



The Price of Idealism

The Price of Idealism

explanatory play about Lawrence of Arabia

by Christian Lanciai (2010, translated 2018)

Dramatis personae:

Lieutenant Thomas E. Lawrence, later major

Dahoum

Professor David George Hogarth

Captain Gilbert Clayton

Sir Reginald Wingate

Prince Feisal of Arabia

Sir Ronald Storrs

Sir Edmund Allenby, general

the Bey of Deraa

his officer and soldiers

Sherif Ali

Said

a captain

General Harry Chauvel

The action is Arabia 1911-1918.

The play is a kind of chamber play completely undressed of all epic heroism trying to concentrate exclusively on the central problem points of the complicated case of T.E.Lawrence 'of Arabia'. All persons are taken from reality, 'Dahoum's' real name was Salim Ahmed, the 'S.A.' in the dedication of "Seven Pillars of Wisdom", while the Bey of Deraa never could be identified in spite of Lawrence's own painstaking account of this crucial crisis in the development of his personal oversensitivity.

Christian Lanciai, 2010

Act I scene 1. Karkemish, Syria, 1911.

Lawrence Free at last! The holy land is at our feet, and all we have to do is to take care of it.

Dahoum But what about the Turks?

Lawrence It's only a matter of time. Their time is out, and their days are numbered. That's part of the reason why I am here, Dahoum, to undermine criminal empires, and the Turkish is possibly the most criminal and rotten of all.

Dahoum Are not all empires criminal and rotten?

Lawrence We try to make the British an exception, and we practically made it so far. Contrary to most empires we are a democracy, and instead of suppressing subjected people we make it our duty to develop and educate them, to make them mature by themselves from lawlessness to democracy. We will have very much to do, Dahoum, but we accepted the burden once and for all, that's why we've spread all over the world, because we can do it.

Dahoum What about the French? They also seek influence in Syria.

Lawrence The French are more selfishly inclined. They also are a democracy today, but only forty years ago they were an empire under a ruthless Napoleon. They still have far to go and much to learn. We have been a democracy for more than two hundred years, while they don't even have reached half that maturity. Their desire here is to govern.

Dahoum Isn't that your aim as well? Why else would you have come here?

Lawrence To dig and excavate, Dahoum. I am an archaeologist and want nothing more than archaeology. History is here since more than 3000 years to be rediscovered, charted and restored, and history is the only absolute teacher of man. All other fields of knowledge, like science and philosophy, religion and politics, will only lead to megalomania and risky temptations, but history is always wise, for it is dead but lives all the same and proves by its existence after death that there is an eternal life for everybody to take part in, if we only make ourselves worthy of it by refraining from vanity and folly.

Dahoum And megalomania.

Lawrence Above all.

Dahoum Here is now our professor.

Lawrence Welcome, professor Hogarth.

Hogarth You seem to take it easy.

Lawrence Archaeology is the easiest and calmest work of all requiring basically only arduous patience. That's why I chose it.

Hogarth Don't forget that you are also here on other purposes.

Lawrence You keep reminding me, professor.

Hogarth Don't forget that our duties are not only to the empire but to the entire humanity.

Lawrence But we are here to bring down empires, professor. No double standards, please. I was primarily sent here to find weak spots with the Turks and strategic

possibilities for ourselves in the future. That's why I will dig as little as possible but look around all Mesopotamia as much as possible.

Hogarth We are privileged, Lawrence, to serve the right empire with the best possibilities in the world.

Lawrence Just don't say also that we are at the heart of history.

Hogarth But we are, and you know it.

Lawrence It's unnecessary to remind me.

Hogarth You are too easily bored. Take care of life's possibilities and beauties instead! Forget yourself and show some more interest in the positive sides of life and creation!

Lawrence I will try to forget myself throughout my life just because I was born the wrong person.

Hogarth Forget your complexes, Lawrence. Your family background means nothing. Only you yourself are of any consequence to your life.

Lawrence And so you ask me to forget myself?

Hogarth Balance, Lawrence, between your own qualifications and your duties to mankind and life.

Lawrence You mean reproduction? Begetting children, bringing them up and giving them a safe future? You know I can't stand women. Forget it.

Hogarth You are still so young. You may yet grow up.

Lawrence Either you are born mature enough, or you will never mature. Honestly speaking, I don't really know to which category I belong.

Hogarth No matter how mature you are already as a young man, you can always acquire further maturity.

Lawrence I am afraid I am a hopeless case. I was born conceited and bitter, the betrayal by my parents confirmed my reasonable detachment from life, and such a realistic attitude is incurable.

Hogarth Carry on and live, Lawrence, be patient with yourself and carry on digging, and travel around in the country as much as you can. Learn Arabic, get to know the Hebrews, get familiar with the different Turkish and Syrian dialects, and you might one day help us liberating the country. That's why I've stayed on your being here.

Lawrence Thanks, professor. Or else I would really be a hopeless case.

Hogarth There is no hopelessness. That's an illusion for fools.

Lawrence What is an illusion for fools, professor, if not our naïve illusions about the empire? Didn't even King Arthur and his Camelot perish in the merciless irrefutability of reality? If anything is futile, it's every empire, and ours will only be a number in the long line of historical failures.

Hogarth But King Arthur and Camelot made an effort to give the world immortal ideals and beautiful legends. At least we can do as much as that.

Lawrence Yes indeed, professor. That's why I am here.

Hogarth That's the spirit.

