

CARSON-NEWMAN COLLEGE

WANDERING WARRIORS: TWO 20TH CENTURY ICONS OF REVOLUTION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE HONORS COUNCIL

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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JEFFERSON CITY, TN

FEBRUARY 2009

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An Introduction

...if you can get the right book at the right time you taste joys— not only bodily, physical, but spiritual also, which pass one out above and beyond one's miserable self, as it were through a huge air, following the light of another man's thought. —T. E. Lawrence¹

Popular culture representations of historical figures can both illuminate and obscure historical reality. Two such iconic images from the 20th century were T.E. Lawrence, otherwise known as “Lawrence of Arabia,” and Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Lawrence will forever be embodied by the actor Peter O’Toole as a character who is commanding and dashing as he dons a turban and white, flowing robes.² Guevara’s face will always be the beret-wearing relief on red t-shirts worn by pseudo-revolutionary college students the world over. One Che biographer has written, “This is the fate of those who inspire nostalgia: to be trapped in the coffers of consumerism or in the shelter of innocence.”³ But the lives of Che and Lawrence reach far beyond nostalgia; they represent the idealism of the war-ridden 20th Century. Lawrence is the icon of the beginning of the nationalist movements that lie behind World Wars I and II, while Che ushered in the end of that era by guiding more socially-driven revolts during the turbulent 1950s and 60s. Lawrence was the Western leader of the Arab Revolt, a key movement in the eventual overthrow of the Ottoman Turks in World War I.⁴ Guevara was the military commander of Fidel Castro’s force in Cuba during the Batista Overthrow of 1956-58.⁵ Both were guerrilla warriors in their own right and both have become icons, especially in the Western world, of

¹ Malcolm Brown, ed. *T. E. Lawrence: The Selected Letters* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1988), 24.

² *Lawrence of Arabia*, David Lean, Horizon Pictures, 1962.

³ Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Guevara: Also Known As Che*, trans. Martin Roberts (New York: St. Martin’s, 1997), xi.

⁴ Michael Asher, *Lawrence: The Uncrowned King of Arabia* (London: Penguin, 1999).

⁵ Ernesto Guevara, *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey*, ed. and trans. Alexandra Keeble (New York: Ocean Press, 2004), 7-10.

revolution and revolutionary movements, and the development of their characters is strikingly comparable. The story of Che casts an interesting light onto the legacy of Lawrence, because it represents the end of the progression of 20th century revolutionary iconography that began with Lawrence.

Both men were intellectuals, born of the aristocracy, and each went on to write his own account of the events that made him famous. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* is a work of historical prose and a dramatic narration of his experiences in Arabia.⁶ Guevara's most famous works were the inspirational ramblings compiled in his notebooks and instructional pamphlets that enabled his ideas to spread around the globe even posthumously.⁷ The comparison of the two men is interesting because their images reveal a great deal about how the world changed between the early 20th century and the post-WWII era.

Che has been both deified and demonized, but he lives on as the voice of the communist revolution and its idealist association with justice for the oppressed peoples of the world. His depiction in the 2008 film *Che* gave him a culturally relevant medium to permeate afresh the minds of young idealists everywhere.⁸ But his story, fraught with tragedy and triumph alike, is not a new one. In fact, the story of the 20th century revolutionary icon really began with T.E. Lawrence, a product of the turn of the century. His portrayal on film in 1962 immortalized him to a new generation; however superficial that image may be, it has become his legacy.

The image immortalized in the film *Lawrence of Arabia* is the romantic, white-robed British savior of the Arab Revolt. That image was solidified by the film and worked well for

⁶ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1935).

⁷ Jon Lee Anderson. *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997).

⁸ *Che*, Steven Soderbergh, IFC Films, 2008.

creating for the public an icon who embodied a hero of Western ideals on the Eastern front.⁹ However, Lawrence was far more than just the champion of the Revolt, and while he may have found his true calling by that feat, by the time he reached the battlefield, he had already been at war with himself for years. The film does not show the motivations spurring Lawrence to lead the Revolt. In large part, he survived and flourished in the desert in 1916 because of the Arabian wanderings of his youth. These wanderings empowered him to become an early 20th century crusader and ambassador to the desert, roles he consciously developed from following the examples of his personal heroes, William Morris¹⁰ and C.M. Doughty.¹¹ These men, great “wanderers” of the Victorian era, helped mold Lawrence’s own character as a wanderer.

Lawrence’s schoolmate, E. F. Hall, pointed out that although Lawrence was a wanderer, he was no “wanderer for wandering’s sake”:

At first we thought him a wanderer for wandering’s sake, with no settled purpose that could bring real achievement; later, perhaps, oppressed with a sense of destiny, wandering for duty— the Arab cause that impelled him. Yet to leave it there would be to miss the joy of his life— both the joy of fulfillment was his, achieved by his iron will, and the joy in beauty of form and colour, the safety-valve of a mighty brain, so often overtaxed beyond the limits of human endurance.¹²

He wandered to achieve that which was beyond himself; he was searching for the purpose just beyond his reach, hoping to achieve it through his “iron will.” He seemed little affected by the stationary world and defined himself by a series of internal dichotomies. The most fundamental of these dichotomies were reader and writer, English and Arab, crusader and

⁹ *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lean, Horizon Pictures, 1962.

¹⁰ Reference to William Morris, 1834-1896, Victorian author and artist.

¹¹ Reference to Charles Montagu Doughty, 1843-1926, author and traveler.

¹² Arnold Lawrence, ed. *T.E. Lawrence: By His Friends* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1937), 34.

scholar. These internal struggles coincided with his wanderings and helped shape his character long before his famous work in the Revolt began.

A Biographical Overview¹³

The 1962 film epic *Lawrence of Arabia* starred Peter O'Toole and won seven Oscars, achieving a visual mastery never before seen on film.¹⁴ The character of T. E. Lawrence in the film is a man torn between his duties within and to the British Army and his personal mission to mold the Arabs into a nation. The film captures the eccentricity of this character, highlighting the man who stood alone—Lawrence the individual revolutionary; it also follows very closely the storyline created by Lawrence himself in his memoir of the Arab Revolt, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*.¹⁵ By choosing to draw primarily from this work of literature, the film misses many of the basic traits of the man behind it. His introspection is taken at face value, but those around him at the time would have seen someone rather different—someone who revealed little of his true self.

He was, according to his friend E.F. Hall, “an enigma even unto himself.” This is reflected in one of the very first scenes of the film, when the attendees of his funeral are reflecting on the extraordinary man they knew and standers-by prod them for more information. Lawrence’s friends respond with generalities, admitting that they never really knew him at all. The Lawrence of the film projects smugness and eccentricity that effectively overshadow the harder-to-portray characteristics of self-sacrifice and over-intelligence that defined Lawrence to those who knew him personally.¹⁶ Lawrence’s own whimsicality and subtle ironic humor are captured in the film. His speech is above everyone around him, hinting at a higher mind, but very

¹³ Summary drawn from Lawrence, *By His Friends*, xi-xii. and Asher, *Uncrowned King*.

¹⁴ *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lean.

¹⁵ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*.

¹⁶ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 31.

few scenes showcase his true book-knowledge and carefully sculpted intellect. His intelligence is the part of his character that reaches most deeply into his past and, as the film only portrays the portion of his life spent in the Arab Revolt, most of his past is left undisclosed. The film succeeds in depicting the biographically important actions of the Arab Revolt, but at the expense of historical accuracy and historical significance. For example, the film spends a great deal of time building up the story of Lawrence's supposed rape by Turkish troops.¹⁷ While Lawrence claimed this event as a detrimental blow to his character, historians argue whether it even occurred at all because multiple discrepancies exist in Lawrence's story.¹⁸ To understand the actual achievements and failures of the film in historical context, it is important to outline the significant milestones of the Arab Revolt beginning with the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and, consequentially, Lawrence's part in aiding that Revolt in the years 1916-1918.

The Arab Revolt¹⁹

Grand Sherif Hussein ibn Ali of Mecca was the Turkish-appointed Arab ruler of the Hejaz region of Arabia who became a supporter of the Allies at the outbreak of WWI. He essentially founded the Arabian Nationalist Movement and, therefore, the Arab Revolt itself. His supporters worked with the Royal Navy to capture much of the Arabian coast from the Turks, but by 1916 his resistance was beginning to slow. The British saw the advantage of having an Arab alliance on their side, but could not commit to support Hussein until they knew for sure that the Arabs would put up a fight. They sent young Captain Lawrence to assess the situation.²⁰

¹⁷ *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lean. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 441-47.

¹⁸ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 282-92.

¹⁹ Summary drawn from Asher, *Uncrowned King*, Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, and "Lawrence of Arabia: The Arab Revolt," <http://www.pbs.org/lawrenceofarabia/revolt/index.html>.

²⁰ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 168-73.

The pride of the Bedu tribes kept them from being pushed by the British. However, as Lawrence points out, “While very difficult to drive, the Bedu are easy to lead.” The Arabs were willing to follow a leader who was capable and competent, but they were unwilling to be bullied by the will of foreigners; in their minds this would be viewed with the same regard as the Turkish occupation they were already under. Lawrence immediately recognized Sherif Feisal as the man both the Arabs and the British could back. Feisal was the son of the aforementioned Grand Emir of Mecca and supposedly a direct descendent of the Prophet Mohammad. He was educated and well connected and had a much better temperament than his father. Lawrence described his first impressions of him in a letter to his mother saying,

Sherif Feisul, to whom I am attached, is 31, tall, slight, lively, well-educated. He is charming towards me, and we get on perfectly together. He has a tremendous reputation in the Arab world as a leader of men, and a diplomat. His strong point is handling tribes: he has the manner that gets on perfectly with tribesmen, and they all love him.²¹

They worked well with one another; Feisal kept the tribal feuds at bay while Lawrence ensured funding from the British. In January of 1917, Lawrence decided to test Feisal’s leadership and the capabilities of the Bedu troops by marching on the city of Wejh. Wejh was important as a base of operations because of its proximity to the Royal Navy on the Red Sea and also the Hejaz Railway. The success of the operation boosted the legitimacy of the campaign and the morale of the Arabs; Feisal’s force grew exponentially and the British supplied it modestly with guns and ammunition. Lawrence planned to move on the port city of Aqaba next, but in the meantime, he incorporated dynamite into the native style of Arab warfare. The Bedu had perfected the tactic of tribal raiding, giving them a unique ability to move in and out of the desert unseen and strike with extreme precision. Lawrence melded the traditional and the modern in his

²¹ Brown, *The Select Letters*, 101.

own brand of guerrilla warfare, which planned to destroy the Turkish supply lines. With the British in control of the Red Sea, the Ottomans were left with only the railways as a means to transport goods and troops. By blowing up the railways, Lawrence inconvenienced and weakened the Turkish Army that remained in Arabia.

By 1917, Aqaba remained the only Ottoman outlet to the Red Sea and its capture would open up a key port for the influx of British supplies to the region. In May of 1917, Lawrence and Feisal traveled across the region to gain supporters and make alliances with the tribes in the desert. Different families required different initiatives to join the revolt; some agreed to send men for mere trinkets like wristwatches while others needed much more convincing. Lawrence's most beneficial alliance was made with Auda Abu Tayi, the commander of the Howetat Bedouin, who was war-worn and wise with a real sympathy for the Arab cause. His Howetat warriors proved a valuable asset to the Arab fighting force and with this hodgepodge assembly of men, the Arabs took Aqaba in July. Even the planning of the Aqaba operation was largely unknown to the British. Lawrence, delighted with the victory and anxious to spread the good news, rode straight to Cairo, breaking all previous time records set for the journey. He met with General Allenby, the supreme commander of the region and proclaimed that Aqaba was in Arab hands. Allenby was thrilled and promised Britain's full support in Lawrence's further expeditions. After the capture of Aqaba, the Arabs were officially included in the overarching Allied strategy to take Damascus.

Damascus fell to the Allies just before the end of the War in 1918. Feisal assumed that he and his supporters would be placed in charge of the city, but were denied authority by the Sykes-Picot Treaty drawn specifically to cede the control to the French. After two years of working together, Lawrence and Feisal had become great friends and Lawrence continually defended him

to his fellow westerners. He joined Feisal as a part of his Arab delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, but the delegation emerged with very little to show for its effort; their petitions for Arab independence were rejected by the European treaty makers and President Wilson was forced to agree. After losing his petitions in Paris, Feisal returned to Syria and crowned himself its king. The French, to whom the land had been given, forced him out within a month. As a consolation prize, the British installed him as the ruler of the newly formed kingdom of Iraq. He reigned there for the remainder of his life.

Lawrence was the key Western player in this story, and was exceptional in his role. He thought both historically and modernly to create the ideal battle strategy for the Arabs under his guidance. His adeptness in decision-making suggested a dignified upbringing and education, but these characteristics are not mentioned in the film, either, they are only suggested. Surely, Lawrence's Victorian upbringing and the cultural bridging of two centuries were crucial components of the context of his life. A biographical understanding of Lawrence is necessary to outline the formation of his character and the motives that spurred him into action.

Lawrence grew up at the end of the Victorian Era as the earlier phase of the Industrial Revolution was playing itself out. The life of an aristocrat was still relatively carefree; one born of standing had the opportunity to pursue an education and the path of his parents. But Lawrence would never fully fit into the pattern of the Victorian Age. Born the second bastard son of Sarah Lawrence and Thomas Chapman, Lawrence's struggle for legitimacy was one that transpired deeply within himself.²²

Lawrence's father, Thomas Chapman, was an English noble who owned an estate in County Kerry, Northern Ireland where he lived with his wife and four young girls. Sarah

²² Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 8-10.

Lawrence was a self-determined orphan who grew up on the Isle of Skye, Scotland. At eighteen, she was offered the post of governess to Chapman's daughters and moved to Ireland to pursue the offer. Chapman was unsatisfied in his marriage and found in Sarah the vivacious companionship for which he was searching. Sarah became pregnant and Chapman chose to leave his wealth and family to follow the love he found with Sarah. They first moved to Dublin and then to Wales, assuming the names Thomas and Sarah Lawrence and claiming a common law marriage. The couple never actually married, but biographers maintain that they lived a relatively happy life together.²³

Thomas Edward Lawrence was born in Tremadoc, Wales on August 16, 1888. He would never forgive fate for allowing him to miss sharing his birthday with Napoleon Bonaparte by just a few hours, and as a child he tagged the resentment onto his answer when he was asked his birthday.²⁴ The Lawrence family moved to Oxford, England in 1896 and the four eldest boys began to attend the Boy's High School. At school, Lawrence developed the need to become distinct from the other boys in his class. Victorian education emphasized uniformity and set modest goals for all students. Lawrence, however, easily and consistently surpassed the norm. He read with a comprehension and retention far beyond his years. More than any other single ability, this particular asset shaped him into a scholar and exceptional military leader more than any other single ability.²⁵

Lawrence got along well with other children and participated happily in group activities that used the muscle of the mind, but he saw organized sports as frivolous pursuits.²⁶ In lieu of team sports, Lawrence excelled at personal feats of endurance. His mother and friends recalled

²³ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 7-10.

