

## Freshman Seminar

Fall 2016

### Lawrence of Arabia: His Life, Literature, and Legacy

#### Instructor

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#### Seminar Description

During the First World War, a young British officer by the name of T.E. Lawrence helped lead an Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire, a war and a revolt that determined the shape of the modern Middle East, for good or for ill. After the war, Lawrence became famous in the West—the war’s first celebrity, “Lawrence of Arabia.” However, the long memoir he wrote shortly thereafter, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, was hardly celebratory. On the contrary, it is a tortured confession of the triumph and tragedy of the revolt: what “waking dreams” were had, and how they were dashed. Into that narrative Lawrence weaves captivating meditations—philosophical, psychological, and religious. This course will look closely at Lawrence’s life, literature, and legacy, through his own writings, and writings (and films) about him. We will endeavor to get past the myth, and to the man; past his part (however over or underrated) in geopolitics, and to his peculiar and ambivalent genius. To that end, we will also attend to his life *after* the war, when he sought anonymity in the ranks of the Royal Air Force, devoted himself to new writing projects (including a translation of Homer’s *Odyssey*), and his fatal love affair with speed—which led to his untimely death in a motorcycle accident in 1935.

#### Required Books

T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* [SPW]

T.E. Lawrence, *The Mint*

John Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder* [POD]

David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* [**suggested**]

All other readings will be made available as PDFs. In addition to readings, we will be watching three films:

*Lawrence of Arabia: The Battle for the Arab World* (2003)

*Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)

*A Dangerous Man: Lawrence After Arabia* (1991)

A very helpful reference website: <http://www.telstudies.org>

## Requirements

A “satisfactory” grade will be given to students who will fulfill all the following requirements:

### 1. Attendance and Participation

It is expected that you will attend every class and participate fully in the discussion.

### 2. Reading

It is vital that you read the assigned texts carefully and come prepared for each class, ready to ask and field questions.

### 3. Viewing:

You are responsible for viewing the assigned films on your own time as part of your weekly assignments. All films will be on reserve in Lamont Library. Bear in mind that the films are full-length motion pictures, and thus you need to be prepared to identify times in your schedule to watch these films independently. You are most welcome to watch the film together with your fellow classmates (SOCH at Hilles has viewing facilities that can be reserved by sending an email to [soch@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:soch@fas.harvard.edu)).

### 3. Writing assignments:

(1) 4-5 pages, due in Week 7

Select a short passage from *SPW*—not longer than a paragraph—and argue for how this short passage sheds crucial light on the entirety of the book, and on the events the book narrates. Try to find a passage where Lawrence’s language is especially rich and/or fraught, so that your interpretation can revel in the details of his prose.

(2) 4-5 pages, due in Week 10

Select a scene from the play or one of the two films we have seen, a scene that depicts an episode from *SPW* but does so substantially differently than Lawrence does in his narrative. First explain how the dramatic or cinematic depiction is different, and then explore whether and how its different depiction is significant. Why would the playwright or screenwriter or director wish to present a different version of this episode? Does their different depiction compromise the play or film, or does it rather reveal something crucial that Lawrence cannot, or will not, in *SPW*?

(3) 10 pages, due at the end of Reading Period

It is often noted how significantly *The Mint* differs in terms of theme, scope, and language, from *SPW*. Challenge this common view by first focusing on some feature of *The Mint*—be it a short passage or an episode or the overall structure of the work—and then arguing for its deep continuity with *SPW*. How do the two works speak to each other in ways that may not be apparent at first glance?

## Other policies:

### Electronic Devices:

No laptops in class as they have proven distracting to the user and to others. Please turn off all mobile devices and other noisemakers for the duration of the sessions.

### Academic Integrity:

Collaboration of any sort on any work submitted for formal evaluation is not permitted. This means that you may not discuss any of the written assignments with other students. All work should be entirely your own and must use appropriate citation practices to acknowledge the use of books, articles, websites, lectures, discussions, etc., that you have consulted to complete your assignments.

## **Schedule of Assignments**

### Week 1

View: *Lawrence of Arabia: The Battle for the Arab World* (1hr 52 mins)

Recommended: if you are looking for relevant background for World War I and the Middle East, please read David Fromkin's *A Peace to End All Peace*.

### Week 2

Select correspondence from TEL's youth  
*POD* Part 1 and 2 (3-110)

### Week 3

*SPW* Introduction and Book I-II (23-164)  
*POD* Part 3 (111-244) – read this along with *SPW* over the next three weeks

### Week 4

*SPW* Book III-V (165-381)

### Week 5

*SPW* Book VI-VIII (382-535)

### Week 6

*SPW* Book IX-X and Epilogue (536-661)  
André Malraux, "Lawrence and the Demon of the Absolute"

\*SPECIAL EVENT\*: Class outing to Houghton Library to see the 1926 subscribers' edition of *SPW* as well as important manuscripts of Lawrence's other works.  
Supplementary readings include:

A.J. Plotke, "Eric Kennington and *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: A Reassessment"  
Jeremy Wilson, "T.E. Lawrence and the Printing of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*"  
Kate Rich, "T.E. Lawrence, Designer and Printer"

### Week 7

#### **First writing assignment due**

View: *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962) (3hrs 42mins)  
Steven Caton, *Lawrence of Arabia: A Film's Anthropology* (selections)

### Week 8

Terence Rattigan, *Ross* (read online: <https://archive.org/details/rossadramatic001479mbp>)  
Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, "White Skins / Brown Masks: The Double Mimesis, or With Lawrence in Arabia" (299-338)  
Select correspondence with Charlotte Shaw

### Week 9

View: *A Dangerous Man: Lawrence After Arabia* (1hr 43 mins)  
POD Part 4 (245-318)  
Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Introduction & Chapter 3 (1-30, 226-283)

### Week 10

#### **Second writing assignment due**

Select correspondence around TEL's translation of the *Odyssey*  
POD part 5 (319-414)  
Maren Cohn, "Reflective Heroes: Self-Integration through Poetry in T.E. Lawrence and Homer's *Odyssey*"  
Stephanie Nelson and Maren Cohn, "Lawrence's *Odyssey*: A "Prosaic" Approach to Greatness"

### Week 11

T.E. Lawrence, *The Mint*  
Andrew Williams, *The Toxic Morsel: T.E. Lawrence and the Mint* (selections)

### Week 12

Select correspondence around unfinished work, *Confession of Faith*  
POD Part 6 (415-462)

#### **Third writing assignment due at the end of reading period**