Lawrence Come, Dahoum. We have the latest excavations to inspect. (*leaves with Dahoum*)

Hogarth (alone) He has all possibilities and could achieve anything, since he is a free and talented young man, but he doesn't realize his possibilities himself and could because of that fail in taking care of them.

Scen 2.

Dahoum I don't understand your problem, Aurens. You have everything but are dissatisfied with everything. You come from the best of families but have no family. You have the best profession in the world as an archaeologist but only want to do something else all the time. I can't make you out, Aurens.

Lawrence My family deceived me, Dahoum. That's why I have no family. I was brought up in a family of lies, but I don't want any lies, for I don't want to be a liar and spread lies of double standards myself. My father never married my mother, for he was already married and had children. I was never told about that. I grew up knowing I had a mother, but she was false and not my mother. My father left his family, wife and children running away with a maid, Dahoum, and that maid became my false mother. I was trapped in a deceit of lies and betrayal and learned the truth so late that it turned into my life's greatest shock to learn that I was not who I was, that I had no legitimacy and really no right to live. I was brought up in a lie to become a lie, but that I will never be able to accept.

Dahoum I can't understand you. For an Arab it's the same if his father is a sheik, if several mothers claim him, if his family is a harem chaos or if he is a beggar completely without pedigree. He is still just an Arab with only Allah above him. It's so simple. Why make such a fuss when it can be so simple?

Lawrence I envy you, Dahoum, for your simplicity, which is so sound, wise and so much more rational than the whole British Empire. In your human simplicity you have everything, and so you have all that I lack, and not only do I envy you that so sincerely and immensely, but it creates in me an abyss of desire to attain the same simplicity. You are the best friend I have and perhaps the only one. Professor Hogarth has gone back to England, he became like a father to me by his wise and idealistic education, but you are more. You have become my family, and I could do anything for you.

Dahoum Then rid us of the Turks.

Lawrence That's a political task. It's not a one man's quest. It needs an army.

Dahoum You can do it, Aurens. You have the talent and the motivation. You know our language now and have mastered all the dialects, you know the country and you know the Turks; although you are an Englishman you have become more of an expert on our country, language and culture than anyone of us, you could unite us and do something about it.

Lawrence Dahoum, there is a war coming up, and war is something terrible. There could be a war in Europe any day, all leading maniacs desire an extensive settlement, it will be England, France and Russia against Germany and Austria, and Turkey is

allied with Germany, but there are only losers in a war. The worst political lie of all is that every war has a victor. Every victory is hollow and a lie to conceal the losses, and the only one ever to see through the eternal failure of victory was Pyrrhus, when he after his greatest victory said, that "another victory like this, and I am lost." War produces only losers, and all are losers, no matter how much they may imagine themselves to be victors. Every victory is just deceitful propaganda aimed at covering up the losses and sweeping them under the carpet. Give me anything, but just not war, Dahoum.

Dahoum But if there is a war, as you say, with you against Germany, Austria and Turkey, then you must win, and Turkey must lose. Can you then stand off as employed by your government in your secret service?

Lawrence You open up an abyss to me.

Dahoum I am your friend, Aurens, and I can see you as the liberator of our country. Can you refuse that glory if you get the chance?

Lawrence For you and your Arabs I could do anything and even throw myself down the abyss.

Dahoum Something tells me that you will have no choice.

Lawrence Dahoum, I must soon get back to Cairo. We have had a wonderful time together here, perhaps my life's only happy period, when I could explore and get to know all Arabia and the Orient with its history and ancient traditions and treasures. For that I love you and not only for your beauty and good comradeship. Together with you I almost feel like an indomitable Achilles with Patroclus or like the invincible Alexander with his Hephaestion, but Hephaestion died, and Alexander could not survive it. I accept your challenge, Dahoum. For your sake I'll do anything for Arabia, but it's only possible as long as you stand by me. We must never lose touch. I never want to lose you.

Dahoum Even if you go to Cairo we will stay in touch.

Lawrence Precisely. That's all I ask of you. I need you, and you gave me a reason to live.

Dahoum You can liberate the Arabs from the Turks. I know it.

Lawrence You charge me with a superhuman task, but for your sake I could try.

Dahoum Alexander's last project was to explore Arabia and join it to his kingdom. You could add it to your British Empire, and then we would be free, since you are a democracy, which Turkey isn't.

Lawrence You tempt me.

Dahoum On purpose. I am an Arab, and I see you as a potential liberator.

Lawrence David and Jonathan enjoyed a friendship more valuable than any female relationship. I feel the same highest possible friendship with you. Never leave me, Dahoum. Only you can give my life a meaning. You have done so, and I don't want to lose it.

Dahoum You have found your calling, Aurens. I was only the instrument. You can carry it through. All you need is to go through with it.

Lawrence For your sake I would do it gladly.

Dahoum Thank you, Aurens. You are a man I can believe in, and if I can trust you, all Arabs can.

Lawrence Thanks for your confidence, Dahoum. There will be no woman in life for me, but I found something higher.

Scene 3. Cairo.

Wingate Are you sure you know what you are doing? Lawrence is a dreamer, a fantasist. He knows nothing at all about politics or military matters.

Clayton He is still the only one fit for the mission. There is no one else.

Wingate He is capricious, has a weak character, psychologically unstable and completely in the blue. He only lives for his idealism, and such could be dangerous, if they get out of hand.

Clayton He asked to be relieved of the mission.

Wingate Excellent! Then relieve him!

Clayton London still insists on his assignment. As I said, Wingate, we have no other. He can handle the Arabs. He understands them. He speaks their language and respects their religion. Who else does among us? Only he could definitely turn the Arabs to our side, and it's of the highest strategic importance that they do, as they now raised a rebellion in Mecca.

