FROM BREAD AND CIRCUSES
TO
MOVIES AND POPCORN

FILMIC REPRESENTATIONS OF ANCIENT ROME AND THE LEGACY OF ITS VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT

by

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DECLARATION

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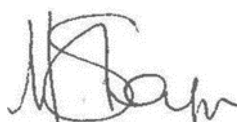
I declare that ***From Bread and Circuses to Movies and Popcorn. Filmic representations of Ancient Rome and the Legacy of its Violent Entertainment*** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. This work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution. I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.



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Margaret Clare Steyn

Dated 25th September 2021

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family: to my late father, Don Honey and my cousin Stephen Cook who inspired me to start studying again, my husband Mornė and my daughter Aimėe who encouraged and supported me on the long road of this study.

I value your support and enduring belief in me.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank my promotor, Prof Martine De Marre, without whose support I am sure I would never have completed this work.

ABSTRACT

English:

The thesis examines the nature of violence in entertainment in the socio-historical context of the ancient Roman world, from the 1st century BCE to the late 3rd century CE and interrogates the presentation of such entertainment in a representative selection of modern receptions, namely the films *Spartacus* (1960) and *Gladiator* (2000) as well as the televised HBO series *Rome* (2005) which all relate back to this historical period. The study aims to demonstrate in what ways we, as inheritors of a Western tradition, idealise Rome and the Roman conquests as a way of legitimising our own heritage, and how the gladiatorial tradition – in many ways undermining the idea of civilisation – fits into this in the films under discussion.

What is also demonstrated here is how, in many ways, the creative licence of the ancient historians and biographers is not so dissimilar from the motives and techniques of the film industry in modern times – in the word of Jane Austen's character, Ms Morland, a great deal of history is invention.

The techniques of violent entertainment in ancient times (which were sometimes surprisingly sophisticated) are explored here, and what techniques are used in the entertainment industry today to the best effect.

The study also aims to show how we, as modern viewers of these filmic representations today, are as much inclined to be spectators of violent spectacle as were the ancient Romans 2000 years ago.

Afrikaans:

Hierdie verhandeling ondersoek die aard van geweld in die vermaakindustrie binne die sosio-historiese konteks van die antieke Romeinse wêreld, vanaf die eerste eeu v.C. tot en met die 2e eeu n.C. Hierdie ondersoek hanteer vervolgens die uitbeelding van hierdie vermaak in ‘n sortering van moderne interpretasies daarvan, namelik die flieks *Spartacus* (1960) en *Gladiator* (2000) asook die HBO televisiereeks, *Rome* (2005). Die studie kyk ook krities na die tegnieke wat in die vermaakindustrie gebruik is in antieke tye, wat soms verbasend gesofistikeerd was, en watter tegnieke vandag in die vermaaklikheid gebruik word tot die beste effek.

Dit poog ook om aan te dui hoe ons, as moderne toeskouers van hierdie film weergawes net so geneig is om na geweldagige spektakel te kyk as die mense van 2000 jaar gelede.

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isiZulu:

Lo mqondo uhlola uhlobo lodlame kwezokungcebeleka ezimweni zomphakathi nezomlando wezwe lasendulo laseRoma, kusukela ngekhulu lokuqala BCE kuya ekhulwini lesibili CE, bese uphenya ngemibuzo ukumelwa kwalokhu kuzijabulisa ekukhetheni okumelwe ukwamukela kwanamuhla, okungamafilimu *USpartacus* (1960) *noGladiator* (2000) kanye nochungechunge lwe-HBO lwethelevishini, *iRoma* (2005). Lolu cwaningo luhlola izindlela zokuzijabulisa ezikhathini zasendulo, okwakuthi kwesinye isikhathi zibe yinkimbinkimbi ngokumangazayo, nokuthi yimaphi amasu asetshenziswa embonini yezokuzijabulisa namuhla.

Ihlose ukukhombisa ukuthi thina, njengababukeli banamuhla balezi zithombe zamafilimu namuhla, singababukeli bombukwane onodlame njengabaseRoma lasendulo eminyakeni engu-2000 eyedlule.

KEYWORDS

Ancient Rome; violence; death; pleasure; entertainment; gladiators; sword; gladiatorial combat; Samnites; Etruscans; Oscans; *bestiarius*; arena; amphitheatre; heroic values; gladiatorial games; spectacle; *spectacula*; Roman theatre; Commodus; soldiers; veterans; Pullo; Vorenus; Julius Caesar; Mark Antony; Pompey; Octavian; Cicero; Subura; ancient Gaul; ancient Egypt; euergetism; munificence; triumph; *lanista*; *familia*; *editor*;

Classical Reception Studies; sword & sandal; epic; *peplum*; *Spartacus*; *Gladiator; Rome,* HBO; BBC; Hollywood; Stanley Kubrick, Ridley Scott; Bruno Heller, John Milius and William J. Macdonald; popular culture; film; television; public gaze;

CLIO, THE MUSE OF HISTORY
ROMAN SCULPTURE OF UNKNOWN DATE,
VATICAN MUSEUM

'But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in. Can you?'

