

THE ARMORED personnel carrier is drawn by *Waltz With Bashir's* animators with an exacting realism; the flames belching from its machine guns are those of comic-book illustrations. It is this double aspect that gives the film much of its visual power. First shot on videotape, its interviews, supplemented by documentary footage taken from archives, were reframed as drawings with the help of computer imaging, while additional scenes were animated from scratch. Repeatedly, cartoon figures are superimposed on verisimilitudinous backgrounds, not so much blurring the boundary between the real and the imagined as disconcertingly demonstrating their ability to co-exist.

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But *Waltz With Bashir* works so well precisely because its characters are meant to be inexpressive. While not amnesiac about Lebanon like Folman, almost all are equally affectless. In speaking of their experiences in the summer of 1982, each, although fully individuated by the hand that drew him, is frozen in a kind of numbness. Forced to talk about what they would rather not think of, Folman's interviewees respond with fixed looks of discomfort, detachment, quizzicality, or (in the case of Ben-Yishai) tortured amusement. Had we been shown the original videotapes, these masks would have been imperfect, marred by the superfluous or contradictory detail. As it is, accompanied by the flat tones of the interviewees' recorded voices, there is not a crack in them.

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Frankel is performing a death-defying and death-intoxicated dance, and his exaggeratedly revved-up movements are the animator's notion of what such a state must have felt like as opposed to its post-traumatic recollection.

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lets.) These psychedelic, adrenalin-charged images, we are made to understand, are the Lebanon that lives on beneath the expressionless accounts that would deny its grip on them.

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It is with Ben-Yishai's account of entering the camps the next morning that *Waltz With Bashir* ends. The animation, however, ends before this, for the film's final moments are composed entirely of grainy documentary footage of murdered Palestinians, sprawled and lying in bloody heaps where shot by the Falangists. *This*, says the film, can no longer be animated; *this* is too horrible for the aestheticization of illustrators; *this* is the reality into which you, the audience, are asked to awake before

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leaving the movie theater. All you have seen until now has been merely a bad dream by comparison.

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Damour in 1976; and that Israel was seeking to implement a grand geo-strategic plan designed to crush the PLO once and for all, bring the Christians to power, rescue Lebanon from Syrian domination, place it firmly in the pro-Western camp, and sign a peace treaty with it.

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was. To deal the PLO a devastating blow, free Lebanon from the Syrians, and make peace: only something so ambitious could justify risking our lives for it.

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And so I don't fault Ari Folman for his associations, though I do think that it was flagrantly irresponsible of him to have introduced them into *Waltz With Bashir* in the way he does. As vilely anti-Semitic as it is to compare Israel's actions to those of the Nazis, it is perfectly natural for Israelis to think of the Holocaust in certain situations, because they, unlike other peoples, still live in the Holocaust's shadow. It was this shadow that lay over Tel Aviv's Rabin Square—in those days Kikar Malkhei Yisra'el, Kings of Israel Square—when an estimated 400,000 people, the largest crowd ever to turn out for a political demonstration in Israel, gathered in protest a few days after the Sabra and Shatila massacre.

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This was negligence, perhaps uncondonable, but it was not, on Israel's part, a planned slaughter. Yet who, a quarter of a century later, bothers to make the distinction? Not *Waltz With Bashir*, which settles for a murky ambiguity. As elsewhere, the film explores one kind of amnesia while perpetuating another. Folman's personal memories of Lebanon in the summer of 1982, their loss symbolized by his imagined entry into Beirut from the Lethean waters of the sea, are recovered. The memories of the state of Israel are not.

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The "first Lebanese war," as it is now called in the wake of the "second Lebanese war" of 2006, was thus neither futile nor unjustifiable. The PLO was a brutal enemy that deserved to be driven from Lebanese soil, for Lebanon's sake as well as for Israel's. Doing this was nothing to be ashamed of.

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viewees suffer from. Although acute war-related PTSD is largely a function of personality and intensity of combat, the syndrome's chronic form, it is widely recognized today, involves social factors, too, and occurs inversely to a veteran's ability to think positively of his military experience and take pride in it. Because many Israelis who fought in the summer of 1982 do feel such pride, Folman's interviewees are not representative. Nevertheless, wars that may ultimately leave their participants feeling that they have taken part in something purposeless or reprehensible have higher incidences of permanent traumatization, and this is true of the first Lebanese war as well.

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In the end, everything is a matter of context. The trouble with *Waltz With Bashir* is that it has none. It is all images and no commentary. Or rather, the little commentary it provides, like that of the TV news, is entirely image-driven. Folman's film is a child of our times, which likes its visual bites, like its sound bites, to be compact. We do not have the patience for history.

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