Wingate I maintain my reservations.

Clayton (to an orderly) Show in lieutenant Lawrence.

(Exit the orderly to fetch Lawrence, who enters in military outfit, saluting both.)

Lawrence Sir!

Clayton Wingate here would have preferred that you were relieved of the mission.

Lawrence You know my considerations, Sir.

Clayton Explain your reservations, Wingate.

Wingate Lieutenant, with all due respect of your knowledge of the Arabs and the country, I still would have preferred you as only an archaeologist.

Lawrence Me too, Sir, but unfortunately there is a war on, which must affect us all negatively.

Wingate Exactly, and it's for us to make the best of it. Do you think you could make the Arabs join our side?

Lawrence Yes.

Wingate How?

Lawrence By friendly persuasion. Convincing facts, with strategic offers and unlimited promises.

Wingate What kind of unlimited promises?

Lawrence Military support and money.

Wingate Do you think that is enough to convince them?

Lawrence No.

Wingate How then will you convince them?

Lawrence If I must, I could always promise them independence.

Wingate Can you give such a promise and keep it?

Lawrence Unfortunately the will of politicians is beyond my power. I can give them the promise with the best will in the world, but it will be the responsibility of others to fulfil that promise.

Wingate If you can give that promise to the Arabs well aware that it might not be fulfilled, then you are our man, Lawrence. Go for it for all the world. Organise the Arabs. Establish connections and communications. Tell them what to do, since they can't get it by themselves. Bring them in under our banner, Lawrence.

Lawrence I regret to say that I have to obey orders.

Wingate What do you mean?

Lawrence I have the order to report to Feisal and become his man. I will obey orders and bring the Arabs under our banner against the Turks well aware that any future promises I would give them could be foul deceits. I agree with you, Sir. I would rather have remained a free archaeologist. Unfortunately we have a war on our hands.

Clayton That's all, Lawrence. Dismiss.

Lawrence (saluting) Sir. *(exits)*

Clayton Do you still have your reservations?

Wingate Politically, no. But he has committed himself to a destiny that could bring him to an untimely and unhappy end. My only reservations now concern him personally.

Clayton It's the war, Wingate.

Wingate Yes, the war has to be survived and made the best of, regardless of the sacrifices, and we already have the worst aftermath in history behind us. Lawrence could survive, but will any one of us be the same after the war as we were before?

Clayton That issue will come later, Wingate.

Wingate Precisely. That's the problem ahead of us, and the less we know about it, the better.

Act II scene 1.

Feisal It pleases me to have you here, gentlemen, but you Englishmen have so far only disappointed us. My father made a deal with you that you would destroy the Turkish railroad or at least give us means to do it ourselves. Only because of that my father Hussein felt confident enough to raise a rebellion against the Ottomans, but the Turkish trains keep rolling on and filling up the Turkish supplies of bombs and machine guns.

Storrs We must bide our time, emir Feisal. We get daily reports about the inconstancy of your Bedouins. They desert you or join the enemy, and if they have a victory they immediately turn back home with their spoils. That is why we have to wait until we can send you our own troupes.

Feisal So you don't trust us. Why then should we trust you? Do you really want to liberate us, or do you just want us to perish to take over our land yourselves when the Turks have lost?

Lawrence Emir Feisal, I and Ronald Storrs are primarily here to find out what we can do for you, to find out what lacks and wants we could remedy.

Feisal We only need one thing: freedom. If we are granted liberty, any Arabs would do anything for you. To be *free* we need weapons, howitzes and mountain cannons, to destroy the railroad. Once you promised us all that, but they were never delivered, and as long as they don't arrive we have to fight with one hand tied behind our back. It doesn't work in the long run, if we want to win and if you want to keep us as friends.

Lawrence You will have your liberty.

Storrs Lawrence!

Lawrence I have the authority to grant it.

Feisal And howitzes? Mountain cannons?

Lawrence We will arrange it.

Storrs Lawrence, don't promise too much.

Lawrence I promise too little.

Feisal El Aurens seems to know what he is saying, my friend Storrs, while you seem to be afraid to say anything. If El Aurens says he has the authority I believe in that authority, for he would not have that authority unless it was given him from above.

Storrs Lawrence, you move too fast!

Feisal Thanks, my friend, but I would like to hear more from El Aurens himself about his moves, which he appears to be commanding. Good night, my friend.

Lawrence (reassuringly) I will not say too much. (*Storrs, gives up, retires.*)

Feisal Well, El Aurens, you are a man one could believe in, if you mean what you say. Can we trust the English? Can we trust their promises of freedom and reinforcements, or are they just eager to take over after the Turks?

Lawrence The French want to take over after the Turks, but we want to give you freedom.

Feisal And will you be able to do it? So far we have seen nothing of it.

Lawrence I will see to it that we can do it.

Feisal How?

Lawrence We must show the English that you are capable of action and responsibility. You must take the initiative and make a decisive move to make the English believe in you.

Feisal Do you have any strategic proposition^o?

Lawrence Take Aqaba! It is defenceless and the most important port of the Turks on the Red Sea. If we cut it off we cut off all Turks south of Aqaba.

Feisal A bold plan, but Aqaba has terrible guns.

Lawrence They are aimed at the sea. No invasion is expected from land. We can take it with just a few hundred men.

