

There has always been a concurrent fascination and repulsion with the “other.” And since the beginning of cinema, that fascination influenced the screen. The Lumiere Brothers began by sending cameramen around the world to gather footage from far off places and strange lands. While traveling, they also exhibited the films they were collecting. These short glimpses into other cultures eventually evolved into the travelogue. Travelogues featured exotic locales with native cultures for the education and pleasure of the viewer, or at least that was how they were sold. Since then, the travelogue has split and two separate paths have emerged: A documentary style and a narrative style. The documentary travelogue has changed and today is seen in the form of mini-series specials on the National Geographic Channel, “Dirty Jobs” on the Discovery Channel or in the form of films like “March of the Penguins.” But the popular travelogue has morphed into what is now the historical epic. Hallmarks of the early travelogues still exist in the guise of this genre, and can be seen in the grand epic of 1962, *Lawrence of Arabia*.

It also contained footage of native peoples and their culture, moving pictures of an ‘uncivilized’ area, images of foreign landscapes, including flora and fauna, and footage of the visiting filmmakers interacting with the native peoples (often in a condescending way, however unintentionally). These elements together create a slice-of-life picture of an exotic location. Travelogues were touted as educational and realistic, promising to be better than any real life journey. They “promised virtual travel to distant and often inhospitable lands, cinema obviated the need for physical travel.”<sup>1</sup> These assertions carry over into the historical epic. Travelogues publicized films of “wild, fantastic parades ... a fierce charge of Arabs ... afford[ed] wonderful glimpses of the manners and customs of these barbarous tribes. ... -- all make up a sum of wonderful Oriental variety and animation that will live for years in the memory.”<sup>2</sup> Ironically, such an advertisement from the early 1900s sounds just like something used to promote *Lawrence of Arabia*.

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<sup>1</sup> Griffiths, Alison. “Early Travelogues as Filmed Ethnography.” *Film History*, Vol. 11, No 3. Early Cinema. (1999), 293.

<sup>2</sup> Griffiths, 290.

Now that actual worldwide travel is much easier, such blanket claims are less prevalent but certain aspects of the attitude still exist. Films in the historical epic genre represent the modern version of an attempt to capture a complicated subject in a condensed form.

Mark Jankovich describes the genre of historical epic as one that has little written about it but is a growing topic. He describes the historical epic as films that “were frequently sold with the promise that these spectacles not only represented history but themselves were historically momentous achievements. It was claimed that they provided sights never seen before or, at least, never since ancient times,”<sup>3</sup> a description not unlike those accompanying early travelogues. Travelogues claimed realism and they would “leave the mind impressed precisely as would the actual visit.”<sup>4</sup>

This historical epic features a hero who acts as a guide; this hero leading the natives to triumph in spite of insurmountable odds (often in battle). The historical epic does the same by featuring a distant location, either in place or time, or both. This location shows the way of life for these people, how they live and what their surroundings look and feel like. It boils down complex issues that exist within a culture, people and places to a few cinematic hours. The historical epic includes an attempt to understand or become like the foreign native, but ultimate failure to do so, at least completely. There is also an innate sense that the foreign culture could be great, if only they would accept certain aspects of the hero’s outlook. Furthermore, the fact that these historical epics highlight real people, real battles and real places, it is all the more convincing to the viewer that what they are seeing is historically accurate. All of these aspects are holdovers from the early travelogues of faraway places and cultures. As such the genre and characteristics of the early travelogues still exist in modern historical epic films.

In the earliest travelogues, the narrator was the lecturer who traveled with the film and presented the footage in context. This lecturer brought legitimacy to the images on screen by describing

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<sup>3</sup> Jankovich, Mark. "The Purest Knight of All": Nation, History, and Representation in *El Cid* (1960)." *Cinema Journal* 40.1 (2000) Pg. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Griffiths, 293.

