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1917 film analysis

1917 was directed by Sam Mendes, it Premiered in theatres on Christmas day of 2019.

1917 is a film based around WWI on the western front in the northern part of France during operation Alberich. The story is centered around two enlisted british soldiers Lance Corporal Blake & Schofield. The story starts with both soldiers being pulled into a meeting with the general who informs them that aerial photos of enemy lines have revealed that the Germans have strategically retreated back and they are assigned the task of delivering a message to the devonshire regiment fighting on another part of the western front. The message contains orders from the general to stop the planned attack on the German front. *1917* is known for its unique editing style. At first thought to be a marketing gimmick *1917* fascinated audiences with it's one shot cinematography. The immersiveness of this film editing is what set this film apart from other war titles. However the cinematography and story of this film did much more than just provide audiences with two hours of entertainment. *1917* uses a lot of the same troupes as many other war movies but *1917* seeks out it's own definitions for heroism and loss.

The theme of heroism in *1917* is explored through three different events. The first focuses on heroism through the call of duty, the second event is heroism through perseverance and the third focuses on heroism through valor. The first event occurs during the very beginning of the film when Schofield & Blake receive their orders to deliver the message to the other battalion. The men are told that if they don't deliver this message that 1600 hundred men will die including Blake's older brother. They are unable to relay a message via telegram because the Germans have cut all phone lines. A medium shot is then taken of Blake and Schofield's face, there's juxtaposition between their two faces. Blake looks determined, stern and driven in contrast to Schofield who is breathing heavily and looking around nervously. The two leave the tent and make their way through the trenches Schofield exclaims "we should think about it" Blake immediately snaps back with "there's nothing to think about, it's my big brother". Blake doesn't even stop to consider the dangers of his mission because Blake's determination to complete the mission and his sense of duty to his older brother and the thousands of other men in the other battalion will overcome any obstacle that he encounters. Self-sacrifice & selflessness are both attributes of heroism; his choice to put his life on the line for the greater good is the same choice that thousands of real life people in the greatest generation made as well when they choose to fight in the great war. Another way that *1917* defines heroism is through perseverance.

Heroism through perseverance is explored later in the movie and uses bits of the hero's Journey to make Schofield more heroic. After he washes up on a riverbank we see him get down

on his knees and start crying. This is Schofield's lowest point; he is exhausted, alone, and wet. His misery is short-lived as diegetic singing is heard off in the distance Schofield gets up and stumbles to the sound of someone singing *I Am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger*. Arriving he sees a large group of soldiers and he sits among them. In shock and finally starting to give in to his exhaustion the soldiers wake him up and tell that they're d-company. Upon hearing this news he starts immediately running to go find the officer in charge. This displays heroism through perseverance by showing that even when he is at his last drop he keeps pushing forward. This scene is important in showing the perseverance of schofield because up until this point schofield had survived a cave-in, got shot in the head, lost his friend and jumped into a river while running away from germans. We see Schofield overcome all his challenges and his revelation is when he is told that he has made it to d-company. Immediately goes from a walking zombie to a running and moving person aside. This new energy that schofield finds valor.

Valor is defined as great courage in the face of danger, especially in battle. Heroism through valor is displayed in the last 25 minutes of the film. Schofield is shown running and shoving soldiers making his way through the trenches when he finally gets to the front line. The first wave of the attack is starting and schofield is only within 300 yards of the finishing his mission, the trench that leads to the Colonel is packed with soldiers blocking his path. The Camera zooms into another medium close up of Schofield shows him considering his options this time his facial expression is firm and his demeanor is courageous. As He climbs the trench wall the sergeants tries to dissuade him by saying “ you can’t possibly go that way are you mad!”

and a tracking shot shows Schofield running. Valor in this scene isn't only displayed by Schofield but by the soldiers running head first into the German line.. What we can learn from this is that valor is necessary whenever we are faced with danger. The Valor displayed in this last scene is contrasted by the secondary theme of loss.