²⁴ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 30.

²⁵ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 10.

²⁶ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 32

that Lawrence would sometimes ride his bicycle up to one hundred miles a day to acquire brass rubbings of church carvings and explore castle architecture.²⁷ This, along with collecting and reconstructing pieces of pottery from building sites around Oxford, filled his summer and weekend days. Lawrence researched ancient waterways in map records and then set out to find them, dragging his friends along with him on dangerous excursions.²⁸ He hung the rubbings of medieval knights around his bedroom until the walls were completely covered. After making rubbings, he would spend long hours researching the symbols of heraldry on the suits of armor and the history of the subjects themselves. He donated pottery and artifacts to Oxford's Ashmolean Museum, and some remain in their collections to this day. While other schoolboys were wooing girls and playing petty pranks, Lawrence was breaking into crypts and sweet-talking the caretakers of protected ancient sites.

His father instilled in him the desire to be well rounded, and Lawrence could converse intelligently on many subjects. He developed early an affinity for history and architecture. His mother remembered that Lawrence often borrowed *The Helps to the Study of the Bible* from the Oxford library.²⁹ His devout, church-attending mother attributed this reading to his interest in religion, but it is more likely he used this book to research the land and peoples of Arabia. Lawrence claimed that this love affair developed quite early when he wrote in his book, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, "I fancied to sum it up in my own life that new Asia which inexorable time was slowly bringing upon us. The Arabs made a chivalrous appeal to my young instinct and while still at High School in Oxford, already I thought to make them a nation."³⁰ Lawrence read extensively in the histories of Egypt and accounts of westerner's travels to the East. He found

²⁷ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 27-28

²⁸ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 33.

²⁹ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 23.

³⁰ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 22.

romance in buried archaic cities and wandering ancient tribes. His favorite travel account was *Travels in Arabia Deserta* by Charles Doughty. This King James-style authority of the East was hardly the type of text the average late Victorian youth would be found reading, but Lawrence thought it so important that later in his life he even helped fund a reprint of the book. He also read Henry Layard's accounts on the excavation of the biblical city of Nineveh and waxed poetic over its dusty leaves.³¹

In 1906, Lawrence's last year of high school, he departed on a cycling trip to northern France with his fellow rubbings enthusiast, Cyril Beeson. They explored over 600 miles in a month, specifically seeking out medieval castles and cathedrals.³² He delighted in playing out mock battles in his head, determining the impregnability or defense of fortresses. Upon his return to Oxford, Lawrence familiarized himself with the curators of the Ashmolean Museum, Leonard Woolley and Charles Bell. They gave him the arduous task of sorting through and organizing collections, to which he responded with joyous researching and obsessive cataloguing of any and all insignificant artifacts.³³

Lawrence sought placement to St. John's College at Oxford University but was denied, so he resigned himself to accept a place at Jesus College with a research fellowship instead.³⁴ Even though Lawrence was working on scholarship, he was still constantly distracted in his schoolwork. He claimed that he did not attend lectures and spent most of his time researching his own interests. He became more of a spectacle than ever, drawing attention to himself through his nonconformity. He would fast for days on end, attend meal times in the cafeteria without eating, poke fun at classmates for participating in sport, and ostentatiously abstain from smoking and

³¹ Ibid., 35-38.

³² Ibid., 39.

³³ Ibid., 39-40.

³⁴ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 32.

drinking.³⁵ During the semester he spent in residence at Trinity College, he roamed the quads after curfew, climbing on roofs and other forbidden places.³⁶ He once planned a trip down an underground sewer he had linked to an ancient waterway described by William Morris in his novel, *Wood Beyond the World*. He roped in a couple of fellow mischievous students and set out into the dark unknown, overjoyed to find his calculations were correct. His friends remembered this as one of many adventures, which, although always a surprise to them, had been meticulously planned by Lawrence.³⁷ His college classmate, E. F. Hall, recalled, “The episode of the Trill Mill stream at Oxford was no madcap adventure. On the contrary, it was planned in every detail. He had been probing into the history of Old Oxford and had read in *Wood* of the existence of this stream.”³⁸ Hall then went on to explain the various precautions Lawrence took to ensure the success of the trip.

After a summer trip to France in 1908, once again to study architecture, he was struck with the idea to travel east and explore the medieval construction of Syrian fortresses. His lack of academic discipline at Oxford allowed him time to research his interests in Arabia. His professors noticed his lack of enthusiasm regarding regular coursework and encouraged Lawrence to pursue his undergraduate thesis on medieval castles across Syria.³⁹ The journey and the research that went into creating his thesis, “Crusader Castles,” became crucial to his development and eventual role in the Arab Revolt.

He began planning and preparing for his long anticipated trip. He took lessons in Arabic, sewed specific clothing (light and equipped with many pockets), purchased a camera, and

³⁵ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 32.

³⁶ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 41-42.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁸ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 33.

³⁹ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 55-57.

mapped his course. Before he left, Hogarth, the new director of the Ashmolean and mentor to Lawrence, asked him to collect Hittite seals in the southern regions of Turkey, since he would be traveling in that area. Girded like a soldier for battle, the twenty-year-old Lawrence set out toward Beirut on June 18, 1909.⁴⁰

From his childhood and early adulthood, Lawrence's capacity for scholarship and his identity with medieval chivalry set him apart. His obsession reached an all-time high as he set out for the great unknown that summer. This trip marked the major turning point in his understanding of and affinity for Arabia. At this time, the Ottoman Empire began to play its part as "the sick man of Europe." Lawrence saw the emerging collision of cultures that was brewing in the near East. He found shelter with Jewish missions and English speakers along the way but preferred to stay with Arabs. He was fascinated by their hospitality, enjoyed practicing his language skills, and delighted in learning their customs more with each host.⁴¹ He began to form his identity as a cultural chameleon, eating anything (though he often ate very little) and developing an unpretentious manner that would be accepted across cultures. It was during this trip that he intentionally began to distance himself from his own heritage while also becoming distinctly English in his adaptation of Arab culture. He took pleasure in sharing, with expatriates he met along the way, stories of his harrowing brushes with danger. Intimidated by camels, he refused to ride them, and instead walked ridiculous distances. This preference led to shredded shoes, blistered feet, and heat exhaustion in his trek to obtain Hogarth's Hittite seals and reach Antioch. He succeeded in providing thirty seals for the Ashmolean by dressing up as a local and

⁴⁰ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 60-61.

⁴¹ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 18.

barely eluding Turkish troops who were blocking the way. He did not succeed in reaching Antioch, however, and considered the trip a failure because of this.⁴²

Shortly after he returned to England, Lawrence learned of Hogarth's plan to excavate the ancient Hittite city at Carchemish with funding from the British Museum. He begged Hogarth to take him on. Although the team had already been assembled Hogarth accepted him willingly, probably recalling the sacrifices Lawrence had made to obtain seals on his behalf a few months earlier. Lawrence excitedly prepared by improving his Arabic and brushing up on his pottery identification skills.⁴³ He spent almost four years assisting the dig at Carchemish and remained there through its many transitions. He broke briefly in 1914 to explore other places in the region; he surveyed Sinai with Hogarth and co-authored the report entitled *The Wilderness of Zin*.⁴⁴ Lawrence remembered his time "digging" as the happiest in his life.⁴⁵ It was during this time that Lawrence met Salim Ahmad, nicknamed Dahoum, a water-boy at the site. Dahoum was perhaps the only non-platonic love interest of Lawrence's life (though there is no evidence that they ever engaged in sexual intercourse). It is commonly accepted that he is the "S. A." to whom *Seven Pillars* is dedicated.⁴⁶ Dahoum accompanied Lawrence on a short stint back to Oxford before Lawrence enlisted in the British Army.⁴⁷ It is believed that he died shortly after Lawrence began his Arab campaign.

In 1914, World War I was just beginning to become the tragedy that would require millions of England's young men to join the cause. British War Offices in Cairo recruited Lawrence out of his position at Carchemish and went willingly went to its aid. He used his

⁴² Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 69-74; Brown, *Selected Letters*, 20.

⁴³ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 70. Brown, *Selected Letters*, 25.

⁴⁴ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, xi.

⁴⁵ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 35.

⁴⁶ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 76.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 50.

attention to detail and expertise of the region to make maps, but he officially worked for the Arab Bureau as an information gatherer and report writer. Officers called into the headquarters from all over the region to request or offer information on troop locations, and he traveled extensively through the region investigating the situation on the ground. Lawrence, as he had done with the innumerable findings at Carchemish, committed this information to memory and then made thorough reports at the end of the day.⁴⁸ This job provided him with enough information and familiarity with the regular army to later make educated decisions in the field.⁴⁹ His first solo job in the field was to gather information from the heretofore-hostile Bedu of the Hejaz and to assess their willingness to aid Britain. Lawrence went with a plan in his head and laid it out before Sharif ‘Abdalla. He then insisted on seeing the supreme commander of the Arab forces and possibly the only man who could unify the tribes– Feisal, son of the Grand Sherif Hussein, Prince of Mecca.⁵⁰ No Christian man before Lawrence had been granted permission to pass into the Arab front line, but Feisal saw something different in Lawrence that the other British officers did not have.⁵¹ Lawrence and Feisal connected immediately. Feisal was desperately looking for someone who could take his cause seriously and Lawrence was looking for a face to characterize that cause. Lawrence was no stranger to British war propaganda; he knew at once that Feisal had the look of a leader and that the Arab forces needed just that.⁵²

As Lawrence learned the ways of the Bedu, he thought that they seemed tougher than the other tribesmen he had encountered. He began forming in his mind the structure that would eventually make the guerrilla Bedu force a success in combat. The Bedouin were desert people,

⁴⁸ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 123.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 84.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 88-91.

⁵² Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 234. Brown, *Selected Letters*, 101.

hardened by a life in the wilderness. They were not strangers to warfare, but generally fought for survival or to reconcile a blood feud. Their structure was built upon family ties, working from the immediate family out; this delicate construction made tribes very loyal to one another, but easily subject to collapse if inter-tribal feuds occurred.⁵³ Lawrence recognized the magnitude of his position. He was the only Englishman who had been to the front lines and had managed to gain the trust (however shaky) of Feisal.⁵⁴ He worded his report to the Arab Bureau carefully and then waited, continuing to work in Cairo. It didn't take long for his commanding officers to realize his potential as a liaison with Feisal.⁵⁵

He was sent to follow Feisal's every move, but was soon sharing more of his own ideas and petitioning Cairo for artillery.⁵⁶ To their eternal shame, the British never supplied enough ammunition for the Arab forces. To his eternal fame, Lawrence made do without the Army's full support, instituting a successful guerrilla campaign into the Allied ranks.⁵⁷ His plans mainly consisted of exploding Turkish supply lines at strategic points and times to create the illusion that the force was much larger and widespread than it actually was while disrupting the supply line to the Turkish front.⁵⁸ Lawrence did manage to force a union of Arab tribes to drive the Turks out of the key cities of Wejh, Aqaba, and eventually, Damascus. The way Lawrence maneuvered these troops made taking these larger cities a psychological battle more than a physical one. His strategy involved blowing up portions of the Turkish controlled Hejaz Railway, killing the soldiers aboard the derailed trains, and then dispersing the looted goods among the men as payment. He described the Arab style of fighting saying, "Seriously, the Arabs

⁵³ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 153-54

⁵⁴ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 103.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

put on a surprisingly good show, and as the only Englishman and historian, I get more than my share of notoriety . . . It's the most amateurish, Buffalo Billy sort of performance, and the only people who do it well are the Bedouin.”⁵⁹ Though Lawrence believed he had inspired an uprising of the people against their oppressor, much of his force were little more than mercenaries, fighting initially in exchange for Lawrence's promises of monetary compensation through the British. Later they would see themselves as fighting for Arab self-rule.⁶⁰

By the end of the war, Lawrence had achieved the impossible but had failed to win for the Arabs what they really wanted. Behind his back, the Sykes-Picot Treaty (1916) was being drawn to exclude Arab rule in Arabia and instead split the former Ottoman territories between Britain, France, and Russia. In 1918, Lawrence and Feisal's forces complicated the issue by reaching Damascus and declaring themselves an independent Arab government.⁶¹ Lawrence claimed to have never been aware of any dealings that would have made a lie of his assurances of self-rule to the Arab forces. But in fact, it is very likely that Lawrence did have a relatively clear idea of what was being planned to occur after the War ended.⁶² His promises to Feisal and the Bedouin forces were a hope that turned out to be false.

The Peace of Paris would be for Arabia, like so many nations, a fateful occasion. Lawrence attended the meetings in his Bedu headdress and voiced his opinions, much to the chagrin of the other Western diplomats. A famous picture from the conference of Lawrence dressed in khakis and a turban amongst the neatly uniformed European representatives spoke to his role as the iconic and eccentric outcast of the Conference. He spoke collectedly and intelligently, but was too passionate about the cause of Arab autonomy for the tastes of many. He

⁵⁹ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 125-26.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 117, 120.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 154-55.

⁶² Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 274-78.

failed to convince the negotiators to give Arabia to the Arabs. The remainder of Lawrence's life seemed a personal penance for the sins he believed he had committed against the Arab people.

He never forgave himself, but lived on the best he could.⁶³ He never returned to Arabia, though he did spend some time in Egypt and India on Army business.⁶⁴ He was also an advisor to Winston's Churchill's administration, offering valuable counsel about the Arab situation. Churchill remembered Lawrence with the highest regard, and in a tribute to Lawrence, referred to his *Seven Pillars* as one of the best works in the English language.⁶⁵ His growing fame, however, caused his increased isolation. During the desert campaign, an American reporter named Lowell Thomas had made Lawrence's name known in both Britain and America. He created a production out of the footage, pictures, and information he gained while following Lawrence in the desert. Crowds from all over England flocked to Thomas' showings.⁶⁶ This notoriety only caused Lawrence more difficulty. He desperately wished to return to the field of archeology, but the British Museum claimed they could not risk compromising a dig site with his celebrity. Eventually, he used his contacts from the military to secure a number of minor placements in the R. A. F. across England under an assumed name to avoid detection by the media.⁶⁷

It is apparent that Lawrence was propelled into the Arab Revolt by the experiences he gained years before through his studies and travels. These wanderings were inspired by the most

⁶³ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 170.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁶⁵ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 199.