'Yes, I am fond of history.'

'I wish I were too. I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all – it is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention.'

Jane Austen,
Northanger Abbey (1817)

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ABBREVIATIONS

AE	*L'Année épigraphique*, Paris, 1888 -
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, edited by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, Berlin, 1972 -
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin, 1863 -
CGI	Computer-generated imagery.
DVFx	Digital visual effects, H. Hashim, 2019.
EAOR	Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'Occidente romano, vols 1-6, Rome, 1988-2004.
FGrH	*Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, edited by F. Jacoby, Leiden, 1923 -
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, 3 vols, edited by H. Dessau, Berlin, 1892-1916.
IMGI	*I munera gladiatoria in Italia.* Considerazioni sulla lora documentazione epigrafica, edited by M. Fora, Rome, 1996.
LSJ	*Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, Oxford, 1996.
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*, edited by J-P. Migne, Paris, 1857-1866.
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, G. Friedrich and G.W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids, 1964.

Abbreviations for ancient authors and works follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th Edition.

Journal abbreviations follow *L'Année philologique.*

CHAPTER 1: VIOLENCE & ROME: AN ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

Many people today would hold the opinion that the ancient Roman world was permeated with repeated and continuous episodes of violence in its many manifestations – spontaneous, sanctioned, and even as forms of entertainment, from stage-plays to the gladiatorial arena.[1] During the late Republic and early Imperial periods, our focus period for this study, the Romans seem to have lived within a very violent society (from which even members of wealthy elites were not always protected),[2] and they relived this in their forms of entertainment with reported enjoyment. This sensationalising of violence, the spectacle element if you will, presents its own challenges for the ancient historian and many readers may be disappointed that I have purposefully aimed to de-sensationalise it in the tone of this study. Working with ancient source material, the historian increasingly comes to realise that much of our evidence is intentionally embellished by our ancient writers (for a number of different reasons), and even if it is not all pure 'invention', in the words of Jane Austen's character Miss Morland, then it certainly needs to be studied in an analytical framework which does not take every aspect of the written evidence as a realistic representation of 'how things were'.[3]

This thesis therefore aims to explore the nature of this violent entertainment firstly within the socio-historical context of the ancient Roman world with its *panem et circenses*,[4] and thereafter in how it is represented in a selection of modern receptions, the films *Spartacus* (1960) and *Gladiator* (2000) as well as the televised HBO series *Rome* (2005), which all relate to the last years of the Republic and into the early Empire. Because of the focus of the selected modern media, this study will focus more on gladiatorial *munera* than chariot races, *naumachiae*, *venationes* or public executions, although

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[1] Purcell 2013: 441: 'In the modern imagination, the ancient city of Rome is tied inextricably to Games: consider the emblematic Colosseum, whose impressive ruin has come, alongside the dome of St Peter's, to stand for the city … the violence and cruelty of the arena remains one of the most powerful popular associations of ancient Rome'.

[2] In his work, *Epistles*, Seneca maintains that amongst life's fears there are three that dominate: 'want, disease, and what comes from the violence of those more powerful than us' (*timentur quae per vim potentioris eveniunt*), with the last deemed the most terrifying of the three (*Ep*. 14. 3–4). Dio (67.2.6; 6.14.4) mentions gangs who killed people through the use of poisoned needles, while Juvenal sardonically describes the dangers of Rome at night in his third Satire (268-308).

[3] On the aspects of invention in ancient writing, see Saller 1980; Woodman 1983; Gabba 2011.

[4] A term deriving from Juvenal's virulent *Satire X,* 80-81, referring to the way in which the masses were pacified with bread donations and public games. Cicero essentially said the same when he referred to doles of meat and 'gladiatorial shows, magnificent games, and wild-beast fights' (*Off.* 2.16) although his point was less about the pacification of the masses than about showy lavishness versus true generosity. See Köhne 2000 for further discussion.

these will be studied where relevant.[5] How are these *munera* portrayed within the film medium, and how are these set against violence in the Roman world in more general terms? Do these depictions give an accurate perspective of elements of Roman life when compared with a full complement of the ancient sources or are they a product of filmic sensationalism?