Loss is a side effect of warfare. There is no such thing as warfare without loss. The theme of loss in *1917* is evaluated through three of Schofield's interactions with secondary characters. Senseless death, loss of your Community and loss of innocence. Senseless death is explored in the film after Blake and Schofield find an old barnhouse and rescue a downed German pilot. While Schofield was getting some water Blake gets stabbed in the stomach by the pilot and Schofield kills the downed pilot. The scene that follows puts death right in front of the viewer's face. The scene is extremely quiet there is no sound except the light breeze of winds and Blake's face goes from pinkish to blue as the scene progresses. Schofield attempts to move Blake to get him to a medic but his attempts just put Blake in more pain. Blake coming to terms with the situation tells Schofield to let his mom know that he wasn't scared. Schofield's time to mourn is cut short when two soldiers from another battalion see Schofield dragging Blake's body. Travels with them to a nearby city. His attempt to save the pilot ironically is what causes both of them to die. Blake's death in this scene demonstrates the senseless death that occurs during wartime. The general pulls Schofield aside and tells him that "I'm sorry about your friend. May I tell you something that you probably already know? It doesn't do to dwell on it." From there sentence we can infer that the general has experienced his fair share of loss as well. Schofield leaves Blake's

body on the farm grass and leaves his body to become just another casualty of war. Many communities were caught in the crossfire of the war and destroyed.

Loss of your home is demonstrated when He is dropped off in a war torn french city. the remnants of old shops and homes are shown. Still occupied by german soldiers a sniper starts taking shots at Schofield from a distance. He gets hit in the head when trying to take the sniper out and black out for a couple of hours when he comes to schofield looking for a place to hide he enters some dingy basement while evading german pursuers. Schofield meets a single mother who is hidden away from the germans. At first she is hostile towards Schofield but then relaxes as she sees that he is actually a british soldier instead of german soldier. Schofield gives the mother a container full of cookies and a canteen full of milk to keep the baby fed. The french woman's loss is the loss of husband and home. The woman, afraid for Schofield's wellbeing tries to convince him to stay. But he insists on getting a D company. He leaves the dingy basement and we see a scene of buildings reduced to rubble and debris. The amount of destruction shown in this scene reinforces the idea of loss in war. What was once a flourishing community is now a pile of rubble that is claimed by the war. Many young men were picked up from these communities and forced to grow up extremely fast.

1917 and the loss of innocence. This film doesn't contain much dialogue between Blake and Schofield but there is a very important bit of dialogue that we see between them just before they enter the farmhouse. Blake during this portion of the Blake is still very green and still

doesn't comprehend what warfare really is. In this bit of dialogue Blake is excited about possibly receiving a medal for this and asks Schofield about his medal and is upset to hear that Schofield traded him for a bottle of wine. Blake probes into Schofield's medal even more and in frustration Schofield exclaims at Blake that "it doesn't make you special it doesn't make any difference to anyone" and the real reason he sold the medal was because "I hated going home, I hated it, when I knew I have to go when I know that they may never see me". This quote from Schofield gives us some insight that Schofield has participated in battle and has experienced loss. The camera then pans around Blake's face and his expression is apologetic and remorseful. He takes a deep breath and keeps walking. This scene shows the psyche of Schofield and Blake. Their different attitudes towards the Great War shows us that Blake still has a childish view of war and the war hasn't stripped Blake of his innocence.

In Conclusion *1917* uses a lot of the same tropes as many other war movies but *1917* seeks out its own definitions for heroism and loss. Through its own visual demonstrations. The theme of heroism in *1917* is explored through three different events. The first focuses on heroism through the call of duty (Blake doing the mission because of his duty to protect his fellow man) this is the most important point because this best explains why Blake took the mission in the first place, the second event is heroism through perseverance (the amount of trauma and loss that Schofield went through) and the third focuses on heroism through valor (choosing to put himself in harm's way in order to prevent more people from charging into their own death). Loss is a side effect of warfare. There is no such thing as warfare without loss. The theme of loss in *1917* is

evaluated through three of Schofield's interactions. Senseless death, loss of your home and loss of innocence.