⁶⁶ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 171. "I am painfully aware of what Mr. Lowell Thomas is doing... [his lectures and writings] are making life very difficult for me, as I have neither the money nor the wish to maintain my constant character as the mountebank he makes me."

⁶⁷ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 135. "As soon as the war ends I'm going to build a railway in S. America, or dig up a S. African gold-field, to emancipate myself. Carchemish ill either be hostile (Turks will never let me in again) or friendly (Arab), and after being a sort of king-maker one will not be allowed to go digging quietly again. Nuisance."

formidable influences in his young life— his books. He wrote passionately about his feelings for them in a letter to his mother during one of his first real “wanderings” to France saying,

Why cannot one make one’s books live except in the night, after hours of straining? And you know they have to be your own books, too, & you have to read them more than once. I think they take in something of your personality, & your environment also— you know a second hand book sometimes is so much more flesh and blood than a new one. – and it is almost terrible to think that your ideas, yourself in your books may be giving life to generations of readers after you are forgotten. It is that specially which makes one need good books: books that will be worthy of what you are going to put into them. What would you think of a great sculptor who flung away his gifts on modeling clay or sand? Imagination should be put into the most precious caskets, & that is why one can live in the future or the past, in Utopia, or the Wood Beyond the World.⁶⁸

At the time of Lawrence’s death in 1935, there were over 1500 volumes in his personal library at his residence at Clouds Hill.⁶⁹ This collection included a great range of books that showcased the diversity of his intellectual interests. His friend Edward Garnett described Lawrence as “a critic in action.”⁷⁰ Reading was his greatest passion; he included a reference to some work of literature in almost every piece of correspondence he wrote. But of the books at Clouds Hill, the most beloved would surely have been those of his youth, the very stories that acted as guide lamps for his journeys to Arabia. The foremost of these influential works were his worn copies of William Morris, Lawrence’s favorite author, whose life and works affected Lawrence greatly.⁷¹ Also of immense influence was C. M. Doughty’s *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, a popular Romantic travelogue. Later in his life, Lawrence funded and even wrote the foreword to a reprinted edition

⁶⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁹ Lawrence’s home in Dorset. Full book list can be found in Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 425.

⁷⁰ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 409.

⁷¹ Harold Orlans, ed., *Lawrence of Arabia, Strange Man of Letters: The Literary Criticism and Correspondence of T.E. Lawrence* [New York: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993], 23.

of *Deserta* in 1921 and there were four different editions of the book in his collection at Clouds Hill.⁷²

He connected to Morris and Doughty both biographically and ideologically; he mimicked the actions of both men throughout his life. Lawrence loved Morris the man and subscribed to Morris the product. He followed in his footsteps—traveling to castles across Britain and France, fanatically researching medieval history, attempting printing and furniture design, and decorating every residence he inhabited with Morrisian ferocity.⁷³ As for Doughty, the connection is most obviously the desert.⁷⁴ Lawrence read Doughty’s travelogue enthusiastically and used it as a guide for his journeys to Arabia and his dealings with the people of that region, most prominently the Bedu Nomads. It is clear that on Lawrence’s travels to Arabia he acted as only Doughty could have prescribed.

Lawrence’s legacy lived on through his writings and inspired the 1962 film epic, *Lawrence of Arabia*. The image of Lawrence that survives most prominently in modern minds is the one created by director David Lean and actor Peter O’Toole. The film won seven Academy Awards and holds the top spot on the America Film Institute’s list of Top Ten Film Epics, a category they define as a “large-scale films set in a cinematic interpretation of the past.”⁷⁵

Based mainly on his *Seven Pillars*, the movie remains true to Lawrence’s own accounts of the Arab Revolt. While it glosses over his life before the war, it portrays some of the most crucial portions of Lawrence’s story in stunning detail. Ironically, the stories highlighted by the film, which were very heroic in content, are some of the ones most disputed by biographers and

⁷² C.M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* [New York: Boni & Liveright, 1923].

⁷³ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 27-28.

⁷⁴ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 156. Hart says, “The desert was in his blood and he was one with the spirit of the desert.”

⁷⁵ www.afi.com/10top10/. [accessed January 2009].

historians. One of these crucial sequences of the film is the crossing of the Nefud Desert when Lawrence risks death by rescuing a fallen soldier but then must exact justice in an inter-tribal blood feud by killing the very man he risked his life to save.⁷⁶ Another important scene appears as the story nears its end with chaos breaking out in Damascus. The Arabs find themselves incapable of maintaining the city and are forced to surrender its control to the British.⁷⁷ While these events may not have occurred in reality exactly as Lawrence or the film depict, they do convey the overall personality of Lawrence and his dealings in the Revolt. His selflessness is highlighted when he returns to the merciless desert to save a weaker individual only to have that individual choose death at Lawrence's hand in another moment of weakness. This is a perfect analogy for Lawrence's work with the Arabs. He felt that he was constantly rescuing them from death at the hands of others only to have them destroy their own chance at life. The scene at the end of the film, in Damascus, portrays a divided people who are ill equipped for nationhood. According to the film, no matter how hard Lawrence tried to bring independence to the Arab people, they were not ready to take responsibility for becoming a modern nation. Lawrence left the war dejected and expended, and this is shown in the closing scene where the mighty warrior of the open desert is contained in a modern automobile and driven away, back into "civilization."⁷⁸ This civilization to which Lawrence returned was the same one from which he came, the England that had also ensnared his heroes, William Morris and C.M. Doughty. Like Lawrence, they had left the country of their birth, wandered the world, and returned to write their legacies.

⁷⁶ *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lean.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*.

⁷⁸ *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lean.

CHAPTER 1

Morris: Crusader & Scholar

*I justified myself by my confidence in the Arab Revolt if properly advised. I had been a mover in its beginning; my hopes lay in it. The fatalistic subordination of a professional soldier would have made a proper officer sit down and watch his plan of campaign wrecked by men who thought nothing of it, and to whose spirit it made no appeal. Non nobis, Domine. – T.E. Lawrence*⁷⁹

Lawrence once wrote to Charlotte Shaw, “I suppose everybody loves one writer unreasonably. I’d rather Morris than the world.”⁸⁰ As a young boy, Lawrence fancied himself a Crusader; his bicycle acted as his trusty steed. It is no stretch to assume that William Morris’s life and writings encouraged his vivid imagination. Morris himself rode around the English countryside in a toy suit of armor as a child. To Lawrence, Morris became much more than just a model for childhood daydreams; he became a model for his life’s most passionate undertakings.

Michael Asher, a biographer of Lawrence, observes,

Morris was exactly the kind of polymath that Lawrence would have liked to be: a poet of distinction, novelist, master craftsman, designer, printer and painter who had pioneered the art of brass rubbing, toured Gothic cathedrals in France in the 1850s, trekked through the cold deserts of Iceland, rediscovered Malory’s classic *Morte d’Arthur*, inspired the Arts and Crafts movement, espoused radical socialism, helped found the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and set up the famous Kelmscott Press. Morris’ inspiration, like Lawrence’s, was the medieval period . . .⁸¹

William Morris was a cornerstone and icon of the Romantic Period and his influences were seen across Victorian England. He was especially well known for his influence on the Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th Century. He was an accomplished writer, translator, poet, interior designer, printer, and artist. Morris was famous for his wallpaper designs, which are still

⁷⁹ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 63.

⁸⁰ Orland, *Lawrence of Arabia*, 23.

⁸¹ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 44.

reproduced to this day. His furniture designs, an example of which is the Morris chair, revolutionized home interiors.⁸² It is not hard to see where young Lawrence got his inspiration. He worshipped Morris and his contributions to Victorian culture. He loved verse, he appreciated hand-printed books, observed architecture with an abnormally keen eye, made brass rubbings, styled furniture, and collected tapestries.⁸³ On Lawrence's 1908 bicycling trip across France, he was most interested in the architecture of the castles and cathedrals he came across. These interests are the undeniable influence of William Morris.

It was not just Morris's writing that caught his attention. In fact, it is difficult to look at only one facet of Morris without being distracted by the whole character. He was far too talented and intentionally diverse in his pursuits to ever be pigeonholed. Possibly his most important, lasting achievements are the creation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Socialist League of England, both of which can be attributed to him. Only the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings or "Anti-Scrape," as Morris affectionately called it, seemed to have a direct influence on Lawrence. Although neither Morris nor Lawrence were practicing architects, they were both devoted to the study of architecture. Lawrence was drawn to the historical implications of architecture while Morris saw the artistic beauty of building forms. These particular interests in the historical value and beauty seem to overlap between Morris and Lawrence. Morris fought to protect the historical integrity of buildings threatened with "modernization" through refurbishment. He strove to prove that renovating older buildings left

⁸² John Burdick, *William Morris: Redesigning the World* [New York: New Line Books, 2005] 105-7.

⁸³ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 27-29.

them more valuable than if they were restyled to be “fashionable.” Lawrence enjoyed the buildings Morris fought to protect, often making them the destination of his excursions.⁸⁴

Morris’ dabbling in socialism never seemed to have had any direct influence on Lawrence as there is little evidence that Lawrence even read them. He also never alluded to any socialist thought in his own writings. Lawrence did, however, refer to himself as an “artist of sorts” in a letter to his mother written during his first dig with Hogarth, where he poured over artifacts and experimented with restoring them.⁸⁵ He also tried his hand at carving sculptures; his naked figure of Dahoum adorned the top of the dig’s headquarters. Lawrence embraced Morris’ artistic side, but chose to ignore his politics. He was interested particularly in Morris’ novels.

Lawrence referenced a number of Morris’ surviving written works when he wrote to his family and friends, but the books mentioned most were *The Wood Beyond the World*⁸⁶ and *The Well at World’s End*.⁸⁷ Morris’ novel *The Well at World’s End* was stimulation not only to Lawrence’s imagination, but also to some of the greatest minds of modern fiction. Tolkien is said to have taken inspiration from Morris’ imaginary world and romantic characters.⁸⁸ This book does not quite live up to modern standards of adventure writing, as the style is arrhythmic at best. Morris slips in and out of colloquial phrasing and over-adorns the dialogue. However, the writing clearly shows that Morris, like Lawrence, was torn between the modern and the medieval. His world flits between known history, that of the Roman Catholic Church and plays of “Saint George and the Worm,” and the world of dragons and damsels in distress. This conflict is one deeply set in Lawrence, who seems to take his travels to the East with crusader-like seriousness.

⁸⁴ Burdick, *Morris*, 105-7.

⁸⁵ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 34.

⁸⁶ William Morris, *Wood Beyond the World*, (West Lake City: Waking Lion Press, 2006).

⁸⁷ William Morris, *Well at World’s End*, (West Lake City: Waking Lion Press, 2006).

⁸⁸ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 348.

It appears that both found their origin in the medieval and branched from there, the Morris line never much changing direction without the Lawrence line acquiescing to run parallel.

The story of *The Well at World's End* follows the journeys of Ralph, the youngest son of a king in a land much like medieval Germany. His father grants an early inheritance to Ralph's older brothers while Ralph is compelled to stay at home to care for his aging parents and the small kingdom they rule. Ralph is not satisfied with this fate and decides to leave his kingdom in disguise to seek his own knightly adventure. Through a series of house stays, he encounters the peasants of his kingdom who take him in and care for him as he travels. During one of these visits, Ralph hears about the fabled "Well at World's End" whose waters have the power to turn their drinker immortal.

Ralph sets out to find the Well and enters the Wood Perilous, where many adventures befall him. After only a few hours in the forest, a man with a beautiful woman as his hostage appears and questions him. Ralph kills the man and frees the woman, with whom he falls madly in love. She leaves abruptly and Ralph, dumbstruck, revises his goal to include finding the woman again. He continues to travel through the Wood and stop at the small towns along the way. In one of these towns he discovers a book that reveals the story of the Well and its legendary maiden. Ralph instantly recognizes the description as the mysterious woman of the Wood. He then spends three days studying the text, learning all he can before setting out again to find the Lady and the Well.

The tale continues and Ralph encounters adventures that turn his path in every direction. In the end, he finds his true love (not the lady of the Wood) and together they find the Well and

drink from it. They return to Ralph's father's kingdom, welcomed with open arms. Ralph and his lady rule the kingdom and live happily thereafter.⁸⁹

Naturally, Lawrence could relate to the restless-crusader character of Ralph. Morris's protagonist is itching to do something out-of-the-ordinary, to seek his own adventure and make something of himself. Ralph feels that he is more qualified to go adventuring than his brothers, and so leaves the realm against his father's wishes. Though Lawrence's other brothers were not quite homebodies, Lawrence in particular was the one destined to leave Oxford to seek his own fancies. He was very close to his mother and they kept close confidences through correspondence until her death. To the other boys, who experienced the same closeness, this was a stifling relationship, but Lawrence found a way to maintain the emotional closeness with his mother while being at a distance.⁹⁰

In Chapter Five of the *Well at Word's End*, Morris describes the heart of Ralph's wanderlust saying, "he had come forth not for the winning of fatter peace, but to try what new thing his youth and his might and his high hope and his good hap might accomplish."⁹¹ This statement could just as easily have described the young Lawrence, setting out on his "digging." He felt at times like a mighty warrior trapped to do house chores. Lawrence was at times bored by the monotony of the dig, and he daydreamed about his future:

I fear very much we will never get it done: in which case I fear my opportunities of doing something good that will count will be very small: at least I am not going to put all my energies into rubbish like writing history, or becoming an archeologist. I would much rather write a novel, even, or become a newspaper correspondent.⁹²

⁸⁹ Morris, *Well*.

⁹⁰ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 16-17.

⁹¹ Morris, *Well*, Chapter 5.

⁹² Brown, *Selected Letters*, 34.