what was being seen for the audience and “provided a metacommentary on the slides and films featured in the programme, perhaps using audience reaction to specific images as a cue to depart from the prepared narration with extemporaneous comments about his experiences of visiting a country.”<sup>5</sup> Oddly enough, this lecturer may not have been the one who shot the film, and in some cases had never even been to that country. But this was not known by the audience. The audience accepted this narrator as a learned lecturer. The content would be determined by the audience demographics, and while it was presented as educational, very often highly entertaining and exploitative. This narrator acted as a host, or a guide, through these exotic experiences. In the historical epic, the narrator is wrapped in the character of the hero. He comes across a strange land and sees it for the first time, just like the audience. He tries to learn its customs and idiosyncrasies, just as the viewer does. The hero shares his point of view with that of the audience, thus acting like the narrator of the travelogue. Lawrence in *Lawrence of Arabia* is the title hero of the tale and is the audience’s guide. In this case, T. E. Lawrence is a real person, who did go to Arabia and fight alongside the *bedu* during the Arab Revolt. There are many extant accounts of his exploits, including his own, from which information can be drawn. Therefore the narrator/lecturer must be given a bit more credence than one who spoke at a travel film who had never been to the country discussed. In the case of *Lawrence of Arabia*, T. E.. Lawrence himself traveled on a lecture circuit when he returned to England. It was these travelogues which made him famous. Brownlow writes, “Lawrence was the first political or military figure to be transformed into a legend through the power of moving pictures. Lowell Howell, an American journalist, accompanied by a cameraman, Harry Chase, had been searching the war zones for a colorful hero. At first he thought he had found him in General Allenby, but when he presented his illustrated lecture in New York and London, he found audiences responding with far more enthusiasm to the lecture entitled *With Lawrence in Arabia*.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Griffiths, Alison. “Early Travelogues as Filmed Ethnography.” *Film History*, Vol. 11, No 3. Early Cinema. (1999). Pg. 287.

<sup>6</sup> Brownlow, Kevin. “David Lean - A Biography.” New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996. Pg 402.

The origin of the Lawrence legend began with the early travelogue, and some forty years later, David Lean would solidify that legend with his stunning film, *Lawrence of Arabia*.

At the outset of the film Lawrence is in Cairo, as a British officer, stuck in the maps room in the basement of a stuffy building. His life is drudgery, boring and uninteresting. Then he is assigned to contact the bedouin (*bedu*) who live in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. He embarks, knowing nothing concrete of the Arabs, and is yet determined to be successful on his mission. Lawrence's first encounter with the harshness of the desert world is a scene that has become iconic in the film world. Lawrence and his guide, Tafas, stop at a well to rest, water the camels and refill the canteens. It seems like welcome respite from the grueling trek they have just endured. When it seems that they have quenched their thirst and begin to feel the slightest bit soothed, a shimmering image appears in the distance. The two men freeze, and stare into the distance, their backs to the camera. Their gaze is trained in the distance as the object very slowly becomes a man on a camel. In fact, his entrance last a full two minutes, completely silent. As he arrives, he shoots Tafas dead at Lawrence's feet. Although Lawrence does not know precisely what to make of the situation, he does not back down. He is as confused as the viewer and yet, Lawrence's stubbornness of character remains. The man on the camel introduces himself as Sherif Ali. When Lawrence retorts that he only gives his name to his friends, Sherif Ali dubs him "English." To Ali, Lawrence is another of the English, come to play in the sand then go home and pat themselves on the back. He assumes Lawrence will do nothing for the Arabs, and will never understand or appreciate the Arabs. Here, the historical epic has taken a step forward from the early travelogue.

In the early travelogue, the native peoples would be shown as primitive, quaint and content to be filmed. If there was interaction between the filmmaker and the natives, it was shown to be cordial and pleasant, if distant and polite. If there were any negative native experiences, caused by the presence of the colonialist-era filmmaker, they were not shown to the public. The

filmmakers wished to be shown as welcome visitors, and they wanted the natives to appear to be willing to share their culture. By contrast, the historical epic can make the attempt to show the 'other' point-of-view. *Lawrence of Arabia* does try to show how an Arab might react to a foreigner, and in this case was based on Lawrence's years in the desert.

David Lean, the director of *Lawrence of Arabia*, and consummate world traveler, began the project enamored with the figure of Lawrence but he quickly became obsessed with the desert's mysticism as well. He scouted the project for weeks, and gained the permission and assistance of the Kingdom of Jordan (the existence of which is a direct consequence of the Arab Revolt) for shooting the film on their lands. Lean recalled, "The overriding first impression is that Lawrence was right all along the line. The real desert people are most impressive. Great manners, hospitality, good humour, and gentleness of real men. The town Arab is pretty horrible and on par with the towns themselves."<sup>7</sup> Lean, and Lawrence's, impressions of this foreign culture are vivid throughout the film. The famous scene of Sharif Ali's arrival demonstrates this comparison of two cultures: the hero's and the native's.