Feisal Mounted on camels with sabres as their main weapon?
Lawrence Exactly.
Feisal An ambush by the desert. It's a terrible desert.
Lawrence We could cross it during the night and rest in the daytime.
Feisal You know us, El Aurens. You know how we work, you know how we are best at war, and you know how we are best used for war. That makes your plan not altogether impossible, and it would unite us in friendship with the British. Why not? Then perhaps all those who intended to leave us will remain, if they are offered something to fight for. They love raiding the Turks, and this will be their greatest raid so far. Lead them, El Aurens! Be our man!
Lawrence I must return to Cairo in between to report.
Feisal Come back afterwards.
Lawrence They must send me back.
Feisal For the first time I have met an Englishman whom I could believe in. Thank you, El Aurens. (*grasps his hand*) I look forward to our cooperation.
Lawrence Me too, emir Feisal. (*bids a courteous farewell and leaves.*)
Feisal It doesn't matter if his promises are false, but he gives us something to believe in and follow. That's enough, for that's all we need. He already gave us the victory, and it's possible that no one else could have done it.

Scene 2.

Storrs Lawrence is back, Sir.
Wingate That is not good news. We had peace here as long as he was away. Well, has he lived savagely enough now among the Arabs, since he returns?
Storrs He has taken Aqaba, Sir.
Wingate What?
Storrs With five hundred Arabs commanded by Auda Abu Tayi.
Wingate How the devil did he manage that? That's the wildest of all Arab chiefs with uncountable dead in his track. No one could get such an Arab to participate in a military operation.
Storrs He did it, Sir. It's a fact.
Wingate Allenby must hear about this. Is he here?
Storrs Lawrence is waiting outside.
Wingate Get Allenby also. (*Storrs leaves.*) Lawrence, what kind of a maniac are you? What have you been up to?
Lawrence (*entering, very much worn and torn*) Reporting my return, Sir.
Wingate Do you know what you have done?
Lawrence We have taken Aqaba, Sir, me and five hundred Arabs. That is all, Sir.
Wingate Do you know what that means?
Lawrence I was hoping to achieve a breakthrough.

Wingate That's just what it is. It means that our Egyptian and the Arab army can unite and that the Turks have lost their only port on the Red Sea. The road to Damascus is open!

Lawrence That was the idea, Sir.

Allenby (entering with Storrs) Is it true*?

Storrs It's perfectly true, Sir.

Allenby I want to hear it from the man himself. Is this the man?

Lawrence At your service, Sir.

Allenby Who gave you the order to take Aqaba?

Lawrence No one, Sir.

Allenby Why then did you take it?

Lawrence I found it possible to do it.

Allenby (after a pause) A damned good initiative, by George! I couldn't have done it better myself. It's on par with one of Napoleon's or Alexander's hits. You deserve the Victoria Cross, old boy!

Lawrence Thanks, but I would gladly decline.

Allenby Don't be a fool! Don't you realize that you decided the war on this front and that the Turks no longer have any chance? Their three hundred year old empire will be completely cut up!

Lawrence That gives me pleasure, Sir. That was the intention.

Allenby And you don't want any reward for this vital feat?

Lawrence Sir, I found an opportunity to do what only I could do. That's why I did it. That's all.

Allenby That is what I call a real man. What do you need more? Ask anything!

Lawrence Nothing for me. Everything for the Arabs.

Allenby And more specifically?

Lawrence Unlimited battle resources, mountain cannons, howitzes, machine guns, armed vehicles and rifles.

Allenby Granted. What else?

Lawrence 200,000 pounds in gold to be distributed.

Allenby That can be arranged. Why?

Lawrence Only gold can keep the Arabs motivated and going. Without gold they will quickly lose interest and go home after the smallest raid as soon as their immediate greed has been satisfied.

Allenby Don't you like the Arabs?

Lawrence I have grown to know them. They are dirty and unreliable, capricious and short-sighted, egoistic and incalculable, completely wild and can only be led by money and false promises, since they will believe anything in short terms.

Allenby That sounds like the devil's own mob.

Lawrence Not far from it.

Allenby And still you want to continue what you've started?

Lawrence I promised them to liberate all Arabia, and that promise I want to fulfil as well as I can.

Allenby To whom did you give that promise? Feisal?

Lawrence I gave that promise to a good friend already before the war. Regard it as a bet that I wish to win.

Allenby For his sake or for the Arabs? Or for our sake?

Lawrence For everyone's sake.

Allenby It sounds good. I am looking forward to our military cooperation, lieutenant Lawrence. Consider yourself promoted. You will have the eastern flank while I will lead the western. Together we shall take Damascus. Let's keep coordinated, so that it doesn't become a race as to who gets into the city first.

Lawrence Sir, I am under your command.

Allenby What will be your strategy?

Lawrence To first of all cut up the railroad and take Deraa, which is an important communication centre.

Allenby It's still a long way there. Let me have Jerusalem, and you will have the railroad and Deraa. Then we'll take Damascus together.

Lawrence Sir, I will do my best.

Allenby Jolly good. Carry on, major Lawrence. You will have free hands. Be completely at ease.

Lawrence Thank you, Sir. May I go now?

Allenby We'll see plenty of each other the next few days.

(Lawrence makes a shaky salute and leaves.)

He is in a bad shape. See to it for God's sake that he is well taken care of. We didn't send him to the Arabs to be self-consumed. We need him.

Storrs Yes, Sir.

Wingate Does he know about the Sykes-Picot deal?

Allenby Irrelevant question. We are militaries, not politicians.

Wingate He probably doesn't know about it, and it's better that way for the time being.

Allenby What is the deal?

