

February 2, 2020

Carlene MacGregor

Media Review Assignment

Media & Social Change

Dr. Bakken

They Shall Not Grow Old Review

Nearly everyone has seen very old movies which jerk and jump around the screen, soundless, in their stiff depictions of scenes in black and white or sepia tones. Most have seen old films about World War I in a history class showing short, hyper-motioned shots of soldiers marching, crowds cheering or horses towing cannons. There's usually a clip or two of soldiers shooting from the deep trenches which characterized warfare in the early 20th century. And there is always at least one scene of an explosion or a cannon firing. The movie *They Shall Not Grow Old* has all these familiar old movie items. Talented filmmaker Peter Jackson is not content to show his tribute to his WWI grandfather in such trite ways.

Jackson, producer of blockbuster films *The Hobbit* trilogy, *King Kong* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, is a master in the application of cutting-edge computer graphics and stunningly colored, believable computer-generated characters. In this historical documentary, Jackson takes hundreds of hours of film footage from the British Imperial War Museum archives and BBC archival recordings of actual (mostly but not all British) soldiers and transforms them into a documentary as colorfully immediate as a modern news clip. *Rolling Stone* writer Peter Travers

says, “3D with colorized archival footage that looks as new as the day it was shot. What sounds like an impossible feat becomes a riveting reality in the hands of director Peter Jackson and his New Zealand Weta crew of restoration miracle workers, led by digital VFX supervisor Wayne Stables.”

In a *Variety* film review, Guy Lodge says: “...over 100 battle-scarred survivors narrate proceedings from beyond the grave, a collection of scratched, century-old film once rendered visually inscrutable by wear and tear emerges from the digital chrysalis as pristinely tactile and alive, blown up into grand spectacle via sensitive colorization and 3D conversion.”

Beginning with the start of the War in 1914, the everyday lives of the thousands of WWI soldiers start out in black and white, then come to glorious, believable 3D color. Jackson’s team of meticulous artists base their color usage, for example, from original uniforms in Jackson’s sizable personal collection. Sound effects include modern recordings of firing and shell explosions from real WWI cannons.

This is not a film about epic battles. Instead it shows the poignant transformation of everyday people into battle-hardened veterans, then into confused, battle-fatigued citizens as they return to life after “the war to end all wars”. To quote *Rolling Stone* magazine writer Peter Travers, “In place of live audio recordings, unachievable at the time, Jackson uses BBC interviews with surviving soldiers that were made after the war while memories were still fresh. Jackson doesn’t crowd the screen with names, dates, maps and charts. He lets the soldiers speak for themselves as images flash by on screen.” This movie is a vehicle that becomes engaging and believable to modern, tech-savvy viewers. It sensitizes us to lives that are forever altered by the savagery of man-against-man in one of the first tastes of modern warfare. Jackson doesn’t spare the gory details. He shows the aftermath of artillery barrages on people and animals.

However, it isn't just about the horrors of war. There are moments of levity sprinkled throughout. Imagine seeing a soldier's joy when a long-awaited letter from home arrives. See how a concentrated population of soldiers handle the very human need to defecate. And what happens to five or six guys as they're doing so - when the plank they're sitting on breaks over a latrine trench.

Travers says: "He lets the soldiers speak for themselves as images flash by on screen. ... And the result is startling in its immediacy and intimacy. Though *They Shall Not Grow Old* was created to mark the centenary of WWI, Jackson does not hesitate to make it personal. He dedicates the film to his own grandfather, who served with the 2nd South Wales Borderers infantry regiment from 1910 to 1919."

Technique aside, the film is carefully crafted to flow stoically through the first-hand narratives without the fluff of nostalgia or the glamorous patriotic hype of some war documentaries. What truly remains with the viewer are the faces of the soldiers as they describe events in their lives. Instead of stiff one-dimensional figures in old movies, they become immediate, real, touchable, and relatable, and, well, human.

Works Cited

Travers, Peter. "'They Shall Not Grow Old': Peter Jackson's WWI Doc Is a Cinema Event", *Rolling Stone.com*, LLC, a subsidiary of Penske Business Media, LLC. Powered by WordPress.com VI. Copyright 2018. Web 30. January 2019.

<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/they-shall-not-grow-old-wwi-peter-jackson-review-783310/>

Lodge, Guy. "Film Review: 'They Shall Not Grow Old'", *Variety.com*, LLC, Variety Media, LLC, a subsidiary of Penske Business Media, LLC. Powered by WordPress.com VIP. Copyright 2020. Web 16. October 2018. <https://variety.com/2018/film/reviews/they-shall-not-grow-old-review-peter-jackson-1202981266/>

Jackson, Peter. *They Shall Not Grow Old*, Directed by Peter Jackson. Produced by Clare Olssen, Peter Jackson. Music by Plan 9. Edited by Jabez Olssen. Production companies WingNut Films. Distributed by Warner Brothers Pictures. Release date 16 October 2018 (London Film Festival), 9 November 2018 (United Kingdom). 11 January 2019 (United States). Running time 99 minutes (theatrical cut), 129 minutes (extended cut) [1][2]. New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States.