

WALTZ WITH BASHIR (2008)

INFO / SUMMARY:

Writer/director Ari Folman's animated documentary attempts to decipher the horror of the 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees in Beirut by Christian Phalangists (militia members) while Israeli soldiers surrounded the area. *Waltz with Bashir* examines the horror of war and the way life and memory adjust in its shadow.

QUOTES:

"I was a teenager brought up to have fun—I had girls, smoked pot—not meant to be a hero. In the first year of army service before war started I was cool. The army was a way to be a man." –Director Ari Folman

"[War movies] want everything to be about manhood and brotherhood and valor and glory and sacrifice. I was completely not interested in that. The response I got from many people back home was that the most symbolic shot in the film, the one that represented war better than anything else, was the one of the armed vehicle going through the night and the soldiers shooting like crazy into the darkness without knowing where or why. A lot of people told me that's what war was like for them." –Director Ari Folman

"Just before the world premiere of *Waltz with Bashir*, Shmuel Frenkel [who appears in the film] will compete for the first time in the "Iron Man" competition in Frankfurt, Germany. He will swim 4 kilometers, will bike ride 80 kilometers and will top it off by running a full marathon. All this because a simple triathlon or marathon in steaming hot July is not enough for him anymore." –*Waltz with Bashir's* website bio of Shmuel Frenkel

"I was good at chess and math while everyone else was screwing like rabbits. So I had to prove to everyone that I was the best fighter." –Carmi Cna'an

"I wasn't the hero type who carries weapons and saves everyone's life." –Ronny Dayag

TEXT:

In the story of Sodom, Lot and his family are told to escape from their city, which is about to be destroyed, and to never look back. When Lot's wife does look back at the devastation, she is punished.

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The angels warn Lot, “Escape for your life, do not gaze behind you, do not stand still anywhere in the plain: to the hill-country escape, lest you be swept away!” ... God rained down brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gemorrah, coming from God, from the heavens, he overturned those cities and all of the plain, all those settled in the cities and the vegetation of the soil. Now his wife gazed behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.” (Genesis 19:15-19:26)

What is the danger of looking back, both here and in the film? How are those who look back punished? How are they transformed? And how is looking back itself a punishment to the men in the film?

ALTERNATE TEXT:

In his review of *Waltz with Bashir*, David Ansen compares the film to *Apocalypse Now*, as both films explore the horrors of war and the resulting transformations soldiers undergo. Both films feature “depictions of the dementia of war” with “hallucinatory power.”

In *Waltz*, “one surviving soldier fantasizes about/that he is... being carried across the sea riding the breast of a giant naked woman while, in reality, his fellow Israelis die in flames as their boat is bombed.”

How should Carmi’s fantasy of the giant naked woman be understood? Is her nakedness sexual or maternal? And how do the soldiers in *Waltz* fare in contrast to the soldiers in *Apocalypse Now*?

QUESTIONS:

- 1) Many war movies emphasize unity and togetherness (*Band of Brothers*, *Platoon*, *Saving Private Ryan*) while *Waltz with Bashir* emphasizes the experiences of the individual. Boaz’s dream starts the film; Folman’s search to reconstruct his memories drives it; and almost every scene features a one-on-one interview between Folman and a fellow soldier.

What points are Folman trying to make by focusing on the solitary man, and what effect does that focus have on your perceptions of the stories being told? For example, after hearing Shmuel’s story about the young boy with the RPG in the woods, Folman asks, “Was I there?” “Sure,” Shmuel replies. “Good to know,” says Folman. Is a solitary man a more or less reliable narrator, in your view? What does Folman seem to think?

- 2) In *Waltz with Bashir*, as in *Orthodox Stance*, no women appear in the first ten minutes of the film or for much of the rest. The first significant woman onscreen springs from Carmi’s subconscious: a huge, naked, female sea creature who rises out of the water to sweep him off the boat and carry him away to safety.

In his fantasy this quells Carmi’s fear, but in real life fear prompts him and fellow soldiers to shoot indiscriminately once on land, and they accidentally kill a family. In a movie that takes dreams very seriously, what do you think Carmi’s sea

creature represents? How do other women in the film, such as Folman's ex-girlfriend (about whom he says, "I wanted to die. That'd show Yaeli"), play similar roles, or very different ones?

- 3) How does the animation shape your experience of the film? How does *Waltz* compare to other animated films you've seen? Do the stories told seem less credible for having been illustrated? Why do you think the film switches over to live footage at the end? How do your reactions change, and does it make you see everything that came before in a different light?
- 4) Masculinity for Israelis (as depicted in *Waltz*) seems very different from masculinity for Americans. Do you think this has something to do with the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and Israel's location in the Middle East? How?

LINKS

Film site: <http://waltzwithbashir.com/>

New York Times article: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/19/arts/19iht-ari.1.13005821.html?_r=1

Eye Weekly.com article: <http://www.eyeweekly.com/film/interview/article/47437>

Newsweek article: <http://www.newsweek.com/2008/11/27/waltz-with-bashir.html>