

# WAR ROADS

By Carolina Zarama

The brutal fragmentation of the United States marks the beginning of the Civil War, which will not only divide the nation into the Confederates and the members of the Union but will also result in the unification of a country whose main disease will finally be cured: slavery, which would be abolished following the Emancipation Proclamation.

The film *The General* captures one of the most representative episodes of this war, faithfully recounting the reality as described in the book *A History of the Great Railroad Adventure* written by William Pittenger. Keaton, the director of this cinematic piece, uses romance as a canvas that also serves to initiate the conflict of the film. However, this is not the main theme, although it exemplifies what Keaton aims to convey, as it is not only a biographical recount but also an illustration of American culture. In this regard, the main character embodies the most valuable trait of this country: triumph and success. Here lies the importance of the hero's presence from now on and forever in American cinema.

Johnnie Gray, the engineer, will be the future hero of this story, as throughout the film, he becomes such. At the beginning, he is merely the driver of his locomotive "The General" and the boyfriend of a beautiful lady, Annabelle. However, his life is not synonymous with triumph, as with the impending war, his mission to enlist and proudly wear the uniform to prove his bravery is thwarted when he is not admitted into the army. For Gray, this is a clear sign of defeat, as it is for his girlfriend. Immediately, Annabelle abandons him in his state of failure and cowardice. This marks the beginning of our hero's adventure, who receives a new opportunity to prove his courage when the Northern army steals his locomotive and takes his ex-girlfriend hostage. Johnnie thus embarks on the fight to regain his two loves while also supporting his army in battle, ultimately receiving a commendation as a lieutenant, thus reclaiming his beloved and achieving success.

Comedy is the language chosen by the brilliant pioneer of silent film, Buster Keaton, who, with his agility, precision, and rhythm for comedy, creates an invaluable piece of art for the history of cinema. In addition to the comedy, Keaton dazzles with brief flashes of action and a subtle touch of sentimentality that highlight the production of the work and demonstrate his grand epic ambition, which was dazzling for the time.

It is difficult to describe the countless achievements and qualities that compose the film; however, beyond inviting the reader to enjoy the piece, I would like to not only praise Keaton's brilliant and versatile performance but also highlight the importance of this film for the history of both cinema and humanity. Not only did it inspire future comedies and

cinematic works based on its well-structured script and wonderful audiovisual effects, but it also bequeathed the significance of cinema for man and the world by clearly showing its role in reflecting society and recounting history to keep our memory alive and thus avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

## **REFERENCES**

Keaton, B. (Direction). (1927). *The General* [Movie]. Harvard University Film Foundation.