Studying these three modern receptions of particularly gladiatorial violence will also reveal interesting aspects of how we, as inheritors of a Western tradition,[6] idealise Rome and Roman conquests by physical force as a way of legitimising our own heritage, and how this relates to the gladiatorial tradition. The study also aims to show how the modern viewer of these filmic representations today is as much inclined to be a spectator of violence as were the ancient Romans 2000 years ago.

Violence will here be generally understood as the use of physical force to injure or kill someone, or to cause material damage or destruction,[7] and it is well attested in the Roman world of the late Republic and early Empire. Nevertheless, upon examination it becomes somewhat difficult to quantify, since many of our ancient sources, such as Martial or Juvenal, provide information which is tinted by their genre and literary aims. But the accumulation of information from a variety of sources, even taking into account each one's biases, subjectivities and literary aims, still indicates that violence was very much a part of the ancient world. During the late Republic, for example, Roman politics was one area which became more and more dependent on gangs of thugs to swing choices reached in the popular assemblies: Clodius and Milo, two candidates for the high office of consulship, are reported to have headed private armies of thugs and terrorised the city (Cic. *Mil*.; Livy 107.52). Caesar was effective in utilising mob politics as the key to his political success,[8] and Dio (42.29) relates how Antony used the tribunes as well as his soldiers to guard the city during factional fighting. This type of intimidation, frequently combined with street rioting and chaos, meant that laws favourable to a single party would then be enacted (Lutz & Lutz 2006: 498). Spontaneous violence, such as street fights and riots, sometimes elicited official – and violent – counter-reactions. Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.77) for example speaks of theatre riots during the reign of Tiberius and the equally forceful countermeasures of the Senate, soldiers and tribunes.[9] Murder was inevitably frequent, given the over-crowding and poorly regulated cities, and gangs were known to roam the city while in the

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[5] Admittedly though, the title of this study (in 'bread and circuses') implies a wider form of popular entertainment. A wider study would, however, take us far beyond the scope of the detailed study planned here.
[6] On the influence of Rome in the West, see Bondanella 1987
[7] For the complexities and difficulties in the terminology on violence in the ancient world, see Carlsen 2011: 14-17; Cameron 2018: 102-114; Gale & Scourfield 2018: 1-42. Also, Gibson 2018: 269 for good discussion on the problematics around formulating a definition of violence; Pohl 2006: 22 on 'violence as a common stylistic feature' in certain genres.
[8] As discussed at length in Brunt's article on the use of the mob in Roman politics of the first century BCE, 1966: 3-27.
[9] As Aldrete puts it 2013: 425, for the period 200 BCE to 375 CE, 'the inhabitants of Rome seem to have been a riotous lot'.

countryside one was at risk from bandits and raiders.[10] These vignettes of casual violence reflect a resigned acceptance of these happenings as many were reported on and feared, but not criticised in the way in which we, in westernised societies today, would expect someone 'to do something about it'.[11] In ancient Roman societies violence was therefore considered part of everyday life. Moreover, when perpetrated in public, it elicited a certain spectator response. When in the late Republic the house of the brother of Clodius was set on fire in political rivalries, for example, it had 'the whole town looking on' (Cic. *Att*. 4.3.2-3). Augustus was said to have enjoyed watching street brawlers in action (Suet. *Aug*. 45.2), and the public floggings in the Forum Romanum drew its crowds, as public executions have done through the ages.[12] The Romans seem to have been the first ancient peoples to commercialise this human trait.[13] In ancient Rome violence and entertainment were closely knit together, and such events were very popular. A writer of comic plays such as Terence had reason to bewail the fact that he had to compete with more spectacular entertainment such as gladiatorial fights.[14] What gave rise to such tastes in violent entertainment has already been explored fairly thoroughly,[15] so this thesis plans to look at the rise of the gladiatorial tradition only in overview, and instead pay more attention to less studied aspects, such as how widespread such tastes were in the context of the ancient world over the course of the three centuries, and how accurately they were reflected in the three filmic versions selected for study.

THE ROMANS AND WAR

The rapid spread of their Empire in the last century BCE and 1st century CE is evidence enough that the Romans were militaristic expansionistic imperialists who owed their success to the brutal military

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[10] Terms like 'banditry / *latrocinium*' and 'bandits / *latronibus*' were commonly used by ancient writers who wanted to describe a particular form of criminality undertaken by groups of armed men, and taking place in the rural areas beyond the city permimeter (*TDNT* 4.257-258; MacMullen 1966: 255; Ando 2020: 2-3). Ancient sources appear to make the distinction between a 'bandit' and a typical 'thief' (*fur/*κλέπτης), even though they both took goods illegally. The thief was known to act more stealthily and covertly, usually without violence, against the bandit and his compatriots who seized goods by brute force (Origen, *C. Cels*. 7.54).