Wingate An agreement with the French to cut up Turkish Arabia between ourselves, so that the French get Syria and Lebanon.

Storrs And can you keep that a secret to Lawrence?

Wingate We hope to be able to leave the deal, since it's a dirty deal.

Allenby Mildly speaking. They send us militaries to do the dirty work to then fight about the spoils.

Storrs Is there any hope that such a deal could be averted?

Wingate There is always hope, but politicians are politicians and hopeless as such. We'll see after the war.

Allenby As long as we have the war to manage we have something to do. Then we will be redundant when the vultures come.

Storrs Poor Lawrence. He has been lured.

Wingate No, he has fooled himself by his blue-eyed idealism.

Allenby And as long as it works we'll just let him go on. He is actually an enthusiast. Such men are rare.

Storrs Poor Lawrence.

Wingate Not yet, Storrs, not yet.

Intermission ad libitum.

Scen 3.

Dahoum You have worked miracles, Aurens. You are not only my hero. You are the hero of all Arabs.

Lawrence This success terrifies me, Dahoum. I don't like it.

Dahoum Why?

Lawrence It seduces me. It brings out my worst sides. I wasn't born to be a warrior, Dahoum. My happiest years were as an archaeologist in Karkemish, where I got to know you and the Arabs, but it was a time of peace, when the whole world seemed to be in perfect harmony. It's gone now and changed for the contrary, as if the devil himself or rather evil itself had taken over the world driving it on purpose to perdition, and it wants to bring me with it in the fall, but I don't want to follow.

Dahoum You have only started, Aurens. Not until the Turks are completely out of all Arabia will we be completely free.

Lawrence I know, and that means more war, more sacrifices, more bloodsheds, more massacres, more mass murders, more meaningless slaughters, more cruelty...

Dahoum The Turks were always cruel against us. Is it wrong to hit back?

Lawrence No, but revolting. But I am pulled along and must follow. I asked Allenby to be relieved, but that made him angry. He just couldn't accept it. I am stuck, Dahoum, in a bloody role play about power, which I never desired.

Dahoum You are a hero, Aurens, a liberator, or as you Christians say, a saint.

Lawrence Anything but that, Dahoum. All saints of the Christian church are hopelessly contaminated by the abuse of power by the church mostly in religious wars, inquisitions and persecutions of free-thinkers to damnation. There is one and another true saint in the Christian history, like Saint Francis, but then they are naïve and poor pious fools who ended up in trouble all their lives. I am not one of them. I am a major in the British army, who at the moment voluntarily participate in a world wide mass murder for the sake of power. That's the dilemma I want to get out of, but I can't, for I must serve my country and do my duty and what others order me to do.

Dahoum What can I do to help you, Aurens?

Lawrence You can do nothing. Nobody can help me. You can go on being my friend, my best friend, perhaps my only friend, but that is all. I am done for. When now I must return to your Arabs to help them massacre Turks and blow up trains

with hundreds of innocent pilgrims on board, it's like in a kind of masochistic relish to punish myself for what I am doing by torturing myself in wallowing in the nightmare.

Dahoum It will soon be over, Aurens. You will soon be in Damascus. Then we are liberated. Then you have fulfilled your promise to me and liberated all Arabs, for which we shall never forget you.

Lawrence It could still take a year. As you say, I have only started.

Dahoum All evil will pass, Aurens, but what you are doing is good, no matter how it hurts.

Lawrence (embracing him) Oh, Dahoum, you are the only one I can speak with! It hurts so much! I never wanted to kill a single Turk. Auda Abu Tayi wallows in their massacres, and I share those lusty massacres of his and his Arabs! And none of them have any idea of how much pain it gives to my heart...

Dahoum Aurens, it will pass, like an illness.

Lawrence That's my greatest fear and terror of all, the feeling that it will never be over, that I will never get over it...

Act III scene 1. Deraa.

Bey So you found a candidate for me for tonight. What does he look like?

Officer Small, blond, blue-eyed, fair, appears suspect, probably a deserter.

Bey Circassian?

Officer Could be.

Bey Cooperative, rebellious, desperate or pathetic?

Officer Scared to death.

Bey That sounds good. Then we can have some fun with him. Bring him in.

(The Bey relaxes, lies down on his bed smoking, while the Turkish soldiers eventually bring Lawrence in a prisoner.)

officer Obey the Bey now, you miserable dog, or you are lost.

Bey (rises from the bed, to Lawrence) Arab?

Lawrence Circassian, from Kuneitra.

Bey Deserter?

Lawrence But we Circassians are not on war duty.

Bey (smoking, regarding him with scorn) You are lying. Why are you lying? What are you trying to get away with? Are you a thief or a murderer or just a despicable deserter? Undress him, and we'll take a look at his skin.

(The soldiers tear off his main clothes.)

How white your skin is. You are definitely not an Arab, and you look too innocent to be a Circassian. You could be Russian. Are you Russian? *(pinches his skin)* But you don't have much blood. You are weak and skinny, and the bones almost stick out of your skin. You will be uncomfortable in bed. We will have to find something else to do with you. How would you like being tortured? Could you

enjoy it? I can enjoy seeing others being tortured. Call it some damage by profession, if you want. Almost all soldiers suffer from it, they see too much suffering and can ultimately only bear it by starting to enjoy it. Do you know the phenomenon? Hardly, for I don't think you are a soldier. Instead you will get to know the other side of it. – Put him down and bind him.

(Lawrence is brutally pinioned and thrown on the bed.)