Lawrence continues in his position as guide for the audience, when he leads the Arabs across the Nefud desert, a feat difficult for Arabs, let alone an unpracticed Englishman. Again, the viewer is subjected to stunning yet harsh views of the desert as Lawrence and the *bedu* cross the unforgiving expanse. He asks for no special treatment from Sharif Ali or Prince Feisal ("I drink when you drink") truly tries to learn the ways of Arab life.

The narrator-hero acts as a calcedony to the local culture so the audience will have something to relate to. The hero's actions comment on the natives and highlights their differences. As Lawrence and the *bedu* arrive on the other side of the Nefud, it is revealed that Gasim, one of the younger of the *bedu*, has become lost. Lawrence immediately sets out to find Gasim. Sherif Ali argues, insisting it is too dangerous and that he would only be killing himself. Sherif Ali implores that Lawrence refrain from going back into the desert, stating that both will die - "It is

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<sup>7</sup> Brownlow, 412.

written.” Lawrence and the other brother head back into the grueling desert - “the sun’s anvil.” Lawrence orders the brother to wait and he disappears over the horizon. Time passes. The sun beats down. The music denotes confusion and disorientation. Then Gasim’s brother sees a mirage in the distance, and much like Sherif Ali’s entrance, and Lawrence slowly begins to take shape. Gasim’s brother Farraj races towards him shouting for joy, and the camera cuts to a very wide shot, making the two travelers mere specks approaching one another. This shot reminds the viewer just how vastly empty this foreign land is, and how their guide, their hero is able to exist in it.

When Lawrence returns to the camp, with all three of them alive and well, he is hailed as a hero by the *bedu*. They shout “English! English!” and surround him as he sits stoically upon his camel. When he reaches Sherif Ali, he says simply, “Nothing is written.” In this moment he has defied the Arab tradition, which has allowed the *bedu* to live in this harsh climate. But instead of showing disdain, Sherif Ali is impressed. This is an instance of the narrator as guide placing the values of his own culture before those of the host’s. And in this case, it makes him superior to a savage reality that is accepted by the Arabs in the eyes of the audience. It simultaneously illustrates the difficulties of life in this area, and what the *bedu* do to survive in it. For them, the loss of one person is better than the loss of two, however tragic it may be. It is not cruelty imposed by the *bedu*, it is the cruelty of the world they live in. The scene shows how the situation is handled in the Arab world. Yet to the Western world, this behavior seems unacceptable. It does not mesh with our beliefs and any true Western hero would not allow such a thing to happen. If the boy died, it was not because Lawrence didn’t make every effort humanly possible to save him. In this scene Western ideals are also displayed, and heralded, and is just one of many throughout the film that exhibit the Arab culture.

As the film progresses, Lawrence lives his life more and more as an Arab. He wears Arab clothing, travels by camel, eats and drinks as they do, lives by their social standards and leads

battles for their cause. He even tries to institute and lead an Arab parliament in Damascus so that the Arabs may govern themselves in their newly-won freedom. Still all of this cannot make him an Arab. Lawrence must still battle his own demons, whether English or Western or personal, and hiding in the robes of a sherif cannot mask them forever. As an Arab, the horror of killing his friends, pointblank, and leading bloody massacres, eventually begins to drive him insane and he must leave. His position as a guide for the audience ends when he returns to England. Within the film he has shown the audience a full cross-section of his experience. This therefore becomes the audience's experience as well and often comes to encompass their impression of the entire culture.