He was one spurred by his own aspirations, a young idealist wishing to make a difference.⁹³ Previous statements suggest Lawrence was disinterested in anything beyond the humanities, but this notion is contradicted by the many evidences that Lawrence was interested in a life in the East before his tedium at the dig. He was convinced even then that his young mind was capable of leading nations and made heroic statements to justify his actions. He became a crusading knight with his own internal marching orders. He conveys these thoughts that compelled him in the following quote referring to the Arab need for the crusader-like leader he believed himself to be:

Such people demanded a war-cry and banner from outside to combine them, and a stranger to lead them, one whose supremacy should be based on an idea: illogical, undeniable, discriminate; which instinct might accept and reason find no rational basis to reject or approve.⁹⁴

This idea, that Lawrence was the savior of the Revolt, created some tension between Feisal and Lawrence and indeed has left a bad taste in the mouths of many Arabs to this day. Historians in both hemispheres debate whether or not the Arabs would ever have successfully revolted without the help of Lawrence. The fact that no one else at this time, save the remarkable traveler-scholar Gertrude Bell, had the field experience that Lawrence had made him outstanding among the ranks. This, his unique thirst for knowledge, and his active demeanor made him suited to lead the Revolt inasmuch as organization and correspondence were concerned. There is also no doubt that British funding essentially made the action possible. Lawrence created the Arab army by understanding that the tribes would never unite initially without the hope of a financial award and also by knowing the power of the relief he could bring to the British side if his strikes

⁹³ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 157. Hart said, “It would become as he developed his reflection, a philosophical crusade.”

⁹⁴ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 236.

succeeded.⁹⁵ He set out not only to make a nation for the Arab people, but also to do “something good that will count.”⁹⁶

He explained his goal further with this statement:

I wanted contact with the British; to act as the right wing of the Allies in the conquest of Palestine and Syria; and to assert the Arab-speaking people’s desire or desert of freedom and self-government. In my view, if the revolt did not reach the main battlefield against Turkey it would have to confess failure, and remain a side-show of a side-show.⁹⁷

Lawrence was not one to accept failure. He would either do something great or do nothing at all. He would either hole himself up in his shed with books or assault the cathedrals of England on his bike or the castles of Syria on foot. His self-imposed tasks were all together awe-inspiring, making him a singularly equipped character to fighting heroically in the arduous desert.

He could use his past experience with the desert to impress the British, but the Arabs only trusted what they saw. He presented them with his warrior image. His inspiring tests of crusading endurance are exemplified in his story of risking death for a lost (and likely drunk) Arab comrade who would have certainly died in the unforgiving desert if Lawrence had not turned back to rescue him. The other men did not understand his sacrifice at the time, but were impressed with his tenacity. Lawrence did it to test his fortitude and prove his loyalty to the Arab soldiers, putting their lives above his own.⁹⁸

He girded himself in the garb of the Arabs and gave up his fear of camels to become a desert warrior. His troops recalled later that few could beat Lawrence riding camelback and even

⁹⁵ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 73-75.

⁹⁶ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 161. Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 161. Hart, “His power sprang from knowledge and understanding, not from position.”

⁹⁷ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 274.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 181-82.

fewer could outshoot him. He became an Arab crusader, prepared to lead his men under the flag of independence, sacrificing himself to the cause of the Arabs which he declared was, “fighting to get rid of Empire, not to win it.”⁹⁹ Lawrence took his inspiration of moving from a reader to a writer and from a scholar to a crusader from the example of another of his Victorian mentors, C.M. Doughty. Doughty spurred Lawrence to become a man-of-action and not just a dusty historian. When Lawrence took up the cause of Doughty, he turned his back forever on the clean, English life and embraced the gritty life of the desert.

Lawrence had a prominent internal conflict of always leaning toward the archeological while he was required to live in the everyday, aboveground world. He sought outside sources to help him come to terms with this conflict, but his passion for digging was mostly self-induced and represents his pattern of returning into the background, effectively burying himself like the ruins he studied. His need for these explorations was intrinsically linked to his need to wander and he turned to Hogarth, curator of the Ashmolean museum, to satiate this need. Hogarth certainly encouraged his passion for digging, but he was always just a resource, a person of the present, when Lawrence only found inspiration in the past. Thus, there existed within Lawrence a constant warring between the romantic and the historic.¹⁰⁰ He found both not necessarily exclusive; he instead constantly melded the two in his mind. Lawrence saw himself as beyond both of the concepts, unbound by time or reality.¹⁰¹ He looked at and processed the world with a Romantic eye but communicated what he saw historically.¹⁰² He also constantly reconciled himself between the East and the West. He believed the East to be very much his own, staking a

⁹⁹ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 340.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 132, 224. “Written history is inevitable long & must be judged by the standard of epic rather than lyric... But modern history tries to be a science, not an art.”

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 181. “I’m academic idyllic, romantic...”

¹⁰² This is best exemplified in his letters. Brown, 59, 202. “There’s no absolute in the imaginative world, and so journeymen like myself are confused and miserable in it.”

claim on it. At the same time, his heartstrings were still tied to the West in the culture of Oxford and London with his educated, English friends. The Romantic side of him, the Morris side of knights and castles and art, and the Historic side him, the Doughty side of adventure and mystique, perpetually coexisted. Because Lawrence was always looking backward, he did not realize that the world was moving beyond the Romantic, and he became the perfect portrait of the death of that era.

Lawrence's dual identity did, however, contribute greatly to his abilities as a military leader. Hart recalls his ambition in undertaking the role of commander as, "the immersed ambition of the artist— sinking himself in his purpose."¹⁰³ Though he never fancied himself a soldier, his mind was uniquely capable of forming the guerrilla band needed to take on the Turkish lines. This perfection he believed he had reached in the art of "soldiering" was the inspiration for his most important published work, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. He was inspired to become a crusading knight of the Arab cause by William Morris's heroes and C.M. Doughty's exhaustive descriptions inspired him to write as the lone English voice in the desert. No matter how much Lawrence strove to be a true artist, he lacked the creativity to achieve it. He was too much of a method man, spending his time searching for patterns, hoping to find a key that would unlock complex mysteries, but coming up with nothing original in the process. Lawrence was a mimic to his core and this is why he was incredibly successful but never satisfied with his work.¹⁰⁴ Hart, Lawrence's friend and famous historian, deduced quite rightly that Lawrence's

¹⁰³ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 157.

¹⁰⁴ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 43-47. Brown, *Selected Letters*, 200. "In my case, I have, I believe, taken refuge in second-hand words: I mean, I think I've borrowed expressions and adjectives and ideas from everybody I have ever read, and cut them down to my own size, and stitched them together again."

only true art was that of warfare. It was the medium in which he felt he could truly excel.¹⁰⁵ This theory is entirely consistent with Lawrence's personality. In war, Lawrence was able to use his extensive book knowledge and personal experience to create a work and then have it played out. Because the work was an active and not a stagnant piece, he was able to resolve and improve the imperfections of individual movements. War was Lawrence's one perfect craft, his active art.¹⁰⁶

His entire perception of himself changed when he accepted the challenge to oversee Arab participation in the attack on the Turks. He moved from a mere reader to a man of action, which he would have thought himself completely incapable of being before. He found the means to become a writer, writing his only book of consequence with material gained from his true art, transcending mere soldiery and becoming a guerrilla leader. This follows his pattern of putting research into practice. He was always extremely thorough, from the maps to the waterways, from the maps to the castles, and from the maps to the desert. Hart describes the metamorphosis as one "born of ambition, founded on knowledge, executed through personality." His skills learned in wandering came to their peak on the battlefield, but he still believed himself incapable of greatness.¹⁰⁷ He describes the process of making the decision to lead the Revolt in *Seven Pillars* saying,

I urged my complete unfitness for the job: said I hated responsibility— obviously the position of conscientious advisor would be responsible— and that in all my life objects had been gladder to me than persons, and ideas than objects. So the duty of succeeding with men, of disposing them to any purpose, would be doubly hard to me. They were not my medium: I was not practiced in that technique. I was unlike a soldier: hated soldiering. Of course, I had read the usual books (too many books), Clausewitz and Jomini, Mahan and Foch, had played at Napoleon's campaigns, worked at Hannibal's tactics, and the wars of Belisarius, like any

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 160.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *Selected Letters*, "The perfect artist is half-critic & half-creator."

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 156.

other man at Oxford; but I had never thought myself into the mind of a real commander compelled to fight a campaign of his own.¹⁰⁸

His inspirations, then, link more heavily to Morris and Doughty than the war-masters of his scholarly studies. His predisposition to Romanticism combined with the profound knowledge of the country he had gained in his earlier travels among the Arabs prepared him more for his unique role in the war. Hart also claims, “He is the only one whom it can truly be said— that he evolved a theory, developed it, and grasped its bearing on the whole evolution of war.”¹⁰⁹

Lawrence knew that if he did not think of a way for a small band to make a huge difference in the fight against the Turks, that small band would soon be forgotten in the bigger picture. He had to act fast. Lawrence described the process of developing his concept of subversive warfare in the following passage:¹¹⁰

My wits, hostile to the abstract, took refuge in Arabia again. Translated into Arabic the algebraic factor would first take practical account of the area we wished to deliver . . . but suppose we were (as we might be) an influence, an idea, a thing intangible, invulnerable, without front or back, drifting about like a gas? Armies were like plants, immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head. We might be a vapour, blowing where we listed. Our kingdoms lay in each man’s mind; and as we wanted nothing material to live on, so we might offer nothing material to the killing. It seemed a regular soldier might be helpless without a target, owning only what he sat on, and subjugating only what, by order, he could poke his rifle at.¹¹¹

The Arab forces would not be fighting a simple battle for territory, but for the idea of Arab identity and, thus, Arab autonomy. Lawrence used those ideas to help create a force fighting battles in their minds as well as on the field, battles to regain control of a region long

¹⁰⁸ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 114.

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 158.

¹¹⁰ Lawrence, *Selected Letters*, 104. “The Arab Movement is a curious thing. It is really very small and weak in its beginning . . . It has however capacity for expansion- in the same degree over a very wide area.”

¹¹¹ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 192.

forfeited. He might not have understood the finer points of maintaining a guerrilla force, but he certainly understood the concept and executed it satisfactorily. His reading in military formalities did not prepare him as much to do this as his travels in Arabia did. He understood the people and the land, and with that understanding, what it would take to drive out the Turkish forces. His vision was one colored with multiculturalism and molded by more than the British influence. This would become the source of his disappointments with the British Army and their betrayal of the Arabs after the war.¹¹² Lawrence became like an Arab during his extensive contact with them, but he always maintained his British background. This was also the story of his personal desert hero, C.M. Doughty, the man who inspired him to wander from behind his desk into the uncertain East.

¹¹² Brown, *Selected Letters*, 99.

CHAPTER 2

Doughty: Bedouin & Brit

His urge gained its way because it was based on knowledge. . . . His knowledge of the Arabs came by immersion as well as by study . . . He got inside the Arab's skin first, and then transcended it. –Capt. B. H. Liddell Hart¹¹³

Doughty influenced Lawrence to move from mere bookish pursuits to a life defined by action. Lawrence's self-identity was based on the desire to be unique and motivated by self-fulfillment. This internal urge led him to embark on multiple "wanderings" to find himself, but as was often the case with Lawrence, to find himself he had to emulate someone else. His travels beyond Europe were largely the influence of C.M. Doughty.

His wanderings would eventually take him across continents in search of semblances of his own idea of beauty. As a teenager, Lawrence absorbed all he could of the architecture around his Oxford home. In his college days, he made journeys to France to study medieval castles for his personal enjoyment. When graduation neared, his professors suggested that he focus on the subject of castles for his thesis project because the conventional subjects did not interest him. Lawrence took this prompting to another level by suggesting a journey halfway across the world. His thesis paper, "Crusader Castles," explored the influence of Western building techniques on Arab architecture. Lawrence visited thirty-six castles and walked 1100 miles to collect material for his project. He shredded the soles of his feet and contracted malaria in the process; he had to spend days in a hotel recuperating, leaving him so behind schedule that he was unable to complete his proposed fifty-castle journey.¹¹⁴

Doughty was the first in a long line of unofficial British ambassadors to the cities and deserts of Arabia. He left his life of privilege in England to spend two years traveling the desert.

¹¹³ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 157.

¹¹⁴ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 17.

He became fluent in many Bedu languages, living among the people and learning their customs. He recorded it all in his excessively detailed travelogue, *Arabia Deserta*. The two-volume leviathan of a book sold well because educated Victorians were fascinated by the exotic East. Because of Doughty's status as the expert on anything Arabian, Lawrence went directly to him for advice before his first trip to Syria. He read and reread *Deserta* and then wrote a letter to Doughty petitioning for pointers; Doughty only offered a few words about the weather, apparently having exhausted his thoughts on all other relevant subjects in his memoir. Lawrence's obsession with Doughty's *Arabia Deserta* was made obvious through his actions as he mimicked Doughty throughout his travels. In the foreword to the publication of the 1923 Second Edition, Lawrence makes many claims regarding the extraordinary nature of Doughty's experiences in Arabia. However, when dotting on Doughty, he is actually drawing attention (however purposefully) to his own skill. Doughty's actions mirror his own, and in pointing out Doughty's exceptionalities, he is really claiming his own.

After Lawrence returned from his trip to Syria in 1909, he wrote to Doughty proclaiming humbly that he found the study, "so intensely interesting that [he] hope[d] to return to the East for some little time" in the future."¹¹⁵ Only when Lawrence had experienced the desert for himself did he truly understand Doughty's sacrifices. In the forward to the 1923 edition of *Deserta*, Lawrence made considerable parallels between his life and that of Doughty. He credited him as an inspiration and an example. Lawrence could have been describing himself when made the statement:

'If one live any time with the Arab he will have all his life after a feeling of the desert.' He had experienced it himself, the test of nomadism, that most deeply biting of all social disciplines, and for our sake he strained all the more to paint it

¹¹⁵ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 23.

in its true colors, as a life too hard, too empty, too denying for all but the strongest and most determined men.¹¹⁶

Doughty's determination had led him on a journey of change. Lawrence traced this progression through his writing, noting the Arab-Englishman that emerged at the end of the story. He saw his own individual pilgrimage of self-discovery reflected in Doughty's words and explained the outcome in the following passage:

He says that he was never Oriental, though the sun made him an Arab; and as much of his value lies in the distinction. His seeing is altogether English, yet at the same time his externals, his dress, and his speech were Arabic, and Nomad Arab of the desert. . . . his own origin was from the settled country of England, and this preference for the nomad might seem strange; but in practice the Englishman, and especially the Englishman of family, find the tribes more to his taste than the villages, and Doughty everywhere is the outspoken Beduin.¹¹⁷

Lawrence constantly relished the difficulty of the desert. Though considerably less humble about the hardships he had to overcome and the determination he forged in the process, his journals confirm that he was making these internal comparisons with Doughty even while he himself was journeying through the desert. Even in his Oxford days, Lawrence always claimed to be "hardening" himself for some impending test of will, tests of will that he encountered on his journeys.¹¹⁸ Yet Lawrence endured the privations of the desert, hoping to accomplish something worthwhile the he could record himself one day. He was constantly starting and destroying pieces of writing, but he never thought himself worthy of an epic like Doughty's. Though he agreed that his own story after joining the Arab Revolt was worth telling, he did not believe himself worthy to record it.¹¹⁹ He held Doughty in the highest regard for his pioneering

¹¹⁶ Doughty, *Deserta*, xix.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹¹⁸ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 32-33.