Have you ever been raped from behind? I always wondered what it felt like, and I always asked my victims afterwards, but they never gave a satisfactory answer, if they answered at all. Do you know what this is? *(pulls out a bayonet knife)* Don't be afraid. You are lost anyway. I only want to play with you a little. *(sits over his legs and pulls down his trousers over the bottom)* Are you terrified? It won't hurt. When it's over you'll feel nothing at all. You will be paralysed and benumbed, for I will thrust hard and long. It will pass. If you are happy you will not survive. You'll have the chance to die at the highest moment of pain. Some die of sheer hysteria. *(sticks his finger into his anus)* How does it feel?

(In a great effort Lawrence manages to turn around and spits him straight in the face. The Bey backs down, frustrated.) The rebellious kind. He doesn't want to cooperate. Lash him! Punish him! He shall kiss my cock!

(He rises and lets the soldiers come forth and thrash him. Two are holding him down, and the third lashes him furiously. The Bey smokes.)

Does it feel better now, *(scornfully)* Circassian? Of course you didn't know that I am Circassian myself. The Circassians are not exempt from the war. You know nothing about the Turkish army. Who are you? Where do you come from? Are you Russian? Are you a spy?

(Lawrence starts screaming out of pain. The Bey lays his hand on the soldier and stops the beating.)

You cry like a bitch. Are you that weak that you can't endure pain? A real man can control himself. You can't. You are a coward. You are a pathetic weakling. You are good for nothing. We can make no use of you. You are too bony and small to be of any satisfaction in bed, and your anus is too narrow. My cock will not enter it. You are only good for discarding, whoever you are. – Lash him until you are ready, and then throw him out in the muddy alley, where some whore can take care of him. He is finished here. *(leaves, and goes on smoking)*

The soldiers continue thrashing him with sadistic fury. The scene is interrupted.)

Scene 2. In an off alley.

Ali But how could you expose yourself to such a risk?

Lawrence (bloody, muddy, broken and dirty) We had to examine the city.

Ali It was unnecessary! We'll take it anyway!

Lawrence We had to know how. I found the right way to enter. We must have as few losses as possible.

Ali And then you sacrifice yourself! The way you look!

Lawrence We were unlucky. We met with a Bey looking for pleasure.

Ali What did he do to you? You look like a finished corpse!

Lawrence So I am. There's nothing left of me, Ali. He did everything to me, just to humiliate me, and he succeeded. (*breaking out in nervous crying*)

Ali *Inshallah*, this is too much. You mustn't cry, Aurens. No one must see you crying.

Lawrence (*calming down*) I haven't told you the worst of it, Ali. I enjoyed it.

Ali What do you mean?

Lawrence I felt it as a lovely punishment.

Ali For your liberation war? For everything you did for us? For your heroic deeds? For Aqaba? Punishment?

Lawrence For all the cruelties on the way. I am a bad soldier, Ali. I am just an archaeologist.

Ali Shut up, Aurens! You are one of us! You are our hero! You mustn't break down now! It's not worthy of you!

Lawrence So many died for me already, Davoud, Sayed, Abdul, Christians...

Ali But you are still alive! Go on and live for us! We need you! We haven't taken Damascus yet!

Lawrence Is it only for the sack of Damascus that you need me?

Ali No, for the ultimate liberation of Arabia!

Lawrence That's only a paper promise, Ali. I lied. The English want to take over after the Turks.

Ali You mustn't say that. It must not be true.

Lawrence That's why you need me, Ali, for I am the only one who can be a hindrance to it. The English have agreed with the French to cut up Turkish Arabia between themselves. Only I can stop the French from taking all Syria, but I can't stop the English from taking Palestine. I am English myself. I serve the English.

Ali And the Arabs! You made yourself one of us! All Arabs adore you! You brought Englishmen and Arabs together! No one else could have done it!

Lawrence Yes, and I already regret it, for I deceived you all.

Ali No! You fought with honour! Don't fall down to weakness, Aurens!

Lawrence Help me up. My wounds need dressing. They almost beat me to death.

Ali Was that all?

Lawrence Yes, that was all, Ali, but under very humiliating circumstances. They took my soul away from me. I am like a living dead.

Ali We shall dress you, and we shall reach Damascus, and Arabia will be free, as you promised. That's all that means anything.

Lawrence Thank you, Ali, for believing in me when I no longer can believe myself.

Ali You are the only one to doubt yourself, Aurens. Everyone else have seen you in reality.

Lawrence What do you mean by that?

Ali Don't allow your sick fancies to take over your life. You are our own El Aurens and no one else.

Lawrence You nail my halo of glory to my front like a crown of thorns.

Ali We need you, Aurens. Everyone needs you. – *(to some followers)* Give us a hand, fix his damages, dress his wounds, embalm him, and give him peace and some rest. That's all he needs. He must carry through our liberation war to the end!

Scene 3. Dahoum's death bed.

Dahoum Is Aurens not coming? I am dying. Doesn't he know?

Said We sent for him long ago, Dahoum. He must come, if he is human.

Dahoum But he is no longer human. He is a redeemer, the Messiah of the Arabs, and he has fulfilled his promise to me. He is on his way to conquer Damascus...

Said Don't work yourself up, Dahoum. *(wipes the fever off his front)* Try to take it easy, and you will live until he comes.

Dahoum That's all I have to live for, to see if he comes. But he might not make it, since he has to take Damascus...

Said Dahoum, Dahoum, don't work yourself up. *(wipes his front.*

Suddenly Lawrence appears at the entrance.)

Lawrence How is he?

Said He is dying, Aurens. Thank heavens that you could come!

