Essays on T. E. Lawrence

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and we are part of it.” This assertion seems to me more accurate as to Shaw’s views. Likewise, he has a quite original and powerful reading of Cusins whose lack of bodily health, Baker argues, proceeds from the struggle inside himself between “his conscience and impulses of which he does not approve.”

Minor annoyances in the book are several printing errors, a needless digression on Middlemarch, and the author’s eclectic (and occasionally unreliable) sources (e.g., Carol Gilligan, whose research on girls and boys has been shown by Christina Sommers to be based on unrevealed data). Baker accuses “contemporary economic textbooks on economics” of “an overwhelming right-wing capitalist bias” because they ignore the economists, Ricardo and Jevons, whose theories Shaw believed made “a compelling case for socialism.” Perhaps that’s because contemporary economists have looked at the history of capitalism and state socialism over the last century and seen what each actually produces in practice as opposed to in theory. Alas, as someone has said, Academe and Hollywood are the last places left on earth that think Marx got it right.

Although I think Turco’s book, Shaw’s Moral Vision remains the best study of Shaw’s thought, religious and otherwise, Baker makes a heartfelt and honest attempt to grapple with the contradictions and attractions of Shaw’s provocative religious ideas. Somewhere Jacques Barzun says that for Shaw’s admirers it is not a question of agreeing with this or that idea but of being moved by the vision. And that Baker is indeed moved by Shaw’s vision comes through strongly in the author’s personal and intense engagement with Shaw’s beliefs.

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Essays on T. E. Lawrence


DESPITE THE FACT that it is wildly overpriced, Charles Stang’s The Waking Dream of T. E. Lawrence is welcome as an additional testimony to the growing acceptance of Lawrence of Arabia as a subject worthy of academic attention; it is the third scholarly collection to be published on Lawrence since 1984. However, because of wide disparities in quality, the collection’s eight original essays by seven historians, classicalists, and modern literature professors trained or teaching at American and Canadian universities are not equally valuable. In fact, only
about half of the book's essays can be said to advance the field in any way.

Stang has usually done his own homework even if some of his contributors have not done theirs. His "The Many Ways of T. E. Lawrence" builds on a previous scholar's insight, which Stang duly acknowledges, that Lawrence is perhaps best seen as a brilliant polymath. In this introductory essay Stang covers the necessary ground by summarizing Lawrence's achievements in many fields.

Theoharis explicates the subtitle of Seven Pillars of Wisdom, "A Triumph," on the basis of the Roman meaning of the word as a victorious military procession. While an interesting idea, it proves insubstantial as a foundation for even this relatively brief essay, which also touches on Theoharis's conception of Lawrence's sexual nature. The fact that Theoharis has not reacted to or even consulted any of the numerous previous discussions of Lawrence's subtitle or personality, outside one of Stang's essays in this volume, further impoverishes an already thin essay.

Stang's much more substantial piece, "Does Not Care," very usefully sustains an extended comparison between Herodotus and Lawrence as epic historiographers. On the basis of that comparison he is able to justify to some degree what those from a more scrupulous school of historiography typically see as failures in both Herodotus and Lawrence: a lack of precision, a possible mixture of fact and fancy, and a tendency to gild the lily with the paintbrush of fine writing. Stang quotes Nietzsche to support Lawrence's type of history-writing, which attempts to make the reader aware of "great and exalted things" rather than of document-based details. Stang's defense of Lawrentian historiography may be debatable, but it is a spirited defense built for the most part on a solid consideration of previous scholarship. The only weak point in this essay is Stang's claim that Nietzsche has not been treated sufficiently in the Lawrence literature. Both Jeffrey Meyers and Thomas J. O'Donnell (neither of whom Stang mentions) have provided substantial commentary on Nietzsche's influence on Lawrence.

James Gelvin's skeptical view of Lawrence's generalizations about the Arabs and the Middle East in his time in Seven Pillars of Wisdom stands against Stang's defense of Lawrence's epic historical style. Following Elie Kedourie's harsh criticism of Lawrence as a policy maker and historian, Gelvin sees Lawrence doggedly adhering to several mistaken assumptions about the contemporary Middle East. For instance, according to Gelvin (and Kedourie) and contra Lawrence's claims, Syr-
ian Arab elites preferred the Turks to Lawrence's chosen rulers, Sherif Hussein of Mecca and his family, the Hashemites; and also according to Gelvin, the Sherif was never a nationalist in the modern sense of the word despite Lawrence's attempt to make him seem like one. Gelvin makes several good points, and his raised eyebrow is a valuable corrective to a naïve view of the accuracy of some of Lawrence's historical statements. Yet Gelvin goes too far in a negative direction, claiming for instance that the Arab Revolt did not "have much of any lasting impact." It is important to remember that Lawrence's (and the Arab Bureau's) choice of the pro-Western Hashemites for a leading role in the Middle East persists to this day in King Hussein's rule in Jordan, so it has endured over eighty years, well beyond most other achievements of political policy in the twentieth century. (We might also ask if Iraq and the world would have been happier had the Hashemite rule of that country, also supported by Lawrence, lasted beyond the coup of 1958 that ended it). In any case, Gelvin's cautionary look at Lawrence as diplomat and historian, which is also based on the work of C. Ernest Dawn and William Ochsenwald among others, is worth careful consideration.

