David said, "take it away and do a cut on it."

I probably took about a minute out. It looked really good in a way, but when we ran it with the rest of the film, we both looked at each other and said, "No, it doesn't work. The scene has its own rhythm and you can't interfere with it." It was perfect on its own—it made perfect sense, everything was there—but the rhythm that we somehow established in the whole film wasn't there. So David said, "Well, it was a great idea, but put it back."

So maybe it wouldn't have been such a different cut if we had originally had more time. I always thought that some of the shots were a bit long—not scenes we're talking about, like Wadi Rumm, which were specifically long—but I was thinking of other shots that could be trimmed up a little. But maybe it wouldn't have made it any better. It is what it is. ■