

Lawrence remarks that “fiction seems more solid than reality”, and the sense of masquerade, produced from stressing- perhaps overstressing- the dislocation between subjectively and the role it has assumed, cannot be missed.

It is in this context that the crucial and controversial Deraa episode is recounted. Lawrence claims to have been abducted, beaten and raped by the Turks. His biographers, however, have noted some of the “impossibilities” of the story as it appears in **Seven Pillars of Wisdom** and it is really impossible to know how much of the story has its basis in history. But the facticity of the story is entirely irrelevant. Examined carefully, in its proper context, the story will be seen as significant, primarily and essentially, as a text that summons the whole of Lawrence’s experience in Arabia in stark and extreme terms. Lawrence stresses that the episode cracks open his being, that in spite of his effort to detach himself from his body, he is split and shattered, his integrity lost forever. But the rhetoric overrides graphic description and betrays the episode as Lawrence’s poetic summation and his rationalization of his participation in the Arab Revolt and, perhaps, more than that, as an effort to attribute his psychic schism to the historical presence of the Turkish Empire. Lawrence, therefore, deliberately ends his experience not with a bang but with the whimper of a traumatized subjectively and a clear sense of ontological insecurity.

The transformation of the actual into the apocryphal and the emphasis on the dislocation between subjectivity and the role it has come to assume, are the constituents of the discourse of literary modernism which is manipulated here to contextualize and therefore make possible another discourse, not normally regarded as compatible with it-that is the discourse of colonialism. Essentially, Lawrence’s account of himself in **Seven Pillars of Wisdom** does not diverge from the historical and biological assessments, such as that of John Mackenzie, that project him as a “cultural imperialist”. He stresses from the outset, in unequivocal terms, the imperialistic nature of the project he is engaged in when he speaks of how Kitchener and other English men “allowed” the Arab Revolt to begin in order to defeat Turkey, Germany’s ally. And imperialism emerges as a benign project embodying the best human achievements, so that even what was then regarded as the occasional lapses of its representatives would seem ideal behavior compared to those of people like the Arabs- hence the homosexuality of colonial youth is “a cold convenience that, by comparison, seemed sexless and even pure.”

Lawrence’s dealing with the Arabian Desert is part of his response to the world of the Arab/Moslem- the Other of **Seven Pillars of Wisdom**. The subtitle of the book, “A Triumph”, refers to the assuming of “another’s pain or experience...his personality.” Thus, by taking place the place of the Other, Lawrence reproduces the imperialist venture in his own personal experience. In his account of the Arabian Desert, he produces little more than the imperialist obliteration and displacement of the Other which is made possible by a deliberately limited characterization of that Other. The people

Lawrence deals with are “Arabs”, sometimes referred to, more broadly, as “Semites,” and always defined by the stock racial qualities that the Western consciousness has attached to them. Their historical, moral and spiritual heritage is, never, in Lawrence’s account, part of their definition.

It is not accidental that Lawrence’s response to the Arab/Moslem world should primarily and predominantly be a response to the space in which this Other is located. By making space subjective and apocryphal and thus smuggling into this world a modernist (a colonialist) vision of experience, Lawrence strives to negate the epistemological and moral foundations of its experience. One important aspect of the Arab/Moslem cultural heritage is its postulation of the actual and the objective at the heart of experience and that the personal and the subjective become possible through a significant relationship to a real external world. In the Quran, the Islamic traditions and the Arab cultural legacy perception is directed to the outside, to space on earth and heaven controlled and defined by “signs” (objects that are made into thought-provoking markers) that provide perceptual and cognitive deliverance from the void on earth and heaven and hence provide a rationalization for the systems of Islam and Arab culture.