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Hist 320: Vikings
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Utlaginn Reaction Paper

Random Things That Confused Me:

The most difficult part of the movie to follow was the first fifteen minutes, during which I could not keep track of any of the male characters, and then, to further complicate things, someone was murdered in the dark. I didn't know who had been murdered the first time until the second or third murder. Also, even with the study sheet, it was unclear to me how many young male characters there were, because the beginning showed them all in different locations.

The very opening scene, with the two wives, was really interesting and engaging, though I am still not exactly sure which of those women had what husband, who they were sleeping with—and eying, but not sleeping with—when those affairs had occurred, and what the basis for them was. It really would have helped to have read the saga, even just to get a good idea of the pace of the story, which was quite erratic. I didn't get time to read it, and I am curious how much of the saga this movie is based on, and what the earlier context of the action was.

Also, though we have studied the class hierarchies of early Iceland in Byock and elsewhere, the thingman-godi bit, and all the other relationships, the expression of these in *Utlaginn* utterly confounded me. Except that I was holding a piece of paper that said Refr was possibly a thingman of Borkr's, nothing of the action would have indicated that to me. Yes, it is true that Refr was disloyal, so his social status may have been hard to assume, nothing except the relative ugliness of his wife suggested much to me that he was a mere farmer and not one of the troop of ugly, dark-haired men. Is this an accurate depiction of the interaction of thingman and godar? If it is, I would not consider this a hierarchy of any sort.

The fact that the scenes with the Fates were dreams of Gisli's, and that they predicted the future, was totally unclear in the movie. There were some slight connections between him sleeping and the dream-scenes, but I think the transition could have been accomplished with a little more finesse.

And, though I figured some of them out as time went on, the actions of Thordis were totally bizarre. Either the actress has no talent, or the character she plays is insane. She loses a husband, Thorgrimr, to a violent death *right next to her* and is mildly upset. Rather alone in the world, she turns all her wrath (some of it rather suddenly produced) against her own brother, Gisli, grabs another, *uglier* husband at the funeral of her first husband, uses him to begin her revenge on Gisli, and, when he is successful, she stabs him in the crotch and divorces him. What a gal.

Things I Liked:

Despite the fact that large parts of the plot made no sense to me, it was really rather entertaining. The scenes with the Fates were great—I had been wondering how exactly the “weaving of men’s destinies on looms made of human entrails” was going to be shot, but it was pretty convincing. All of the violence was very entertaining, as it usually is. The fact that a large percentage of the wealthy men and heads of families in one small community were killed off in about six weeks is just great, and smacks of a nice sort of exaggeration. In a movie filled with bad acting and wooden parts—none of it helped by slightly unsynchronized dubbing—I thought that some of the female characters were really pretty good. Refr’s wife was pretty convincing, and, of course, funny. Refr, himself, actually, in his short time on screen, was pretty likable and realistic. Vesteinn’s two sons, the blonde Tweedledum and Tweedledee, were sympathetic and not half bad. Asgerdr was pretty plucky, and quite convincing in her role as the daring, independent, and bitchy wife. Audr, who had the most screen time, though her narration was nice, didn’t have much of a personality until the scene in the hut where she defends Gisli from the search party, which was pretty dramatic itself.

The touch of sorcery, with the bubbling lake, was cool, and it led to the utterly ridiculous chasing of the sorcerer, which didn’t even look violent until the guy fell down the hill. Personally, it looked to me as if Gisli and his friends wanted a stern chat with him, not that they were going to hack him apart. They might have looked a bit more forbidding. The retarded kid was always a light touch, though I would immediately question on what trumped-up evidences historians base their diagnosis that the kid, Ingjaldr’s son, was an

epileptic? Since when do you get a medical degree with your PhD in the history of medieval Scandinavia? That's pretty specific, if you ask me.

Weird, Bad, and Other Things:

Was it just me, or were all the women—Audr, even Gudridr, Asgerdr, Thordis— attractive, young, healthy, well-kempt and desirable, while their men folk were a bunch of hideous, lumpy, dirty, swarthy, dark and completely ineffective slobs? Audr, a skinny blonde, by sheer force of personality, is able to cow a band of well-armed men, and ditto for Refr's wife. Gudridr is brave and plucky and does most of the non-violent leg-work in all of Utlaginn. Asgerdr is having an affair, isn't particularly ashamed of it, and bullies her husband into dealing with it. He dies anyway, so I don't think anyone really cares. In such a small community, with so few children surviving to adulthood, the men seem extraordinarily unconcerned with the promiscuity of their wives and daughters. If this is an accurate reflection of that Icelandic society, it's a little scary.

Also, where are the children? Vesteynn has two sons, but seemingly no other spawn. Audr only has a foster-daughter, but no kids of her own. Thordis has two husbands, no kids. This, paired with the fact that Vesteynn, Thorkell, Gisli, and a bunch of guys who fight with Gisli (and, I guess, the sorcerer), all middle-aged married men, are murdered, leads me to believe that the next generation of people in that area is going to be a motley crew, at best. Kind of like the human version of those horses.