¹¹⁹ Malcolm, *Selected Letters*, 224. "The story I have to tell is one of the most splendid ever given a man for writing."

endeavors as well as the courage to record them. He praised Doughty's achievements as both an adventurer and as a writer:

To have accomplished such a journey would have been achievement enough for the ordinary man. Mr. Doughty was not content till he made the book justify the journey as much as the journey justified the book, and in the double power, to go and to write, he will not soon find his rival.¹²⁰

He also admired Doughty's humility and the legacy he left behind him with the Arab peoples:

He refused to be the hero of his story. Yet he was very really the hero of his journey, and the Arabs knew how great he was. I spent nine months in Western Arabia, much of it in the same districts through which he had passed, and I found that he had become history in the desert.¹²¹

Lawrence regarded Doughty's writing as the definitive style.¹²² He longed to narrate his journeys as Doughty had done many years before, but was never satisfied with the results. He was once asked by a publisher friend to consider writing a biography of Doughty, to which he replied, "I've thought of that 'life' idea, up and down: and I'm sorry that I can't touch it. I would not have delayed so in considering the life of anyone else: but for C. M. D. I had a very real regard. That *Seven Pillars* effort showed me my incompetence with a pen."¹²³

Though Lawrence's account of the Arab Revolt, documented in his memoir, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, is still considered by some to be one of the greatest works of the English language, Lawrence was bound to be a reader, not a writer. His knowledge of the printed word was so great that he had trouble finding his own style.¹²⁴ His self-consciousness and self-imposed perfectionism led him to abandon and destroy most of his projects before anyone else

¹²⁰ Doughty, *Deserta*, xxv.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹²² *Ibid.*, xv. ". . . a bible of its kind."

¹²³ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 419.

¹²⁴ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 200.

ever saw them.¹²⁵ *Seven Pillars* itself went through multiple manuscripts before he allowed it to be released to the general public. Speaking of his supposed incompetence he wrote, “My own writing is only a dissatisfaction to me; so much disappointment and pain, without any faculty of pleasing myself or anyone else.”¹²⁶ Convinced of his own inability to write, he asked his publishing friend to give him works of translation instead of creative ones, and he busied himself by translating Homer’s *The Odyssey* from the Greek rather than composing his own works.¹²⁷

The reason he decided to publish the book at all is debatable. Lawrence made multiple excuses for putting the book through, but always maintained that it was not worth anyone’s time. The whole affair may have been an example of his notorious reverse exhibitionism; he often felt more comfortable behind-the-scenes, but needed the acknowledgement and approval of being center-stage. He may have been overly modest about his personal epic just to have his statements opposed by the people whose opinions mattered to him. He may have secretly been pleased with the work, after all. He was proud of himself for not destroying the document completely the third time he toiled over it and the completion of the work seems a milestone for him personally.¹²⁸ After *Seven Pillars*, he was driven to write *The Mint*, his labor-of-love and personal inspiration. He also offers a few brief glimpses at his deeper motivations in some his more transparent correspondences. He admits therein to having a self-imposed obligation to record his story because he was the only one who could. He was mindful that none of the Bedu were literate enough to convey their experiences in writing and he was the only Brit who was there through

¹²⁵ Ibid., 173.

¹²⁶ Lawrence, *By His Friends*, 419.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 159. “I had one craving all my life, for the power of self-expression in some imaginative form- but had been too diffuse ever to acquire a technique.” 419. “I’ve tried translating, hoping to dodge thereby the creative effort: only to find myself as particular over the reproductive. Consequently I have given it up, and shall manufacture no more books.”

¹²⁸ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 202, 215.

the entire Revolt. He also knew that his opinion was the one that would sell. His celebrity had left the public craving for more detail of his adventures and *Seven Pillars* delivered. His unique position in the War left him solely capable of relating the events in the desert. He was a reader and scholar before the War, an Arab, an Englishman a crusader throughout the war, and he emerged as a writer after the war.

In 1926, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* went through its first publication. He worked on it for seven years, living on a grant from Oxford's All Souls College and rewrote the entire work three times. He published a revised and much abridged version of *Seven Pillars* called *Revolt in the Desert* the same year. He attempted to publish a journal-like "day-in-the-life of an R. A. F. pilot" anonymously in *The Mint*, but no publisher was interested. After his death, his younger brother Arnie took control of his estate and published *The Mint* as well as other books as a tribute to his brother.¹²⁹ Lawrence's only epic was the one inspired by his relationship to the people of Arabia, and it was because of them that he found the courage write it. He was forever after fused to the desert and, in turn, a part of Lawrence would always remain Arab.

Lawrence's first journey to the East marked the beginning of his self-association with the Arab peoples. In a letter to his mother dated August 8, 1909, he writes from Latakia, Syria, "I will have such difficulty in becoming English again, here I am Arab in habits & slip in talking from English to French & Arabic unnoticed . . ." ¹³⁰ Later, during the time of his excavations at Carchemish from 1911-1914, Lawrence displayed the continuation of this conflicted identity. He would often stand between the native workers and the Western site bosses to protect them from exploitation. At the same time, he and Hogarth would not permit the workers to enjoy Western

¹²⁹ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 349-51.

¹³⁰ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 19.

luxury and sent workers home for such displays of modernity as wearing shoes to the dig site.¹³¹ Lawrence refused to reconcile the two halves of himself, that of the Imperialist Englishman and that of the independent Arab, referring to both parts with disdain. He longed to be the older, protective brother and yet wished to secure independence for the underdog.¹³²

In his memoir, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence gives the impression of one disillusioned and disgruntled after his Arabian exploits. He dealt with depression in his later years, partially stemming from self-disappointment in having never delivered to the Arab peoples the independence he had promised them. The following excerpt offers a brief look into his conflicting national identities and the battle between the English and Arab self:

Pray God that men reading the story will not, for love of the glamour of strangeness, go out to prostitute themselves and their talents in serving another race. . . . He is not of them. He may stand against them, persuade himself of a mission, batter and twist them into something which they, of their own accord, would not have been. Then he is exploiting his old environment to press them out of theirs. Or, after my model, he may imitate them so well that they spuriously imitate him back. Then he is giving away his own environment: pretending to theirs . . . in my case, the effort for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was affectation only Sometimes these two selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near, as I believed it would be near the man who could see things through the veil at once of two customs, two educations, two environments.¹³³

This man of “twos” is possibly the most accurate description for Lawrence’s idea of Doughty, whom Lawrence internally revered but was incapable of emulating because he would not surrender his internal struggle. Lawrence explains the conflict further in a passage describing becoming acclimated to working directly with the Bedu forces:

¹³¹ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 85-86.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 120-21.

¹³³ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 33-34.

Among the Arabs there were no distinctions, traditional or natural, except the unconscious power given a famous sheikh by virtue of his accomplishments; and they taught me that no man could be their leader except he ate the ranks' food, wore their clothes, lived level with them, and yet appeared better in himself.¹³⁴

While Lawrence was willing to become like the Bedu (this is obvious through outward expressions such as wearing traditional clothing and swearing loyalty to Feisal as a member of his own tribe), he was not willing to accept them as genuine equals. In the above passage he cites the princes of Arabia as his examples.¹³⁵ This outlook certainly had its advantages when commanding troops, but does not excuse his elitist attitude. He still thought of himself as above the fighting forces in class as well as rank. His sometimes racist sentiments could be attributed to the age-old ideas of “white man’s burden” and the “noble savage” that were very much a part of Lawrence’s Victorian English upbringing.¹³⁶ Though Lawrence wanted the best for the Arabs, it is obvious that he never overcame these prominent colonial thoughts. He made his attitudes clear when he wrote:

The Bedu were odd people. For an Englishman, sojourning with them was unsatisfactory unless he had patience wide and deep as the sea. Their strength was the strength of men geographically beyond temptation: the poverty of Arabia made them simple, continent, enduring. If forced into civilized life they would have succumbed like any savage race to its diseases, meanness, luxury, cruelty, crooked dealing, artifice; and, like savages, they would have suffered exaggeratedly for lack of inoculation.¹³⁷

No matter how he wished to emulate Doughty, he would always remain set apart from the Arab as well as the Brit.¹³⁸ To Lawrence, Doughty’s experiences represented everything acceptable in a cross-cultural exchange. He measured the foreign-relation skills of everyone

¹³⁴ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 157.

¹³⁵ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 135. “I’ve never been labeled yet, and yet I fear that they are going to call me an Arabian now.”

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 40. “The perfectly hopeless vulgarity of the half-Europeanised Arab is appalling. Better a thousand time the Arab untouched.”

¹³⁷ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 219. Brown, *Selected Letters*, 182-83.

¹³⁸ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 128. Brown, *Selected Letters*, 42.

around him against the Doughty standard and came to the conclusion that only he came anywhere near achieving this standard. When comparing the two types of Englishman he encountered while abroad, Lawrence placed Doughty in the “cleaner class” and throughout his wanderings attempted to stay in that category by following Doughty’s example of sympathetic engagement with Arabs and Arab culture: “By always being Arab in manner and European in mind he maintained a perfect judgment, while bearing towards them a full sympathy which persuaded them to show him their inmost ideas.”¹³⁹

Lawrence constantly struggled between the English within and the Arab without during his time in the desert. Outsiders saw this conflict when they encountered him during his journeys and even diplomatic business following the war. He dressed in the dramatically white robes gifted to him by Feisal himself— robes that would have been worn only by a Sherif. The simple act of wearing them denoted Lawrence’s status as honorary royalty. He would have called his native dress and speech a necessity while in the desert, but it is an obvious choice. The rest of the Englishmen who participated in the Revolt refused to wear the Arab dress, preferring their regular uniforms despite their being ill suited for the climate.¹⁴⁰ The majority of the soldiers who worked with the Arab troops depended on translators to communicate while Lawrence doggedly learned the dialect of each tribe. The differences set Lawrence apart, and between, the two nations. He was far more than just another Englishman but not quite an accepted Arab. By the time he wrote *Seven Pillars* he claimed to have been furious with his own “play-acting as a Beduin,” having grown tired of the charade he would have been expected to maintain on both sides of the alliance.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Doughty, *Deserta*, xxi.

¹⁴⁰ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 128.

¹⁴¹ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 254. Brown, *Selected Letters*, 142, 149-51.

Lawrence viewed his own failure to create a unified identity within himself as a reflection on the failure of the Revolt and its goal of autonomous Arab statehood. He was dismayed by the discord he left behind in Arabia, and this marred his legacy as an inspirational revolutionary fighter. Lawrence as an inspiration lived little beyond the First World War and, after his death, he became little more than an eccentric historical figure whose exploits made for a thrilling storyline in a movie. As the basis for many political movements of the 20th century evolved away from simple nationalism into social revolution, the stage was set for those who could capture the imagination of people hungry for more radical social change. The heroes of social change in the 20th century live on to inspire change still while the heroes of nationalism are entombed in memorials in town squares, on currency, and in the case of a few, such as Lawrence, motion pictures. National celebrities like Otto von Bismarck and Napoleon have become historical references whereas advocates of more profound social change such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. live on. These social revolutionaries are transcendent of time and place. They provide inspiration to those who share their goals of building societies founded on ideal of social justice- fair treatment for oppressed peoples. Che Guevara falls into this latter category; he is a transcendent icon of revolutionary, grassroots movements for social change.

CHAPTER 3

Che: Incomparable Comrade

My tired eyes refused to sleep and in them a pair of green spots swirled, representing the world I had left for dead behind me and mocking the so-called liberation I sought. They harnessed their image to my extraordinary flights across the lands and seas of the world. – Ernesto Guevara¹⁴²

A fascinating contrast can be drawn between the legacy of T. E. Lawrence and that of perhaps the most famous iconic revolutionary of the 20th century—Ernesto Guevara, otherwise known as “El Che.” Che is remembered as a key leader in the Cuban Revolution, but is famous for his ongoing role in inspiring communist rebels around the world. His influence can be traced over a wide geographical area stretching from Bolivia to Africa and on to Vietnam and China. He was the guerrilla warrior par excellence of the century, a man willing to fight for the underdogs of the world wherever they were. While Lawrence’s goal of creating a chartable state for the Arabs seemed revolutionary at the time, in retrospect, it was a goal steeped in the ideals of 19th century nationalism and Wilsonian self-determination. Guevara’s revolutions, on the other hand, had more lofty and expansive goals. They were based on philosophical ideals, which are beyond borders, and they tied Che inexorably to the 20th century social revolutions that were rooted in an ideology of social justice.

The biographical similarities between Lawrence and Guevara are noteworthy: wanderers, readers, ancestral aristocrats, non-conformists, and each found his own path to self-education. Some of their seemingly inconsequential similarities reveal much about their personalities. For example, one of Che’s defining traits was his constant untidiness. The upper middle class social order that Che was reared in demanded that he always be “presentable,” wearing a suit and hat with polished shoes. Defying these expectations, Guevara often wore the same outfit for weeks at

¹⁴² Guevara, *Motorcycle Diaries*, 40.

a time, leaving his dirty shirt untucked from his ill-fitting trousers. There was even a period of time, after he and a friend tried to make extra money selling second-hand shoes, when Guevara wore the mismatching remainders of their collection to the horror of his aristocratic peers. Similarly, Lawrence expressed his disdain for conformity by the way he wore his army uniform. He intentionally paired non-regulation attire with his uniform, and friends recall a notorious red tie. Lawrence also played personal game of switching around his rank insignia to represent different levels of command— to the daily confusion of other officers.¹⁴³ Both were nonconformists, choosing their own definitions of “acceptable” and making light of the social expectations imposed on them by their culture. They were two nonconformists who lived in two different eras and on different sides of the great divide that separates the first half of the 20th century from the second—the profound changes brought into the world by World War II. Because of this Che was necessarily a very different “revolutionary” than Lawrence had been even though their childhood and teen years have remarkable points of similarity.