The location portrayed in *Lawrence of Arabia* is precisely the type to be made exotic by the early travelogue. The desert is mystical. The imagination of the viewer brings with it images of Scherazade and Aladdin, genies, harems, ancient curses, fallen empires, magical and beastly gods, and mysterious people. At the time of the Arab Revolt, near the end of World War I, there were few concrete borders in the Middle East. Tribes of *bedu* were separated by natural boundaries and fought for control of small pieces of oases in the scorching desert. They live in a wandering manner, taking their encampments across the desert from well to well. Such desolate landscape was a blank canvas for David Lean in the making of *Lawrence of Arabia*. He wrote, "The mirage on the flats is very strong and it is impossible to tell the nature of distant objects. ... I can also see how the desert can mean something, little or nothing to various people. I found it a stimulant. ... It somehow threw me back on myself and made me very conscious [sic] of being alive. There you are. Just you and it. ... Everyone is somehow more on their own out there, and perhaps they just have to come face to face with themselves if they come under its spell."<sup>8</sup> Little, physically, had changed since Lawrence's time there ("There are lots of remains of Lawrence's blowing ups"<sup>9</sup>). Its ancient austerity influences the feel of the film and Lean

insisted on perfection for each shot. The production was massive, and:

<sup>8</sup> Brownlow, 414.

<sup>9</sup> Brownlow, 414.

not only did the cast and crew have to assemble in the desert, but a catering corps, to feed them, accompanied by sleeping tents, equipment trucks, horse and camel wranglers, plus vast amounts of food and water to keep the livestock fed and watered. The making of *Lawrence of Arabia* was practically a military operation, with Lean commander in chief. ... It took 20 months to film *Lawrence of Arabia*, during which the cast and crew had to endure the scorching heat of the desert during the day, the freezing cold at night, not to mention sandstorms, plagues of insects and being cut off from civilisation for weeks at a time.<sup>10</sup>

Lean was determined that the audience would see the desert as he saw it, and as he thought Lawrence saw it. Most importantly, it should solidify or enhance the already existing impression of the desert, a hallmark of the early travelogue. Lean and Lawrence each eschewed the bustling cities with modern conveniences, in search of a more 'authentic' Arabia. Lean himself had to grapple with his own preexisting notions of Arabia. He wrote, "The desert is *wonderful*. It gave me a bit of a shock when it wasn't at all what I expected from my boyhood diet of 'The Sheik', 'The Garden of Allah' and 'Beau Geste.' ... At first I was worried by not finding what I expected. ... Then I suddenly realized what I was seeing was better than what I'd hoped to see."<sup>11</sup> Lean was as fastidious a filmmaker as there ever was and every shot, and every moment that made it to screen, was purposeful. He spoke about scouting shots for *Lawrence of Arabia* and describes the epiphany he had regarding Sherif Ali's entrance:

The mirage? I was out there on a mudflat and another jeep was miles behind us. It came over the horizon, and the jeep, I must tell you, looked much better than the camel because the dust went up in the air behind it. Wonderful V shape, like an airplane in some windtunnel. And I thought "What a wonderful entrance." Then some people said - - and I'd heard it before -- that you can't photograph a mirage. So I got out my camera and got the jeep to go farther away again and I took a series of pictures. And it did come out.<sup>12</sup>

Lean was notorious for his perfectionism and visual research. The result is a stunning image, which he used to manipulate the audience's vision of the locations shown.

*Lawrence of Arabia* also attempts to show how the Arabs lived, like early travelogues attempted to

<sup>10</sup> Maxford, Howard. David Lean. London: BT Bradford, 2000. Pg. 110.

<sup>11</sup> Brownlow, 412.

<sup>12</sup> Stevens, Jr., George. *Conversations with the Great Moviemakers of Hollywood's Golden Age at the American Film Institute*. New York: Knopf, 2006. Pg 431-32.

document local lifestyle. Travelogues claimed to show the unaffected culture of the natives. It supposedly depicted peoples who were untouched by the outside world. *Lawrence of Arabia* examines the customs of the Arab, primarily by way of comparison, which is enhanced, again by the narrator/hero figure. For example, the audience sees Lawrence and Allenby in the tent of Prince Feisal. It resembles a diplomatic meeting of leaders, but it clearly differs. The clothing of the Arab is in stark contrast to the plain khakis of the British. The tent is filled with colorful textiles and the men are sitting or reclining on the ground. There are no marble halls, or pictures of the reigning monarch on the wall, yet it is clear that this is a place of seriousness and that Prince Feisal is a person of reverence. This scene depicts the traditions of the royalty of the *bedu*. The lifestyle of the everyman, as shown in *Lawrence of Arabia*, is much more survival-based. Daily life consists mainly of finding and protecting sources of water. Complications include invading tribes, sandstorms and quicksand. To add to the difficulties, during the Arab Revolt, the *bedu* were also attempting to fight off and survive attacks from the encroaching Turks. The film implies that it was all the Arabs could do to survive the day. The audience witnesses long camel-back journeys, dangerous sandstorms, and death by quicksand. Warring tribes shoot each other over drinking from the wrong well. *Lawrence of Arabia* as travelogue shows the Arab as comparatively uncivilized and savage, in need of guidance from a Westerner. Lawrence himself says as much to Sherif Ali at the well. After Tafas is killed, he retorts, “He was my friend.”