Lawrence No! *(rushes up, falls down on his knees by Dahoum's side, embracing him)* No, Dahoum! You must not die! You are the only one I lived for!

Dahoum (quietly, but faintly) Thanks for coming, Aurens. Now I was allowed to see you one last time before being called away, the liberator of the Arabs, Hephaestion's Alexander...

Lawrence No, Dahoum, you must remain! I liberated Arabia only for you, but the work isn't finished yet! Damascus is still there!

Dahoum You will have Damascus as well, Aurens. You have won. Thanks for keeping your word. I always believed in you.

Lawrence You mustn't leave me now, Dahoum! All the worst remains! After the war there will be politics!

Dahoum (very faintly) Thank you, El Aurens. *(dies)*

Said He has left us, Aurens.

Lawrence No! It isn't fair! It mustn't happen like that! He if anyone deserved to live! *(rising)*

Is this your justice, Allah, God, Jesus, and whatever they call you, all bloody murderers representing the one true god! He was my only friend, and divine injustice has taken him away from me! I loved him! More valuable to me than woman's love was your friendship, o my Jonathan! I can't accept this. What have I to live for then, when my only friend so brutally is snatched away so young with all his life yet un-lived? Everything I lived for is falling to pieces. The liberator Lawrence of

Arabia now appears as the murderer and deceiver he really is, a bloody butcher of harmless Turks just like his own barbaric and ignorant Arabs, who only joined in for the gold, which the accursed English bribed and paid and fooled them with to drive them on like a blindfolded donkey around a drying well forever, for the sake of a rotting carrot. All was only vanity, and the French will even steal the winnings. Dahoum! Dahoum! My son! My brother! My beloved friend! (*throws himself again on the bed over the body, crying.*)

Said He died blessed, Aurens, because of your return.

Lawrence So what? He is dead!

Said His life was happy for your sake.

Lawrence And mine was happy for his, but it is gone now, dead and murdered with all my glorious vanity as the great deceiver of the Arabs and the mass murderer of the Turks!

Said Aurens, there is still much for you to do. You should return to your army. We shall take care of Dahoum and give him a decent funeral. Forget him, for you have more important duties.

A captain (enters) There you are, major. Your Arabs and the English army and Damascus are waiting for you.

Lawrence (quietly resigning) I have no choice. I have to go through with it all. (*leaves a purse with Said*) For the funeral. Give him the finest possible obsequies, and give the rest to his family.

Said Thank you, El Aurens.

Lawrence (to the captain) I am at your and the world's damned disposal. (*leaves with him.*)

Said remains with Dahoum and continues to dry his front, as if he was still alive.)

Act IV scene 1. Damascus.

Clayton I am afraid we are facing a difficult conference now, general, as we at last for the first time may meet with sherif Feisal.

Chauvel If we only strictly stick to facts, I am sure we will be able to avoid confrontations.

Wingate If just hope Lawrence won't ruin the whole thing.

Allenby He can't do that. He has done his work, and it is an excellent work. No one could have made it better. It's just for him to now retire at the peak of his career, fame and honour and live well on it for the rest of his life, leaving the rest of the war for us to finish, which then the politicians will take over and make a mess of.

Chauvel Lawrence is bringing Feisal, isn't he?

Allenby As it should be, as his right hand and as representative both of him and me and as interpreter between us.

Clayton I think I hear them coming now.

Allenby Gentlemen, let's rise to receive our Arabic ally.

(The gentlemen rise, and in that moment the doors are opened to Feisal with Lawrence and attendants.)

Clayton Welcome, sherif Feisal.

Feisal *(walks straight up to Allenby clasping his hand between both of his)* At last we meet, general.

Allenby Please take a seat, all of you. We only have a few matters to sort out.

(All are comfortably seated.)

Prince Feisal, this is how matters stand. France will be protective power of Syria. As representative for your father King Hussein you will be entrusted with the administration of Syria under French leadership and with French financial support. Lebanon and Palestine are not included. You will immediately have a French communication officer who is expected to work with Lawrence. Any questions?

Feisal *(deeply upset, trying to control himself with difficulty)* General, this goes against everything I so far have been promised. There was never any question of any French intervention. I was promised all Syria except Palestine without any French political involvement. A Syrian desert country without any harbours is worthless to me. And in addition you force French authorities upon me to control me. You disgrace me.

Allenby Major Lawrence, haven't you informed Prince Feisal that France will have Syria as a protectorate?

Lawrence No.

Allenby But you knew about it?

Lawrence No.

Allenby But you must have known, that Prince Feisal would have nothing to do with Lebanon?

Lawrence No, general, I did not know that.

Allenby However, it is like this, Prince Feisal, that you are general lieutenant under my leadership and take orders from me as long as the war goes on. How matters are settled politically after the war is over is beyond my power, which you will have to sort out by conferences with the politicians. Hopefully Lawrence will then be able to support your case. You must accept this situation until Turkey has surrendered. Will you accept it?

Feisal As you say, general, I have to accept it for the time being.

Allenby Then we are agreed, Prince Feisal. We'll meet again at the conference table concerning the problems of administration.

(Feisal rises with his attendants with dignity and walks out with a last questioning look at Lawrence, who remains.)

Allenby Leave us, gentlemen. General Chauvel, I ask you to stay. *(Exit Clayton and Wingate.)* Well, major Lawrence, what do you mean?