Guevara was born out of wedlock on June 14, 1928, the oldest child to a politically active father and adoring mother. Che’s parents had aristocratic lineages, but only his mother’s family would have been considered wealthy. Che’s father struggled his entire life to make a comfortable life for his family by engaging in various business ventures. The Argentina of Guevara’s childhood was in constant political turmoil and his father was an energetic republican. He encouraged Che to take on his brand of political activism, but astonishingly, Che refused to ally with any parties in his youth. While his friends joined student movements, Guevara mocked both the government and the people, choosing sides only when it seemed to offer him some personal advantage. For example, Guevara declared himself a Peronist while in college because with party

¹⁴³ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 130-31.

allegiance he gained access to the nicest libraries on campus. His own political ideas did not germinate until he began his journeys across Latin America and his encounters with the poor underclass of his own continent would push him to action.

As a child Guervara was an avid reader and he read widely in a variety of genres including the science fiction of Jules Verne and later, the revolutionary poetry of Pablo Neruda. He was also, like Lawrence, a persistent writer. He tried his hand at writing books, he wrote passionate and dynamic letters to friends and family throughout his entire life, and he authored the most famous 20th century handbook and guide to guerilla warfare entitled, simply, *Guerilla Warfare*. His writings reflect the extensive reading he did as a young man. Che, like Lawrence, was set apart from other children early on and reading and writing became a way of life. His bouts with asthma left him bedridden for much of his development, and this illness proved essential in the budding of his revolutionary sentiments for two obvious reasons: he spent much of his time reading and the rest devising ways to defy the limitations imposed on him by disease.

Che delved into a wide variety of genres and disciplines and read far beyond his years. His friend and travel companion, Alberto Granado, recalls conversing with the much younger Che about philosophical books Granado was just beginning to study in college. Che kept journals with quotes and concepts from the books he read. He called these journals his “philosophical notebooks” and he composed seven over ten years, each methodically indexed for quick-reference and containing a wide variety of subjects. Having a large family that was always taking in strays, Guevara found solace in a spare room he rented in town for a small fee. Here, like Lawrence, who made a spare room out his parent’s garden shed, Che could study without disturbance and on his own schedule.

Guevara found others means of escape and his forays into the tropical forest near his home would later give rise to romantic renditions of his escapades there and how they would prepare him for his later role as a jungle guerilla fighter. Guevara's father tells the story in his memoir of a 9-year-old Che who, fearing retribution after a squabble with his mother, fled into the forest near their house. After hours of attempting to chase him down on horseback, Guevara's father hired a neighborhood running champion to catch him on foot. The runner returned an hour or so later, worn-out and crestfallen, claiming that every time he had gotten close, Che had vanished into the brush. The family decided to let him return on his own time, and Guevara was found asleep in his bed the next morning. Che's father observes:

I do not know what Ernesto's friends of that period have done in life, whether they have forgotten how to hunt or how to follow a trail or how to hide in the bushes and ambush their opponents, but it is evident that this training put Ernesto in good stead when, as guerilla, he had to attack, hide and escape in the jungles and mountains where he chose to fight. Alta Gracia [the region where they lived] turned him into a real master of the forests and mountains.¹⁴⁴

Che's childhood in Alta Gracia was marked by forest explorations with neighborhood children. The open-door policy of his parents made them the target of gossip among their aristocratic neighbors. Many locals remembered that the Guevara's often took in strays for mealtime and the upper crust Guevara children played with anyone who was willing. Guevara's mixing with different classes gave him a unique perspective on the situation in South America. He knew the value of his own educational system and understood the power that "whites" had gained by keeping the lower classes disenfranchised. He was outraged at the illiteracy of Indians even in his motorcycle days.¹⁴⁵ He would later argue that the guerrilla band had an obligation to teach its members to communicate and think independently. He suggested reading was the best

¹⁴⁴ Ernesto Guevara Lynch, *Young Che: Memories of Che Guevara by His Father*, trans. Lucia Alvarez de Toledo (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).

¹⁴⁵ Guevara, *Motorcycle Diaries*, 96.

way to help recruits fully understand their cause, and commented on this in his pamphlet about guerrilla warfare, “Reading should be encouraged at all times, with an effort to promote books that are worthwhile and that enlarge the recruit’s facility to encounter the world of letters and great national problems.”¹⁴⁶

Guevara’s life was also profoundly shaped by his grandmother’s struggle against a fatal illness when he was in his final year of high school. He spent seventeen continuous days at her bedside as she approached death and through watching her suffer, he developed the conviction that his true calling was to become a medical doctor. He would later enroll in the medical school of the University of Buenos Aires with the hope of finding ways to alleviate human suffering. He was also interested in finding ways to cure his own malady, asthma, and over the years he often experimented on himself. Guevara’s pursuit of medicine was as consciously self-imposed as Lawrence’s devotion to archeology and played an analogous role in his life—it fit only nominally into the rest of his life’s course and minimally into his most notable feat but without it the rest of his path would not have taken its direction toward eventual fame. He used medicine as an excuse to travel just as Lawrence used archaeology as an excuse to escape the mundane life of middle-class Britain. He revered the medical profession for the rest of his life and he believed that doctors had the ability to heal through medicine and empathy. In his pamphlet *Guerrilla Warfare*, he commented on the life-changing abilities that doctors brought with them into political struggle:

The value of a simple aspirin to one who is suffering is beyond calculation when it is given by the friendly hand of one who sympathetically makes the suffering his own. Therefore the doctor in the first stage should be a man who is totally identified with the ideals of the revolution, because his words will affect the troops much more deeply than those spoken by another member.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (1960), 9.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

Profound changes in Che's character occurred as a result of his wanderings and encounters with real people throughout Latin America. Biographers and friends commonly describe the young Guevara as suffering from "wanderlust;" the term appears in multiple biographies and Che even used it himself. His wandering was more clearly defined and he embraced the desire to wander much more passionately than Lawrence. He was also very introspective during his travels, pointedly making a journey physically as well as spiritually. He articulated this in his first book, *Motorcycle Diaries*:

I now know, by an almost fatalistic conformity with the facts, that my destiny is to travel. . . . Still, there are moments when I think with profound longing of those wonderful areas in our south. Perhaps one day, tired of circling the world, I'll return to Argentina and settle in the Andean lakes, if not indefinitely then at least for a pause while I shift from one understanding of the world to another.¹⁴⁸

He knew that to travel was to traverse different social and cultural worlds and learn from the contrasts and disparities that one finds there.

Guevara longed to find freedom and inspiration on the road, but his health greatly limited his travel. He was around the same age as Lawrence when he took his first long trip. In January of 1951, Che set out alone on a 4500-kilometer trip aboard a motorized bicycle. He didn't make it far before his bike broke down and his asthma caught up, but he traveled much of Argentina, piquing his curiosity about his country and countrymen. Upon his return to Buenos Aires, he immediately began making plans to see the rest of South America. The summer of 1951, he volunteered to be a doctor aboard an oil tanker and spent six weeks at sea, hoping to see more of the coast. He was sadly disappointed with the sightseeing, but delighted in the opportunity this

¹⁴⁸ Guevara, *Motorcycle Diaries*, 45.

experience afforded him to mix with workers of a different social class. He then planned an extensive motorcycle trip with his medical friend, Alberto Granado. The two departed northward from Buenos Aires in January of 1952 and did not return until July. This trip, which became known as his “Motorcycle Journey,” has been immortalized in the recent film, *Motorcycle Journeys*.

What became apparent in his travels was that his real internal battles, like Lawrence’s, were culturally and class-based. Che was caught between his European heritage and his citizenship in multi-ethnic Argentina. On his motorcycle journey of 1952, he saw more clearly the rift separating the classes. He became the white man in indigenous Indian country, and through the circumstances that equalized him, began to see the legacy of injustice that his ancestors had created. In the following quote, Che describes the situation he and Granado find themselves in after their motorcycle finally breaks down and they are forced to continue their journey on foot:

To a certain extent we had been knights of the road; we belonged to that long-standing ‘wandering aristocracy’ and had calling cards with our impeccable and impressive titles. No longer. Now we were just two hitchhikers with backpacks, and with all the grime of the road stuck to our overalls, shadows of our former aristocratic selves.¹⁴⁹

Guevara’s realization of class disparity came to a head when he treated an elderly woman in a small village in which he and Granado were traveling. In this remote and poor village he was completely helpless against her illness and fully recognized the brutal reality of the situation. If that woman had access to medical care, she would have lived longer or at least died with dignity. Instead, she had been killed by overwork, pushing the limits of her health and working to support

¹⁴⁹ Guevara, *Motorcycle Diaries*, 68.

her family. This experience reminded him of the suffering of his own grandmother, which had prompted his calling to become a doctor.

As Che's scope on social injustice began to widen, he became increasingly dissatisfied with the political situation in Latin America.¹⁵⁰ This evolving outlook spurred him into action. The insights Guevara gained on his young wanderings, in the forest or on a motorized bicycle, or on foot with Granado, all significantly changed his view of the world. He, like Lawrence, was compelled by these travels to go further and to see more. Their wanderings made them into the revolutionaries they later became, each, however, a man both within and ahead of his time.

In 1953, Guevara graduated from medical school and embarked on his most extensive journey up to that time. He traveled far into Central America and also experienced firsthand the conditions in Bolivia during its revolution. He was also caught in Guatemala during the U.S.-backed overthrow of its government in 1954 and was forced to escape to Mexico. There, he met anti-Batista Cuban exiles and their leader, Fidel Castro, who incorporated him into their plans to wage guerrilla warfare on the Batista dictator. Through a series of dramatic battles fought in the jungles and cities of Cuba, Che, now a bearded revolutionary, led the men under his command to significant victories in Yaguajay and Santa Clara. The guerrilla army captured the capital in December 1958 and Che, along with Castro, were swept into power in Cuba. This series of events forced him to make the transition from guerrilla to government official and bureaucrat. He became a member of the Communist authority of Cuba and it was not a position he was entirely comfortable in. He was away from home and fighting for a cause that had no one single home. He told his father, "Now I am a fighter who is working for the consolidation of a government.

¹⁵⁰ Guevara, *Motorcycle Diaries*, 70-71.

What will become of me? I don't even know in which land I will leave my bones."¹⁵¹ Che held a number of cabinet positions under Castro and they allowed him to travel all over the world, securing allies for the new Cuban government. He met French philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in 1960, both of whom he had read in their original French as a budding philosopher in his youth. He also traveled to the Soviet Union and China, and met another of his early influences, Mao Zedong.

The incident that made him infamous among anti-communists was the role he played as "supreme prosecutor" in the La Cabana trials of Batista sympathizers. He did his best to judge neutrally, but outsiders condemned the trials as perfunctory and unjust. Though other officials performed the most heinous of these executions and many of the tried were themselves murderers, hundreds of people were executed under Che's "jurisdiction" and his image was permanently marred by it.¹⁵²

After a few years of helping to establish the transitioning government in different roles, Che returned to his true art—guerrilla warfare. He helped to foster rebellions in Algeria in 1964 and the Congo in 1965, but both were not the successes he hoped they would be. His ideas about guerilla warfare, however, have survived and continue to be used by would-be guerillas and studied by those who hope to thwart them. *Guerilla Warfare* was first published in 1961. In it, he outlined the process of creating a grassroots guerilla movement.

The guerrilla fighter became the symbol of revolutionary movements across the third world that emerged after World War II. The revolutionary movements were both political and social revolutions and Che became the iconic guerrilla warrior associated with many of them. In

¹⁵¹ Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 390.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 386-390.

his own writings, he consciously linked the concept of social change and revolution; he imagined the agent of this change as the guerilla warrior:

Each one of the guerrilla fighters is ready to die, not to defend an ideal, but rather to convert it into reality. This is the basis, the essence of guerrilla fighting. Miraculously, a small band, the armed vanguard of the great popular force that supports them, goes beyond the immediate tactical objective, goes so decisively to achieve an ideal, to establish a new society, to break the old molds of the outdated, and to achieve, finally, the social justice for which they fight.¹⁵³

Che's concept of guerrilla warfare depends on two principles: the commitment of the individual guerrilla and the commitment of the region's peasants. He believed that the individual guerrilla, a much larger component to the guerrilla army than the regular one, must have no doubt in the cause for which he fights. These individual components must work for a common goal and work in unison to achieve that goal. The army must also work for its preservation, the most lasting assurance of this being achieved through the conversion of the populace of the guerrilla-inhabited area to the revolutionary cause. This two-pronged concept worked well in the Cuban Revolution. In retrospect, Che wrote of the Batista overthrow,

The armed victory of the Cuban people over the Batista dictatorship was not only the triumph of heroism as reported by the newspapers of the world; it also forced a change in the old dogmas concerning the conduct of the popular masses of Latin America. It showed plainly the capacity of the people to free themselves by means of guerilla warfare from a government that oppresses them.¹⁵⁴

Che believed that the guerrilla force, "the fighting vanguard" of the people, was a collection of fighters called individually in an almost beatified way out of the general population. Their positions were not to be taken lightly, and their fervor allowed them access into the most revered ranks of the resistance. Guevara likened the operations of the guerrilla army to those of bandit gangs, especially in the Cuban terrain. These gangs were heretofore unparalleled in their

¹⁵³ Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, pt. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Guevara, *Warfare*, 1.

abilities to avoid detection, fading in and out of the landscape and striking targets with extreme precision. Their similarities with the guerrilla force extend to “homogeneity, respect for the leader, valor, knowledge of the ground, and, often, even good understanding of the tactics employed.” However, unlike a bandit gang, the guerrilla force requires the respect of the people.¹⁵⁵

Guevara spoke of this support throughout his pamphlet and emphasized its importance and intrinsic linkage to the guerrilla body saying, “. . . the guerrilla fighter is above all an agrarian revolutionary. He interprets the desires of the great peasant mass to be owners of land . . . of all that which they have long yearned to call their own . . .”¹⁵⁶

Naturally, it is the goal of the guerrilla army is to become more powerful than the established army of the existing government by resembling the army. According to Guevara, guerrilla warfare is a phase that “will develop continuously until the guerrilla army in its steady growth acquires the characteristics of a regular army.”¹⁵⁷ When the guerrilla force replaces or overcomes the established army, its job is done.