Sherif: That!

Lawrence: Yes. That.

Sherif: You are angry, English. He was nothing. The well is everything. The Hasimi may not drink at our wells. He knew that. [Turns to leave] Salaam.

Lawrence: [Yelling after him] Sherif Ali, so long as the Arabs fight tribe against tribe, so long will they be a little people, a silly people, greedy, barbarous, and cruel, as you are.

Sherif: Come, I will take you to Feisal.

Lawrence: I do not want your company, Sherif.

Lawrence does not care if he appears rude to this man. In fact, he hopes to offend him as he was offended by the shooting of his friend. And though he understands, at least intellectually, that

such actions are part of the *bedu* culture, he does not accept them as his own and isn't willing to even under threat of death.

Lawrence's, and therefore the audience's attitude, toward the Arab culture changes during the span of the film. Lawrence learns more about the culture and the individuals within it, and he begins to accept portions of it, in small quantities. After Lawrence rescues Gasim from the Nefud, Sherif Ali and Lawrence sit by a fire. Ali looks upon him with respect, and Lawrence can sense it. He opens up to Ali and reveals a bit about the English culture that is not all that pretty.

Sherif Ali: El Aurens. Truly, for some men nothing is written unless they write it.

Lawrence: Not El Aurens. Just Lawrence.

Sherif Ali: El Aurens is better.

Lawrence: True.

Sherif Ali: Your father too, just Mr. Lawrence?

Lawrence: My father is Sir Thomas Chapman.

Sherif Ali: Is that a lord?

Lawrence: A kind of lord.

Sherif Ali: [proudly] Then when he dies, you too will be a lord.

Lawrence: No.

Sherif Ali: Ah, you have an elder brother.

Lawrence: No.

Sherif Ali: But then, I do not understand this. Your father's name is Chapman.

Lawrence: [pained] Ali, he didn't marry my mother.

Sherif Ali: I see.

Lawrence: I'm sorry.

Sherif Ali: It seems to me that you are free to choose your own name, then.

Lawrence: Yes, I suppose I am.

Sherif Ali: El Aurens is best.

Lawrence: All right, I'll settle for El Aurens.

A significant amount of respect on both sides is displayed in this short scene. Lawrence reveals an awkward detail of his heritage and Ali does not mock him, or the English. Instead he offers inclusion as one of the *bedu*. When Lawrence turns from Ali and the fire in embarrassment, Ali take Lawrence's officers' uniform and burns it. When he awakens in the morning, Ali gives him the robes of a sherif. He presents Lawrence, now El Aurens, with beautiful white robes with gold tassels and a white bernoose (head piece). Lawrence looks upon himself wearing them and says,

“Great honour.”

Sherif Ali: The honour is to us. Salaam, sherif.

Lawrence: Is it permitted?

Sherif Ali: Surely. He for whom nothing is written may write himself a clan.

These two scenes demonstrate a great deal about the interaction of these two cultures. And this attempt at understanding is now a two-way street, an evolution from the early travelogue. Furthermore, the narrator/host is now concerned with pleasing and respecting the foreign tradition. Early travelogues put forth only colonialist ideals of the ‘other’ and often portrayed them simply, without depth. While some of *Lawrence of Arabia* retains this attitude, as discussed above, there is also an additional layer found in the historical epic which portrays an attempt, usually failed or incomplete, to understand and absorb the other culture. Sherif Ali reexamines his impression of Lawrence as “English” after his defiance and ultimate success in rescuing Gasim. Up to that point, his experience with the English was one of inaction, and selfish intentions. Lawrence’s actions were both gallant and at extreme risk to self. Lawrence also performed this feat to save an Arab, not fellow Englishman. This true admiration of the visiting culture is unseen in the early travelogue.