Lawrence I already once filed my resignation. I will do it again. I don't want to be part of this any more. I have been compelled to deceive the Arabs all the way, and now I was forced to lie one last time to Feisal in order to avoid his losing all confidence in me. I was against French involvement from the beginning. They never

had anything to do with Lebanon or Syria. I promised freedom to the Arabs to make them war with us against the Turks. For two years I have been compelled to sustain this deception. My meaning is, that we owe the Arabs the freedom we promised them.

Chauvel You promised them, Lawrence.

Lawrence With your good memory and your insistence. I feel like a betrayer. That's not me.

Allenby You are needed here, Lawrence. Cooperate with the French. It might only be temporary. The sooner you get on good footing with the French, the more you can do for the Arabs.

Lawrence I can't face up to it any longer, Sir. I am finished. I have no motivation any more. It died during the push for Damascus. All I want is to get away from it all.

Allenby Then you fail your responsibility.

Lawrence Can I become more a betrayer than I already am? Accept my resignation, general, or I will just blow away. (*leaves decisively*)

Allenby He is finished.

Chauvel He is not needed any more. We can do without him.

Allenby He means much to the Arabs. We would have needed him here for the good relationship with these unruly Arabs, who no one could handle except him.

Chauvel Peace and politics will take over, Allenby. Then neither you, me nor Lawrence will be needed any more.

Allenby He has done a magnificent job, and it has been a pleasure to take over the country together with him. Must the whole brilliant show end with a sordid hangover?

Chauvel All great performances do, general, invariably. All we can do is to resign.

Allenby Lawrence will have to continue by the conference tables in Europe. We will have to arrange an audience with the King for him. I will open the door to him to the foreign office, so that he may speak for the Arabs there. That's all I can do for him. I will miss him as a fellow soldier.

Chauvel All Arabia will miss him.

Scene 2.

Ali Don't let us down, Aurens.

Lawrence I let you down from the start, Ali. I was never one of you. It was only role play. I am a deceiver, Ali, and I enjoyed it. I went on as long as it was fun and as long as I could keep it up, but the mask was lost when my best friend died. Then I found myself naked and hollow, and all that was left of me was a completely wasted bluff. I can't lie any more, Ali, neither to myself or to anyone.

Ali You deny and denigrate yourself afflicted by your grief. You have only lost the perspective. History can't be denied, Aurens. You took Aqaba and decided the war and turned our sufferings to victory. The fact is that you liberated us,

Aurens, and gave us something even more valuable than victory and liberation, namely a friend from another world, that was more powerful than our own.

Lawrence I gave you victory and liberation to hand you over to the French?

Ali You did not do that. It was the politicians, this ruthless pack of parasites who only live for destroying the world for us normal decent people.

Lawrence I promised you liberation and independence. I knew it was an empty promise. Prince Feisal's brother saw me through. He never trusted me. I only did it to serve my country and win the Arabs to our side, so that we could take over the Turkish domination of you.

Ali But you gave us your life and your soul. You adopted our way of life, our habits and our clothes and respected our religion. You gave us everything, Aurens. We will never forget you.

Lawrence You will forgive my crimes for having given you some poetry.

Ali We are all victims to the politicians, but we are happier than the politicians as we see through them, while the politicians only make themselves hated by all and perish in remorse for having failed in everything, which they blame each other for, so that they are most hated by their own. We see their shortcomings and detach ourselves from their delusions, preserving our poetry, our freedom, our freedom, our beauty and our idealism, which will stand forever.

Lawrence I am afraid that my flame and share of that has been put out.

Ali Yes, you were lost as a romantic in the dirty political intrigues. You were sacrificed for them. They started the great war and blamed each other for it while they all were lost in their own creation, even your friend Churchill had to resign dishonoured, and in a world controlled by them in which they all the time sharpen their control we romantics find it constantly more difficult to survive, and still the whole world depends on us, the idealists, the romantics, the guardians of beauty and poetry, and you still have it all, if you want. You could write books.

Lawrence I will write a book of all of you, Dahoum and our visions, the freedom we dreamt of and dared to try to realize, the dreams of beauty we lived for and which shall survive us. Not one of you will be left out of my book.

Ali El Aurens, you shall never leave us. You will stay with us. You are and remain our man. We will never let you go.

Lawrence And I will do everything I can to forget you, to get over my deception, to indemnify my unfulfilled promises and to atone for my crimes.

Ali You are getting pathetic, Aurens. You have nothing to atone for, but you want to torture yourself because you did something good. Don't get morbid, Aurens. There is no reason for it.

Lawrence I must get home to England. Only there I will still be able to do something for you. I must take part in the peace negotiations. That means I shall hardly ever be able to come back to Arabia.

Ali You will always remain with us anyway. You are our man, El Aurens.

Lawrence Thanks for always standing me by, Ali. I shall never forget you.

Ali El Aurens, you belong to us forever. (*grabs him, and they embrace. Then they depart, and Lawrence leaves.*)

He doesn't realize himself what he has done. Without him we would never have had any success against the Turks but would really have become dependent on British support and fallen under them. Aurens gave us the dream of freedom, and that gave us the real freedom.

Manali 13.8.2010

Commentary epilogue

Immediately after his resignation Lawrence went back to England to never return. He did his utmost to keep the French away from Syria and Lebanon during the peace conference of 1919 but failed utterly. Feisal finally received Iraq for his kingdom, which was kept within the family until 1958. Lawrence seriously declined in England after the conference but wrote "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" dedicated to the memory of Dahoum and some other minor books before he died in a completely ordinary motorcycle accident in 1935 only 45 years old. Churchill had in vain tried to keep him politically active.

Gothenburg 28.9.2010