Guevara outlines three specific steps in achieving this goal. His strategy includes analyzing objectives, planning attacks, and carrying out those attacks. These are repeated continuously to gradually weaken the enemy and maintain the safety of the guerilla force. The most certain way to achieve success is to establish an impenetrable base of operations within striking distance of the enemy. This base would ideally be safe from detection but accessible enough to be mistakenly happened upon by enemy combatants, to make military engagement more likely. Out-reaching assaults should be sporadic but continuous, creating the illusion that

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 3.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 4.

the guerrilla force has surrounded the enemy base and is capable of attack at any moment. As soon as one column has established control of an area, it is capable of producing new columns, each one reaching closer to the final objective. These columns are not independent of each other, but can operate differently according to the abilities of the individual fighters and the specific objective. Each member of the guerrilla army is an individual general; he must work for the good of the whole, but often make decisions without the input of a commanding officer. His most important character qualities in the field are flexibility and mobility.

Guevara developed an effective offensive tactic known as the minuet. In this maneuver, four bands containing four to five fighters each circle around each other to annihilate the enemy. One band lures the enemy from its position, while the others make inward spoke attacks on the moving and, now, disoriented opposition. This tactic can also be called counter-encirclement. Che also explains the difference between sabotage and terrorism, the latter of which he believed should be used sparingly and never on people of little importance. Sabotage was his preferred method of insurgence, and one of the only excuses he outlines for engaging in urban warfare. Guevara explains that in any country where suburban or rural warfare can be achieved, it is inadvisable to engage combat within a city. He believed that it was more likely for civilians to be harmed and combatants to be captured in an urban area, and these were two things to be staunchly avoided. The only reason for guerrillas to enter an urban setting is to employ sabotage and hinder the flow of everyday civilian life, thus raising discontent among the population. This tactic, along with smaller, psychologically related schemes such as releasing prisoners, are efforts to recruit new fighters and increase general sympathy with the guerrilla cause.

Che recognized the importance of paying attention to seemingly insignificant details, such as the most successful mule to combat ration and the most effective forms of explosive

implementation and food rationing. These details may seem mundane, but only prove the fervor with which Guevara believed that the success of the Batista resistance could be duplicated in other environments. He believed that his designs could be replicated with success in other volatile environments to prove, yet again, the legitimacy of his communist campaign. He believed that his victory had proven that “Popular forces can win a war against the army” and “It is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist; the insurrection can create them.”

Guevara wrote his strategies into a pamphlet to be translated and distributed in countries ripe for revolution. He put his ideas into writing because he himself had been influenced by the writings of others. In his quest for knowledge, a trait that an ideal revolutionary would share with Che, a guerrilla fighter could read Guevara’s work to be enlightened. But as much as Che had drawn his designs from philosophers and fighters, he always respected the writers that first piqued his creative imagination. His childhood loves, Neruda and Verne, wrote of revolutionaries as well.

Chapter 4

Neruda and Verne: A Revolutionary Pairing

Liberators, in this twilight/of America/in the morning's/forsaken darkness,/I give you my people's/infinite leaf,/the exultation/of every hour of struggle.— Pablo Neruda¹⁵⁸

In the formation of his character, Che's choice of favorite authors is as revealing as Lawrence's. Che had a three-volume set of Jules Verne's adventure classics that he kept throughout his life, even sending for them to be brought to Mexico from Argentina. His affinity for Verne is similar to Lawrence's love of Morris; Verne depicts the adventures that Che so desired and the future that he was fighting to see. Instead of being a romantic caught in the past, Che was always looking for tomorrow. His ideologies were not to return the world to its perfect, pre-modernized order, but to form it into a new, united and revolutionary society. Guevara's devotion to the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda resembles Lawrence's obsession with Doughty. Lawrence looked to Doughty as the height of literary excellence, attempting to emulate him with his exhaustive prose; Che, on the other hand, was drawn to the poetry of Pablo Neruda. Many of his attempts at verse live on, and he memorized a good portion of his favorites.

Neruda was more than a writing influence. He was an activist, taking many of the paths that Guevara would also take and expand. Neruda was a prominent communist diplomat as well as a poet; he lived between exile and acceptance as the waves of Chilean politics ebbed and

¹⁵⁸ Pablo Neruda, *Canto General*, trans. Jack Schmidt. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), "The Liberators XLIII," lines 1-6.

flowed during his lifetime. It is easy to see how Guevara would have sympathized with Neruda's case.¹⁵⁹

Pablo Neruda was another young philosopher. Like Che, he began reading and writing at a young age. He was from a poor family and mingled freely with the native Indian children on the railroads where his father worked. At age twenty he published *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Desperation*. This collection, which went on to sell millions of copies, was also the first book of Neruda's poetry that Che owned. Neruda began his political career in his twenties as a Chilean diplomat in Burma, Sri Lanka, and Spain. It was this last stint in Spain, during Franco's Civil War, that solidified Neruda's communist convictions. After this time, he became a prolific member of the Chilean Communist Party, an identity that would soon prove troublesome. He was elected to the Chilean senate but promptly exiled for his anti-American convictions. He traveled all over Latin America to avoid capture, writing poetry as he went. His most political collection of verses, *Canto General* was composed and published at this time. He returned to Chile under less hostile conditions and ran for President in 1969. He withdrew in favor of Salvador Allende, who went on to win the election to become the world's first democratically elected communist president. Neruda was sent as ambassador to France and awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. He claimed the award on behalf of all Latin Americans. He died in 1973 just a few weeks after the overthrow of his friend Allende and U.S. economic blockade on Chile. His funeral served as a public demonstration of resistance to the new military dictatorship.¹⁶⁰

Guevara's love of Neruda was a life-long commitment. In his younger days, he was entranced by Neruda's intoxicating descriptions of love and often read and recited them to woo

¹⁵⁹ Anderson, *Revolutionary Life*, 569.

¹⁶⁰ Red Poppy, "Pablo Neruda," http://www.redpoppy.net/pablo_neruda_briefbio.php.

many gullible girls. However, when Che found true love with his second wife, Aleida March, the words took on a new potency. Guevara would stay up all night reading to Aleida out of Neruda's newest collections. Just before his final mission to Bolivia, Aleida recorded one of these sessions on tape along with a message from Che to his children.¹⁶¹ Arguably the most important of Neruda's poetry was his published collection *Canto General*, a veritable vendetta and memoir in verse. Neruda wrote these 231 poems in response to the colonial devastation of the ancient Latin American peoples— from the slave labor of Machu Picchu to land exploitation by multinational corporations. This book was published in Mexico in 1950, and at the very latest Che obtained a copy when he was exiled there in 1954. Neruda's development from love poet to political socialist resembles Guevara's transition from wandering romantic to activist.¹⁶²

Both men made life-altering journeys to Machu Picchu, Peru and both realized the historical depth of colonial oppression in that ancient place. They came to believe that the turmoil they experienced in their Latin America was only the most recent in centuries of violence. Guevara claimed that the United States was stealing the heritage of Latin Americans and the ancient Incan site was the perfect example for his argument. The museums of Cuzco have little to show for the wonder that lies just outside of their town. By the time the importance of the American archeologist Hiram Bingham's discovery of the site was known to Peruvians, North Americans and Europeans had already looted the area and removed many valuable artifacts from it. Thus, as Guevara claimed in his 1953 article, "Machu Picchu, Enigma de Piedra en America," one must travel to the museums of North America to see the treasures of that indigenous city.¹⁶³ Neruda focused his outrage not on the missing artifacts, but on the suffering

¹⁶¹ *Che*, 569.

¹⁶² Red Poppy, "Pablo Neruda."

¹⁶³ *Che*, 117.

of his ancestors. He called on the spirit of these conquered peoples to embolden him to speak on their behalf in his poem, “Heights of Machu Picchu XII”:

I come to speak through your dead mouth.
Through the earth unite all
the silent and split lips
and from the depths speak to me all night long
as if we were anchored together,
tell me everything, chain by chain,
link by link and step by step,
sharpen the knives you kept,
place them in my chest and in my hand...¹⁶⁴

This is the mindset of a revolutionary; these few lines show the progression from empathy to action. Both Guevara and Neruda fought for the voiceless masses. But while Neruda was freeing the voiceless from the tombs of the past for the sake of the present, Guevara was more concerned with freeing the voiceless from the oppression of the present and future. He was always looking forward while assessing the current situation. He could never escape that his ancestry was more closely linked to Europe than Latin America, but by acknowledging that he himself was a native Argentine, he could fight on behalf of all Americans and likely felt more compelled to win their independence because of his mixed heritage. Neruda recognizes the multiethnicity of suffering Central Americans in his “America, I Do Not Invoke Your Name in Vain X.” He proclaims, “Day and night I see the enchained—/Whites, Blacks, Indians—/writing on the night’s interminable/walls with bruised phosphoric hands.”¹⁶⁵

In a section of *Canto General* entitled “The Earth’s Name is Juan,” Neruda gives voice to the voiceless by transforming personal testimonies into verse. He writes from the perspective of a variety of individuals, highlighting the atrocities suffered by each. Cristobal Miranda is a shoveler from Tocopilla who, along with his coworkers, keeps the barges moving in the bay

¹⁶⁴ Red Poppy, <http://www.redpoppy.net/poems25.php>, lines 28-36.

¹⁶⁵ Neruda, *Canto*, 207, lines 8-11.

workers, bribed politicians, and skimmed on its taxes, practically destroying the socio-political balance in the regions in which it operated. Neruda was one of many outraged artists who voiced his vehemence in writing. His poem, “The United Fruit Co.,” is written using religious imagery to portray the godlike dominance of corporations such as Coca-Cola and Ford and refers to the U.S.-friendly dictators of the time as “flies” feasting on the dead flesh and decay of the common people. The trained flies do the gods’ bidding on empty promises and, Neruda writes,

Meanwhile, along the sugared up
abysms of the ports,
indians fall over, buried
in the morning mist:
a body rolls, a thing
without a name, a fallen number,
a bunch of dead fruit
spills into the pile of rot.¹⁶⁷

The United Fruit Company also had holdings in Cuban sugar cane during the Batista regime. They were seized by Fidel’s government and the company never received compensation. The new Cuban government refused to be the instrument in another U.S.- Latin America dictatorial alliance game. The region was still reeling from the U.S-backed overthrow of the democratically elected leader of Guatemala on the premise of growing communist threat. Guevara was in Guatemala at the time of the overthrow and was forced to flee to Mexico. This event had an intense impact on Che’s ideals. His conversion to communism was solidified at the hands of United Fruit Company, an irony that only gives weight to Neruda’s analogy of the deified corporation.¹⁶⁸

Neruda, like Che, was a man of action. He took the initiative to fight against the machine he could so easily have been a successful part of. He was willing to be exiled and persecuted for

¹⁶⁷Red Poppy, <http://www.redpoppy.net/poem26.php>, lines 34-41.

¹⁶⁸Anderson, *Che*, 123-24

what he thought was right. Che could have lived a prosperous life as a doctor, but yearned for something bigger, just as Neruda could have remained a poet. By allowing political activism to enter their lives, they became entrepreneurs of ideology. Both found something greater than himself, a force to live through, as Neruda so desperately describes in his poem, “Walking Around”:

I don't want to go on like a root in the shadows,
hesitating, feeling forward, trembling with dream,
down down into the dank guts of the earth,
soaking it up and thinking, eating every day.

I don't want for myself so many misfortunes.
I don't want to keep on as root and tomb,
alone, subterranean, in a vault stuffed with
corpses,
frozen stiff, dying of shame.¹⁶⁹

If Che needed more motivation to be a man of action, he found it in the adventure stories of Jules Verne. His works are the embodiment of Che’s restlessness and wanderlust, and Che read them his entire life, drawing strength from the adventurers within. Of particular interest, then, are the themes of Verne’s work *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* in the context of Che’s life. He encountered these themes at a young age; they certainly shaped his wanderings and even his views on the international world in the 20th century.¹⁷⁰

The story begins with a French naturalist named Aronnax living in the United States. He is intrigued by news reports of a mysterious ocean creature that has been attacking cargo and passenger ships around the world. The beast is luminescent at night and larger than any sea

¹⁶⁹ Red Poppy, <http://www.redpoppy.net/poem13.php>, lines 20-28

¹⁷⁰ Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea: The Omnibus*. (Garden City, NY: J.B. Lippencot Company, University of Virginia Library)
<http://text.lib.virginia.edu/modengJ.browse.html>.

creature ever reported. Aronnax follows the stories closely and hypothesizes that the strange creature is nothing but a giant narwhal that sinks ships with its large tusk. He is preparing to leave for France when he receives a request from the U.S. government to join a search party to track down and kill the mysterious creature. He and his manservant, Conseil, board a ship and meet a number of famous crewmembers including the world-renowned harpoonist, Ned Land, a French Canadian. The crew sails around the coasts of North and South America with no sight of the mammal, but the very day they are preparing to sail back to New York in defeat, a creature fitting the description of the “narwhal” is spotted.

Ned Land attempts to harpoon the monster in the night, but his harpoon is deflected and the creature retaliates by overturning their ship. Ned Land, Aronnax, and Conseil fall into the water and tread it for hours until they find the creature and use it to stay afloat. They discover that the skin of the animal is actually sheet metal plating. In the morning, they succeed in getting the animal’s attention, men emerge and drag the companions inside. They are confined in a small room for a couple days, unable to communicate with the men who are guarding them. Eventually they are introduced to the captain of the underwater ship they have deduced they are inside; his name is Captain Nemo and his submarine is called *The Nautilus*.

Aronnax and Nemo get along quite well. Aronnax is curious to discover how the ship works and why Nemo is sailing the seas instead of sharing his amazing technology with the world. Aronnax soaks up all he learns and is content to sail around the world with Nemo and his crew, but Ned Land is soon restless. Nemo cannot let the prisoners free because he worries his secret will leak out; none of his crew have ever been allowed to leave the ship. Ned Land plans many escape attempts, but each is thwarted. After a number of encounters with other vessels on the sea, Aronnax grows more wary of Nemo and his behavior. The Captain seems to be on a

personal campaign of revenge and also has a taste for violence. Aronnax realizes that he has no choice but to escape with his journal and his faithful companions. He, Ned Land, and Conseil jump ship. Aronnax wakes up in a fisherman's cottage in Norway. He ends his narrative wondering about the fate of Captain Nemo and proclaims the end of warfare on the seas and the beginning of a new age of scientific exploration, saying, "May the contemplation of so many wonders extinguish for ever the spirit of vengeance! May the judge disappear, and the philosopher continue the peaceful exploration of the sea!"¹⁷¹

There are many characteristics that stand out about this piece of literature besides its obvious appeal to a young, adventure-seeking boy. Its socio-political commentary may very well have spoken to pre-teen Che. He may have connected to both Captain Nemo and Aronnax, but his ideals are more closely tied to Nemo. Aronnax is a self-proclaimed philosopher while Captain Nemo is driven by something much deeper than himself— memories and the driving force of revenge.