Maren Cohn's two essays build on her University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation on Lawrence's translation of the Odyssey, which is the most thorough consideration of that important translation yet. Like Stang's work, both of Cohn's essays show an awareness of her predecessors in the field, particularly James Notopoulos and Maurice Bowra, among others. In the first essay, "Reflective Heroes: Self-Integration through Poetry in T. E. Lawrence and Homer's Odysseus," she shows that Lawrence desperately hoped to escape a pervasive feeling of mental fragmentation through his writing and Odyssey translation, but that he only grew more and more impatient with Homer (and himself) as the translation progressed and self-integration eluded him. Yet, like many other commentators, she points out that despite Lawrence's famous introduction attacking the Homer of the Odyssey, he produced one of the best of all the prose translations of that work.

Her second essay, co-authored with Stephanie Nelson, stresses what they see as the irreverence of Lawrence's Odyssey translation, following Maurice Bowra's and Robert Graves's commentaries, among others. According to Cohn and Nelson, because of Lawrence's distrust of heroism in himself and others, his translation "punctures pretension" in language and characterization, and ultimately exposes the Odyssey's in-
herent anti-heroic as well as heroic aspects. This makes Lawrence’s version not only unique but also uniquely accurate and useful.

Jonathan Hart’s essay on Lawrence and the Shaws is a reading of the Lawrence-GBS-Charlotte Shaw correspondence recently published by Jeremy Wilson and his Castle Hill Press (and reviewed in ELT, 45.4, 2002), plus some additional correspondence from Lawrence to F. N. Doubleday and Sir John Maxwell held at the Princeton University library. Strangely, Hart neglects to even mention Stanley Weintraub’s Private Shaw and Public Shaw (1963), a book wholly devoted to the relationship between Lawrence and the Shaws, and which was based on some of the same letters later published in the Wilson volume. The result of this neglect is that Hart does not shed much new light on Lawrence’s relationship with the Shaws, and also ends up saying very little that cannot be gleaned from a reading of the letters themselves. His cavalier decision to ignore almost all of the secondary Lawrence literature also has unfortunate consequences for his own interpretation of the letters. Thus, he seems unaware that Lawrence’s letter of 28 September 1925 to Mrs. Shaw about wanting to feel degraded and publicly dirtied may refer at least as much to Lawrence’s anguish concerning his secret postwar practice of having himself whipped as it does to his torture by the Turks at Deraa during the war.

The final essay, by George Gawrych, uses Lawrence’s own claimed reading in military theory and his supposed use of that theory to argue that theoretical studies should be a more important part of the curriculum at American war colleges today. Whatever the truth of his claim about American military training, Gawrych largely ignores the skeptical studies about Lawrence’s campaign and his account of it in Seven Pillars. Richard Aldington, for instance, who Gawrych apparently has not consulted, charged that Lawrence did not actually read any of the theorists whom he mentions in chapter 33 of Seven Pillars, but rather learned about them superficially from a war games club at Oxford. If true, that would make Lawrence less than the serious student of military theory that he ostentatiously claims to be at the beginning of that chapter. In a cagey footnote, Gawrych evades the issue of how much theory Lawrence actually read. At the same time, the writer who makes the best case for Lawrence’s overall strategic contribution, the German military historian Konrad Morsey, is also missing from Gawrych’s bibliography. And even Morsey suspects that in Seven Pillars of Wisdom, Lawrence retrospectively claimed that for strategic reasons he did not
want to take the city of Medina in order to hide the probable reality that the Arab forces simply could not take Medina, and in order to make his own campaign seem more planned than it actually was. To Gawrych’s credit, however, he makes some interesting remarks about Lawrence and coalition building, showing once again how Lawrence remains uncannily relevant to discussions of the Middle East.

Since only four of the book’s eight essays noticeably contribute to our understanding of Lawrence, Stang’s collection is even more overpriced than it seems at first. Serious Lawrentians will want a copy of this book; other potential buyers must judge for themselves if those four essays alone are worth the high price of admission.

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Ulysses’s Promise for a Post-Colonial Ireland


Gibson’s thoroughly researched and documented study revolves around a paradox; he tackles the “traditional account of Joyce as a deracinated, international modernist” by tracing the opposing perspectives of Ezra Pound and H. G. Wells that view Ulysses as either somehow beyond national politics or deeply entrenched in an antagonism against colonial and Catholic power. Gibson maps these perspectives against Bloom and Stephen and asserts that Joyce criticism has begun to address both strands without yet converging. The significance of Joyce’s Revenge is that Gibson provides an intersection, an analysis of both/and, a solution to the paradox.

With a remarkable graciousness to scholarly predecessors and even dissertations in preparation, Gibson sets forth his argument: a perspective fundamentally concerned to show Joyce’s commitment to “liberation from the colonial power and its culture.” Borrowing from Francis Duggan, Gibson articulates with exceeding clarity how Joyce renounced the cultural nationalism of Irish politics such as found in games, sports, and music as well as public oratory in favor of an “aesthetic warfare” in order to accomplish a new kind of liberation, one that resists reinscribing the binary between colonizer / colonized: “In Ulysses as a whole, the famously pacifist Joyce is partly concerned to translate a ferocious political struggle into the literary arena, thereby releasing it from its most debilitating features, notably passionate violence. Here if anywhere, Joyce’s revenge is liberating rather than dis-