Additionally, Lawrence begins to respect the Arab culture. He does not make any more insulting speeches about their actions. He accepts their christening, being named El Aurens. He also accepts their gift of the robes of a sharif with true humility. He bows to the *bedu*, in their fashion, and greets them with “Salaam” - only after getting permission from Sherif Ali. Lawrence shows great respect for the *bedu* and their customs with these actions. Unlike the early travelogue, the historical epic portrays instances of true cultural dialogue between the host and visiting peoples.

The distant and remote time in which *Lawrence of Arabia* takes place also make this historical epic much like an early travelogue. One offering of the travelogue is the chance to see a culture that is nearly extinct. Lyman Howe, popular travelogue producer and lecturer used the phrase “See

Them Now or Never” in his advertising. He exhibited films with the “recurrent notion of a world inhabited by rapidly disappearing native ‘types’.”<sup>13</sup> The claim was that modern times were encroaching and their authentic culture is quickly disappearing. It was therefore necessary to document the culture in its native habitat before it’s too late. Furthermore, it was necessary for the viewer to see these travelogues to understand the world that is changing around them.

*Lawrence of Arabia* visits two such disappearing cultures at once. Both the English Victorian era and the *bedu* culture were fading. Lawrence represents the typical disillusioned of the youth thrown into W.W.I. The Lost Generation was raised with Victorian ideals in an industrial age. Encouraged to believe in chivalry, at all costs, they were sorely dumbfounded when wave after wave of their sword-rattling cavalry were mowed down by machine gun fire and nerve agents. This war was nothing like their fathers and grandfathers had described. Those that survived the battles were shattered, confused, and felt they had nothing to build the rest of their life on. Brownlow writes, “...the Western world needed an authentic hero to shore up the ideals for which the war had allegedly been fought. ‘A shining symbol was needed to prove that chivalry and nobility has not vanished, that we had not fought in vain when individual genius could rise out of mass horror’.”<sup>14</sup> The foundation that the Lost Generation had built was demolished and Lawrence speaks for this generation. He somehow managed to find that place where the ideals of chivalry still survived. He found a place where he would ride into battle, sword raised, and come out victorious. He found the adventure the rest of the generation had been promised. While every generation has its hallmarks, the Lost Generation was deeply scarred and it changed the literary, art, and music world forever. *Lawrence of Arabia* provides a glimpse into the psyche of this generation.

The second vanishing culture to be showcased in *Lawrence of Arabia* is of course the *bedu*. Living the same way for centuries, their traditions are hard-earned and stoic. They had as yet to be overexposed to the modern world. Only the biggest ports were modern cities, and so the *bedu*

<sup>13</sup> Griffiths, 289.

<sup>14</sup> Brownlow, 408.

continued to live a nomadic lifestyle relatively untouched. Lawrence is able to immerse himself in this foreign world so completely that it seems as though the rest of the world has gone away. Lawrence acts as the audience's guide through the last days of this remote culture. Once the *bedu* begin to fight back against the Turkish invasion, they tacitly agree to interact with the outside, modern world. The British, led by Lawrence, present modern machinery and ideas into the hands and minds of the *bedu*. While this change affords them the victory and independence they wish for, their existence is forever altered. They cannot return to the simplicity they lived before the Arab Revolt. *Lawrence of Arabia* as a historical epic explores not only a distant land, but an extinct time. It offers the audience a chance to see a world, in dazzling Cinemascope brilliance, that no longer exists.

When sound came to film, it was used to legitimize the genre of the early travelogue, including real recordings of native sounds to accompany the images on screen. Audiences of the time found the travelogues were "greatly enhanced by the mechanical sound effects and human voices which could be heard at appropriate points during the film screenings. ... and makes the audience forget for a moment that they are really looking at views, but are spectators at actual events."<sup>15</sup> Even at this early stage of cinema, the importance of sound to the realism of the travelogue had become clear.

The historical epic uses dialogue to advance the narrative, rich 'natural' sound effects, and sweeping symphonic thematic scores. These evolved elements have become part of the epic's style. In *Lawrence of Arabia*, the viewer's experience is enhanced by all these elements. The audience gets to hear the sounds of sandstorms, camels bleating, and clang of swords in battle.

