

Dream Work, Dance Lessons, and War Memories: Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir*

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Abstract

Waltz with Bashir is a “psycho-documentary cartoon” made by the Israeli director Ari Folman about the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp massacre that occurred during the 1982 Lebanon War. The film has received mixed reviews and caused heated debate among fans and critics since its release in 2008. In this paper I read *Waltz with Bashir* as an Israeli soldier’s traumatic awakening to his blindness to the dehumanizing power of the militant nationalist ideology of Israel and the cumulative trauma thus inflicted on the Palestinians. In my reading of this film, I focus on key moments of traumatic encounters that Folman portrays in his animated feature: Folman’s recurring dream, Frenkel’s surreal dance, and the shocking news footage at the end of the film. Taking my cue from Eric L. Santner’s notions of “ethical encounters” and of memories as an “archive of symptoms,” I read these traumatic encounters with the Other as unintended sites where the subject becomes exposed to the nakedness of his being and the “corporeal vulnerability” he shares with his Neighbor, an exposure which compels him to perform memory-work “otherwise” by animating repressed affects. By recollecting and deciphering missed encounters, the subject then creates the possibility of translating missed opportunities into ethical encounters. Folman’s encounter with the Palestinian women at the end of the film is, in my reading, precisely such a revelatory moment that releases him from the mesmerizing, though cryptic, demands of nationalist ideology and opens him to live “in the midst of life.”

Keywords

Ari Folman, *Waltz with Bashir*, traumatic awakening, war memory, Eric L. Santner

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