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Thor and the Effervescent Search for Meaning

Home and love are two common themes that most stories seek to define. In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the films *Thor: Ragnarok* and *Thor: Love and Thunder* effectively explore these two concepts through the journey of Thor, a lovable and lighthearted god. Director Taika Waititi beautifully depicts Thor's growth as he strives to find meaning in his life. Without Waititi and his unique vision, Thor would not be the beloved superhero that we know today.

Thor: Ragnarok follows Thor and Loki seeking to protect Asgard from their recently freed sister, Hela, upon their father's death. *Thor: Love and Thunder* picks up Thor and Korg's journey while traveling with the quirky, ragtag group of misfits known as the Guardians of the Galaxy. They part ways and we follow Thor and Korg, partnering with Jane Foster and Valkyrie on an adventure to defend New Asgard from Gorr the God Butcher.

In each film, Director Waititi expertly ties each beginning to their ending. In *Ragnarok*, the film begins and ends with destruction and the iconic "Immigrant Song" by Led Zeppelin, firmly establishing the meaning of home and foreshadowing what is to come. In *Love and Thunder*, Waititi elevates the theme of love by weaving together a story that circles back to its beginning serendipitously. The opening sequence in *Love and Thunder*, for example, is not just about Thor, but about Love as well. The importance of losses and gains shown in this manner in both films stress the progression of Thor's story and character.

Waititi's directing style is evident throughout both films, particularly in its use of mise en scène which conveys purposeful emotion and depth. Bright and intense colors dominate the scenes featuring

the protagonists, while the antagonists' scenes are darker and duller. Hela's individual scenes in *Ragnarok* are gloomier, specifically when she recounts conquering the nine realms with Odin (43:00-46:08). Scenes that show Gorr in *Love and Thunder* are shadowy and more pronounced, specifically when he appears in New Asgard to capture the children (28:28). In *Ragnarok*, the characters' emotional scenes are emphasized with slow moving closeups. Such as Valkyrie's flashback in the battle against Hela, Waititi utilizes slow motion to highlight the tragedy of her memory then ends with the camera close up to illustrate her agony (*Ragnarok* 1:19:19-1:19:56). Waititi repeats this effect more dramatically in *Love and Thunder* with slow zooming for comedic effect in the beginning when Peter Quill explains that knowing yourself includes having loved ones know who you are (26:14-26:27). Underscoring the importance of love, Waititi also utilizes the subtlety of zooming in to show the tender scene of Thor and Jane admitting their continued love for one another in *Love and Thunder* (1:13:00-1:13:50).

One key difference in the films is the embellished drama. *Ragnarok* has minimal flashback and montage sequences. *Love and Thunder*, on the other hand, introduces more stories that further advance Waititi's style and the development of Thor as a character. Korg serves as the comical narrator in *Love and Thunder* to quickly catch up the audience on Thor's familial losses or his love story with Jane (32:24). Another advancement in *Love and Thunder*, is the contrast that shows the true depth of the shadow realm by filming in black and white only, which is heightened by dampening the sound in the scene (1:14:20). This distinction of the shadow realm in the fourth film creates a detailed and immersive experience for the audience.

Another difference of Waititi's approach is his editing. In *Ragnarok*, the transitions are smooth and have a slow cadence to them, save for the action scenes. For instance, when Thor and Loki travel to Norway to find Odin (*Ragnarok* 19:05) or in the aftermath of Thor's fight with Hulk (*Ragnarok* 1:02:47), the scenes are gradually panned up to mindfully illustrate the change the pace. By contrast, the

transition scenes are elongated and show grander, more extravagant settings in *Love and Thunder*, such as Jane's reconnection with Mjolnir in New Asgard (21:25-21:48) or the crew's arrival in Omnipotence City (49:45-49:55).

Despite the overwhelming personal losses, Thor remains optimistic and resilient - a tone captured masterfully by the director. Waititi effortlessly conveys the lightheartedness that is integral to the God of Thunder, cementing his significance in the hearts of those who love this superhero. While the many similarities between these films are undeniable, Waititi's direction perfectly embodies the essence of Thor and seamlessly balances the heavier emotional setbacks to aptly illustrate his growth throughout both films.

Works Cited

Thor: Love and Thunder. Directed by Taika Waititi, Marvel Studios, 2022.

Thor: Ragnarok. Directed by Taika Waititi, Marvel Studios, 2017.