Captain Nemo could be described as a type of underwater guerrilla leader. He and his crew maintain secrecy, gathering information from all corners of the globe and resurfacing to attack the enemy ships of Imperial countries. Nemo seeks revenge on society and a life free from any government but his own. He manages his crew like a dictator, forbidding anyone to leave the ship and dictating every action of the boat. These men, however, remain nameless and almost faceless throughout the story. In some respects, Nemo is a negative example of leadership. Unlike Nemo's example, Che never supported the idea of having an absolute commander in guerrilla warfare. In Che's guerilla warfare each man was responsible for himself and the good of the whole. Each member also had to be completely fanatical about the ideology of the revolt

¹⁷¹ Verne, *Leagues*, 293.

before joining the fight. Guevara knew that to allow members like Ned Land would create factions in the company. Che's guerrillas had to be equally dedicated to Fidel's cause or, ultimately, dissenting groups would rob the whole of its ability to govern itself in the field.

Captain Nemo was also blinded by his hatred, aimlessly wandering the seas. He kept his knowledge and scientific achievement to himself. Che, however, fought for a purpose with a fixed goal of spreading his knowledge. His cause was something he believed to be completely good and he aimed to share it with the world so as to allow others to know the truth of his philosophy. With his country and family destroyed by imperialism, Nemo took to the seas to seek revenge; Che got this hint and took preemptive action. Nemo was likely born in colonial India, the best-known example of imperial oppression at the time of Verne's writing. Che looked around him and saw the oppression in Latin America and the many potential Nemo's such subjugation could create. He fought to keep imperialism from turning him into a Captain Nemo; he did this by spreading socialism and fighting to oust colonial invaders and their native dictator cronies.

It is possible, however, that Nemo himself also had socialist roots for his actions. He does not forget that the root of his hatred is the oppression of the poor. He uses the treasure looted from shipwrecks to ease the affliction of those still stuck under the boot of imperialism. Aronnax assumes that collecting the treasure is just another way that Nemo withholds profitable things from the outside world because of his personal injury. He expresses his philosophy passionately after Aronnax accuses him of keeping the money for himself instead of giving it to those in need,

"Barren!" he exclaimed, with animation. "Do you think then, sir, that these riches are lost because I gather them? Is it for myself alone, according to your idea, that I take the trouble to collect these treasures? Who told you that I did not make a good use of it? Do you think I am ignorant that there are suffering beings and oppressed races on this earth, miserable creatures to console, victims to avenge? Do you not understand?"

Captain Nemo stopped at these last words, regretting perhaps that he had spoken so much. But I had guessed that, whatever the motive which had forced him to seek independence under the sea, it had left him still a man, that his heart still beat for the sufferings of humanity, and that his immense charity was for oppressed races as well as individuals. And I then understood for whom those millions were destined which were forwarded by Captain Nemo when the *Nautilus* was cruising in the waters of Crete.¹⁷²

Nemo also has wise words regarding the selfishness of colonial nations. While cruising through French Polynesia Aronnax suggests that a new continent will be created from the island chains in the region. Nemo replies, "The earth does not want new continents, but new men."¹⁷³ With this simple sentence he states that continents are nothing but geo-political records of ownership, and do not reflect the allegiance of men. This belief is backed by the fact Nemo wanders the world through international and claimed waters alike, disregarding any country's ownership of the sea.

Nemo believes in the equality of all men, an idea that Che embraced. Nemo's multicultural view is offset, like so many other opinions, by Aronnax's traditional Western approach. Aronnax goes ashore to investigate the flora and fauna of the Papua island. When natives begin to approach him, he flees in panic, back to *The Nautilus* and Captain Nemo to warn the crew of the impending threat. Nemo labels Aronnax's fear as hereditary racism as Aronnax refers to the people like he would a species of animal, calling them "bipeds" and "savages."

'Savages!' he echoed, ironically. 'So you are astonished, Professor, at having set foot on a strange land and finding savages? Savages! where are there not any? Besides, are they worse than others, these whom you call savages?'¹⁷⁴

Aronnax is caught off guard by these natives in traditional dress, but the crew aboard *The Nautilus*, seemingly gathered by Nemo's preference, is extremely diverse. Che was a proponent

¹⁷² Verne, *Leagues*, 195-96.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

of multi-ethnicity in the ranks. In fact, in his inner circle of guerrillas were men of African, European, and Indian heritage. He revered Chairman Mao and traveled all over the world spreading his message of communism to all who would listen, regardless of race.

Also, like a guerrilla leader, Nemo had to deal with the many aspects of commanding a crew. It was his job to ensure the safety of the men, provide them with basic necessities, and also care for them in sickness and death. Nemo's words regarding a crewmember who died aboard the ship are applicable to the death of Guevara and of many guerrilla warriors. Che would have sympathized with Nemo as he buried a loyal follower and companion on the battlefield of the sea,

‘And he rests now, near his companions, in the coral cemetery?’

‘Yes, forgotten by all else, but not by us. We dug the grave, and the polypi undertake to seal our dead for eternity.’ And, burying his face quickly in his hands, he tried in vain to suppress a sob. Then he added: ‘Our peaceful cemetery is there, some hundred feet below the surface of the waves.’

‘Your dead sleep quietly, at least, Captain, out of the reach of sharks.’

‘Yes, sir, of sharks and men,’ gravely replied the Captain.¹⁷⁵

Guevara's guerrilla aspirations were set alight at a young age by the fire of literature, stoked with the words of Neruda and Verne. Pablo Neruda's experience with the suffering of Latin America emboldened Che to speak out against the regimes that disenfranchised so many of his countrymen. Verne's character of Captain Nemo served as both an example and a warning. While Che could sympathize with Nemo's lonely path as a leader, he also realized the need to fight for a cause beyond personal revenge.

¹⁷⁵ Verne, *Leagues*, 141.

A Conclusion

Verne depicted the adventures that Che so desired and the future that he was fighting to see. Instead of being a romantic caught in the past, Che was always looking for tomorrow. His ideologies were not to return the world to its perfect, pre-modernized order, but to form it into a new, united and revolutionary society. Guevara would have shared Neruda's passion. It is possible that Guevara, by embracing both Neruda's artistic and philosophical contributions to Latin America, sealed his own fate as an ideological giant.

Lawrence's connection to Morris, however intimate it was, lacked one key element in its ignorance of Morris' socialistic ideals. Lawrence's part in the Arab Revolt and Britain's involvement in it might have taken a far more memorable turn had Lawrence followed Morris into the Socialist League. Instead, Lawrence was a product of the much less progressive Victorian and historical ideas of colonialism. By overlooking Morris's socialism, he destined himself to be lost in the annals of time.¹⁷⁶

Despite his sympathies and desire to bring equality to the poor, some have demonized Guevara because he embraced violence. What is obvious is Guevara's own idea of the "greater good" was his driving force and the end-result of his actions was always in pursuit of this ideal. His familiarity with violence did not come from his literary inspirations, but more likely, the political atmosphere of his childhood Argentina. His childhood impressions of a successful coup involved violent depositions and party cleansing. His tactics at La Cabana in Cuba were successful in creating a more powerful regime, however inhumane they were at times. As a result of these measures, critics of Guevara will always question his status as an icon.

¹⁷⁶ Anderson, *Revolutionary Life*, 569.

While Che's legacy is tainted, for some, by his resort to violence, Lawrence managed to escape this stigma. Guevara argued that he was only doing what was necessary to achieve his ends, but Lawrence upheld his ideal of eschewing violence by not personally killing anyone in combat. He left that to the Arab troops. Morally, it is debatable whether or not Lawrence commanding troops to do killing for him instead of doing the killing himself leaves him blameless for the deaths of Turkish troops, but Lawrence was never demonized in the West for his role in the war.

To fully understand the true legacies left by these men, it is important also to return to the idea of the images that have been created around them as well as the images they created for themselves. Lawrence was a very successful military leader, but his image does not extend much beyond O'Toole's portrayal of him on the silver screen in 1962. Che's military endeavors outside of Cuba were far from successful, yet he is still inspiring revolutionary thought the world over. Guevara's face still adorns the t-shirts of anti-authoritarian college students, and there is sure to be a resurgence of interest in him with the release of the 2008 Steven Soderbergh epic film based on his life. It could be that future generations will know Che through his film portrayal in the same way that Lawrence is universally recognized as Peter O'Toole. The film *Che* is split into two portions, *The Argentine* and *Guerrilla*. The first part depicts Guevara's involvement in the successful Cuban Revolution and the second part depicts Guevara's leadership of the unsuccessful guerrilla bands in Bolivia, as well as his murder there. Actor Benicio del Toro plays Che and was awarded Best Actor at the Cannes Film Festival for his performance. Both *Lawrence* and *Che* are grueling in length, capturing lives that cannot be contained in an acceptable modern cinematic run-time. The two four-hour epics are grand visual

undertakings. Che and Lawrence were bigger than life; it is fitting that their definitive films are epic in length.

Their historical environments, as well, were very different. Lawrence was on the front end the 20th century's new version of colonialism. After World War I, European powers cut up the developing world and distributed the pieces among themselves on a seemingly first-come-first-serve basis. This left the disenfranchised native populations of these countries under the control of foreign domination. Only then, beginning in the inter-war period, did peasants' movements begin, especially in Latin America where the indigenous Indian populations were continuously oppressed as the European upper class grew wealthier. Che emerges at the end of this era, bringing an end to the colonial repression that defined the inter-war period. Nationalist movements were emerging all over the third world in the 1920s and 30s, therefore, the idea of nationalism was much more developed in the third world during Che's childhood than Lawrence's.

The two men had strikingly different ideas about themselves as revolutionary leaders and guerrilla fighters. Lawrence embraced his role as a guerrilla leader saw fighting for the freedom of a stateless, oppressed people. He saw this as a personal challenge, a goal to accomplish. Che spent a good portion his life intentionally discovering the hardships of the people of the third world and experimenting with the best way to alleviate their pains, always fusing the communist cause to his own goals of social justice. Che perfected the tactics of guerrilla warfare in South America and then sought to spread those tactics and the message of Cuban communism to fledgling revolutionary movements in other third world countries. As a result, Che died a martyr and his ideas of political reform and guerrilla strategy live on. Che lives on as the ultimate revolutionary, the ubiquitous inspiration of anyone outraged at "the system" whereas, Lawrence

remains trapped in celluloid. Lawrence died a recluse, with a half-true legacy that faded into history and remains alive primarily in a classic film. Their deaths are testament to their iconic fates, one left a legacy of romance while the other did not.

In his last years, Lawrence became fascinated with engines. He worked with a special branch of the R. A. F. developing speedboats for five years before his honorable discharge in 1935. Lawrence owned several motorcycles throughout his life and delighted in tuning and tweaking them to their top performance. In May 1935, while riding one of his beloved Brough Superior SS100s along the roads of Dorset, he swerved to miss some young boys and an oncoming truck and was fatally injured. After his death, his bust was placed in St. Paul's Cathedral in London and he was buried on the property of family in Dorset. This lackluster death confirmed his fate as a memory of greatness. Che's story would end quite differently, thus, producing a radically different legacy.¹⁷⁷

Under a cover of extreme secrecy, Che returned to Bolivia in 1966 to organize a coup against the U.S.-supported Bolivian government. On October 9, 1967, he was captured and executed by Bolivian forces and buried in an unmarked grave. Pictures of the dead guerrilla were published worldwide, but his grave remained undiscovered until 1997.¹⁷⁸ Guevara's capture and murder were steeped in mystery. Conspiracy theories still link the FBI to Che's execution and the obscure location of his grave left many to believe that Che was not actually dead. The captors who took his picture had to clean up his face to even make him recognizable, as he had undergone plastic surgery shortly before entering Bolivia and was so unkempt from traversing the jungles that his hands were removed to confirm his identification. Che died in action, still

¹⁷⁷ Asher, *Uncrowned King*, 375-77.

¹⁷⁸ Guevara, *Motorcycle Diaries*, 10.

fighting for the communist cause of his youth.¹⁷⁹ He became a martyr of socialist thought, immortalizing him as the ultimate anti-establishment icon.

Why, then, does one of these guerrilla leaders live on as an active inspiration while the other has been entombed as a romantic figure attached to one particular time and place? Both revolutionaries were most prominent outside of their home regions. Che would always be known as “the Argentine” and Lawrence as the Brit amongst the Bedu.¹⁸⁰ Lawrence, despite his waywardness, will always be associated with the British Army and the turncoat operation that the Arab Revolt became. Regardless of his efforts, Lawrence’s ideals were not the engine of the revolt as Che’s were. Che was fighting to give power to a people who sought it before his involvement in their cause. According to Lawrence, he was trying to convince a people who did not have a concept of independence that they deserved power.¹⁸¹ The people sympathetic to Guevara’s cause chose to take up arms and follow a man of their own volition. They were ripe for change and Che facilitated it. The people he fought alongside were not coaxed into a coup; they requested one. His expertise grew both from necessity and passion; his aspirations for the communist cause were rooted in his own ideals.

Che’s death symbolized the end of a traumatic era of war on a worldwide scale. For Lawrence, this era was only beginning and perhaps what makes him the most prominent non-conformist hero of the early 20th century was his willingness to ally with a state-less people when nationalism was *en vogue*. He was still within the bounds of British approval, but chose to fight alongside the exotic tribesmen of Arabia, making him an anomaly in Western culture at the time. His ability to “go native” made him both charming and fascinating to his contemporaries.

¹⁷⁹ Anderson, *Revolutionary Life*, 737-750.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁸¹ Brown, *Selected Letters*, 141-42.

Lawrence's compassion for the oppressed but native Arab population made his cause romantic and justified. However, his legacy is left back in the desert with those Arabs of the past. The same compassion does not exist for those people today as Saudi Arabia has capitalized on their natural resources, becoming wealthy and independent from Western influence. Their struggle does not live on, and perhaps, Lawrence's legacy died along with the triumph of Arab self-determination.

Conversely, Che lived to bring justice to a whole class of people across ethnic divides. His ideology was to equalize the poor across the globe, and even Jesus Christ acknowledged that "the poor will always be with us." Che's surviving belief in social justice is one that only becomes more relevant as the gap between the world's wealthy and destitute continues to widen. His ideal will never die because the poor live on, and despite what evils Guevara may have committed in his lifetime; it is the iconic image of the social activist and idealist "Che" that remains.

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