Maxford writes:

Lean makes as much use of startling sound effects as he does imagery to impose on his audience the other world of the desert. As Sherif Ali approaches Lawrence and Tafas from the mirage, all we hear is the gentle pad, pad, pad of the feet of Ali's camel as it makes its way towards the well, all of which adds to the building tension. ... Finally the taking of Aqaba, we're refreshed by the sound of waves crashing thunderously on to the

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<sup>15</sup> Griffiths, 294.

beach as Lawrence rides along the coast in triumph. Indeed this is the first time we've seen a body of water in the film, and after the heat and dust of the Nefud, one can almost feel the coolness of the foamy waves.<sup>16</sup>

The sounds of nature help to create the atmosphere of the film.

The one and only time women are in the film, it is their sound that is notable. As Lawrence and Sherif Ali head off to battle there are women sitting on the tops of the cliffs, looking like outcroppings, watching the men ride by. They are wailing and the sound is loud and overwhelming. Lawrence is struck, impressed and confused by it. Ali explains the significance of this and that the women are wishing them well as they head into battle. The sound is deafening, and strange to the Western ear. The inclusion of such a scene further accentuates the exoticness of the the desert culture, and the strange world that Lawrence is in.

An aspect of the historical epic that did not exist with early travelogues is the score. Scores give emotional theme to the overall film and individual scenes. Music is an international language and certain styles evoke subconscious responses. *Lawrence of Arabia*, at this point, would seem empty without the score. Composer Maurice Jarre created leitmotifs for the desert scenes, British scenes and Arab scenes. The themes are repeated throughout the film, at different tempos and in different instrumentations to enhance the action on the screen. The desert theme, the main theme of the film uses the harmonic minor scale to replicate the sounds of Arabian music. Harmonic minor raises the 7th, which gives an exotic sound to otherwise Western melodies. Interestingly, harmonic minor is a scale used by Western composers and orchestras to *evoke* a sense of Arabian or Middle Eastern music and sounds. Middle Eastern culture's native music is not played in harmonic minor. They do not even use the Western diatonic scale, which ascends by half-steps. Their instruments are played on a 23-note scale and include quarter and three-quarter increments. Jarre composing with the Western harmonic minor is another instance of a foreign culture being simplified and digested for the moviegoing audience. This main theme

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<sup>16</sup> Maxford, 115-116.

is the one that audiences could walk away humming and it acted as a unifying aspect within the film. It is sweeping, fluid, romantic and appears in otherwise quiet moments. It can shift tempos and moods, softly, like the sand dunes. It comes to represent the romantic ideal of the desert, and a foreigner's discovery of it. It is triumphant and confident in itself and makes the listener feel all of this at once.

The British theme is used the least, but it signifies the properness of English society and procedure. It uses simple melodies played lightly and staccato. It suggests the idea that form is most important. It keeps everything outwardly lovely and anything that does not fit within this rigid, developed form should change or be left behind.

The Arab theme is native and tribal. It begins with loud tympani, like the banging of war drums. It is dissonant but strong, as if everyone is playing confidently but not everyone is on the same page. Its progression is unpredictable and non-melodic. It conveys the confusion and incoherence of the *bedu* and the Arab peoples before Lawrence solidified their efforts. This theme occurs primarily in battle scenes, themselves moments of confusion.

At times, these themes are played over one another and reflect the attempted unity of disparate agendas. Just before the intermission, Lawrence returns from the desert to the British headquarters in Cairo. Even though he was sent as an emissary from the British army, he returns an emissary for the Arabs. He confers with his superiors while wearing the robes of a sherif, not a British uniform. Now the clash is no longer between Lawrence and the Arabs. It lies somewhere between Lawrence, his support of the Arabs' independence and the English. As the film goes to intermission, the music reflects this great conflict. The stirring desert theme remains in melody, but has changed in structure. It is played over the tribal Arab theme, and the piccolo, which is the lead instrument of the British theme, cries shrilly over the top of everything. It is all coming to boil and the disturbance is evident. Lawrence can no longer ride in the soft, fluid strains of his romantic ideals. Nor can he find meaning or order among the

British ranks. And yet, he is not quite an Arab. This ambivalence is reflected in the score by Maurice Jarre and viewer is cued by the musical themes. Just as with early travelogues, the historical epic uses sound to create the atmosphere of the mysterious place. The historical epic *Lawrence of Arabia* extends this characteristic by creating additional sounds in the composition of emotional effective music.

The original trailer for *Lawrence of Arabia* opens with a quote from Winston Churchill: “I deem him to be one of the greatest beings alive in our time... we shall never see his like again. His name will live in history. It will live in the annals of war... It will live in the legends of Arabia.” The fantastic claims of Churchill, a well-respected and larger-than-life figure himself, set the tone for this historical epic. The quote mirrors the claims made by early travelogues and further aims to impress the audience with representations of accuracy. A quote such as that from Churchill is unlikely to be refuted by the Western world and solidifies “a spectator’s imagined version of an object or phenomenon, [that] can never fully escape the internalised culturally-constructed way of seeing it which may end up more ‘real’ than the first hand account.”<sup>17</sup> These claims at realism are underscored by the fact that real people are characters in the film, the location shooting, and the length. These aspects of the historical epic genre lead the viewer to assume that the film is a fairly accurate account of that particular piece of history. *Lawrence of Arabia* has become a pocket encyclopedia of the Arab Revolt and T. E. Lawrence’s involvement in it for millions of Western viewers, for at least two generations so far. Its grand scale (shot in Cinemascope), locations (Jordan, Morocco, Cairo, Spain), troubled characters (on all sides), and fabulous length (longest cut at about 222 minutes) all seem to add up to realism. Instead they merely point to fastidious *filmmaking*, not historical accuracy.

Historical epics often claim to tell “the real story of” or the “true events of .” In some cases, most certainly in *Lawrence of Arabia*, the filmmakers were committed to telling Lawrence’s story. The only failing is their limited view of the world, which colors their concept of the story. David

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<sup>17</sup> Griffiths, 293.

Lean represents the story from a British perspective. Even the film's several attempts to portray the Arab world view were made by a Westerner. Although the exact circumstances are unknown, the support of the Kingdom of Jordan changed at some point during the course of filming. Lean and producer Sam Spiegel went from having free-reign in Jordan for a location shoot, to being asked not to return. Additionally, when David Lean was asked how *Lawrence of Arabia* was received in the Middle East he said, "They banned it in Jordan, where we shot it, because, as you know, Hussein is the king there, and Feisel, the Alec Guinness character in the film is portrayed as an unwarlike man who would rather spend his time in the garden. This isn't history as it's taught over there."<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the official history of the Kingdom of Jordan does not even acknowledge the existence of T. E. Lawrence, let alone a positive or negative comment on him. Their history of the Arab Revolt does not include a need for English guidance. The only mention of the British involvement is one of betrayal, regarding the French and English dividing of Arab lands with the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The website of the Kingdom of Jordan states that "The Sykes-Picot Agreement specified that most of Palestine was to be entrusted to an international administration. The agreement clearly contradicted the promises made to Sharif Hussein of Mecca. To further complicate matters, in a totally deceitful move British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour in 1917 issued a letter to a prominent British Jew, Lord Rothschild, promising Britain's commitment and support for a Jewish home in Palestine."<sup>19</sup> Still, does this mean that T. E. Lawrence had nothing to do with the battles against the Turks? Or are they merely tired of Western images of their own?

Despite being accepted in the Western world as an incredible example of filmmaking and exceptional storytelling, *Lawrence of Arabia* represents only one aspect of the Arab Revolt. This does not mean it is a fictitious account; only that it is not all encompassing. Early travelogues faced the same challenge. At least some of the footage displayed the life of natives but the presentation of information documented was done by Westerners. It is impossible for

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<sup>19</sup>Jordan - History - The Great Arab Revolt. [http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/his\\_arabrevolt.html](http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/his_arabrevolt.html) (Accessed

documentarian to remain completely anonymous as everything in life has shaped their personality which in turn affects their interests in shots, aesthetics and theme choices. This is highly evident in the history of the early travelogue.

The historical epic genre represents a movement toward an evolved version of the travelogue which attempts to include the perspective of the native in the exotic narrative. *Lawrence of Arabia*, a masterful historical epic, fulfills the role of modern travelogue through its use of the narrator/hero, its exploration of foreign cultures and locations, an endeavor to understand the foreign culture, use of sound effects and symphonic scores, and an attempt to display historical accuracy. These aspects of *Lawrence of Arabia*, and other historic epics, are evolved from the early travelogue.