[11] Violence was also embedded in the Roman judicial system. The torture of slaves was an unremarkable event, particularly if it was to extract information, and Suetonius imparts that during the Empire even senators could be tortured for this purpose (*Aug*. 12). Further discussion in Garnsey 1968; Peters 1985 1-36; Wiseman 1985: 5-10; MacMullen 1986; Dossey 2001; Riess 2002 and Fagan 2011a: 475.

[12] Further examples and discussion in Kellum 1999: 282-299; Mattingly 2007.

[13] By contrast, ancient Greek tragedies, which had their fair share of matricides, child-killings, atrocities, and mutilations – reported on these violent events rather than directly staging them.

[14] Ter. *Hec*. 25-40 mentions specifically *pugiles* (boxers), *funambuli* (tight-rope walkers) and *gladiatores*. There is some dispute about where this took place, and whether this could have been in the theatre itself, see Jory 1986: 537-539.

[15] Studies on the origins of gladiatorial sports are too many to enumerate here, but works worth noting are: Dunkle 2008/2013, *Gladiators: Violence and Spectacle in Ancient Rome*; Welch 2007, *The Roman Amphitheatre: From Its Origins to the Colosseum;* Thomassen 2009, 'Gladiator Violence, and the Founding of a Republic'.

conquest of war.[16] *Pax Romana* was established and enforced by toughened soldiers equipped with bronze and steel.[17] For centuries, Rome's citizen soldiers had fought in regular wars, replaced in the late Republic by the career soldier. Fighting in battle was the ultimate demonstration of valour and masculinity. Our ancient literary sources, written by elite male citizens for members of their own culture and class, reveal how warfare was seen as an excellent arena in which to display their culture of intense male rivalry.[18] Unsurprisingly, therefore, there was little of a counter-war or pacifist narrative – certainly nothing like, for example, our social media today. The elites had control of the narrative and typically added in an ideological angle that legitimised and honoured their own role in war. The enjoyment of the violent and sometimes fatal gladiatorial contests was derived from the vague idea that these displays would show an inspiring 'glory in wounds and a contempt of death, since the love of praise and desire for victory could be seen, even in the bodies of slaves and criminals' (Pliny, *Panegyric* 33). The gladiatorial violence did in fact ritualistically create an aura which hallowed '[b]loodshed and slaughter joined [with] military glory and conquest as central elements of Roman culture' (Hopkins 1978: 2). Thus, it would seem that the whole ethos of Roman society and its economic system relied on wars of conquest, to the extent that Rome has been considered an example of a truly militarised society (Hopkins 1978: 1; 28-29; Millett 1990: 3).

Enemy civilians could also be ruthlessly put to the sword. Livy, for example, describes how the Sicilian town of Henna was considering changing their allegiance to Carthage, and the Roman forces awaited the public debate that was to be held on the following day. The meeting was an ambush set up to allow the Roman soldiers to fall on the meeting:

> ...the entire scene was one of flight and panic as in a captured city; and that they were butchering an unarmed crowd did not diminish the soldiers' fury [*militum ira*] – danger shared by both sides in the heat of battle would not have excited them more (Liv. 24.39, transl. Foster).

An element of the cathartic nature of killing is seen to be present in such action; here, in outbreaks of authorised violence, the soldiers could discharge their pressures and fears.[19] It cannot be denied, and is probably inevitable, that military training and killing became normalised for the Roman soldier, often leading to brutalisation in non-military situations, and as the armies grew in size with legions stationed in the more problematic provinces, the veterans who spread out over the Empire and into Romanised societies also increased in number.

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[16] Scholars have seen Rome as a system of violence and theft, fundamentally exploitative and oppressive, vulnerable to crisis, dysfunctional and doomed to collapse, Faulkner 2004: 11-12. In comparison with other Italian cultures, Rome emerges as particularly violent and bellicose. Under Roman law, the unification of Italy and a large part of Europe was a long process and accomplished at a tremendous human expense, Mattingly 2007: 6.

[17] For further discussions on Rome as a warrior state, see Hopkins 1978: 25-30; Harris 1985; and Kyle 1999.

[18] Amply demonstrated by epic poets from Homer (*Iliad* 1.1-2) onwards, with Herodotus (1.1) and Thucydides (1.1.1-2) leading the field for ancient historiographers. As Tacitus remarks, 'renown is more easily won among perils' (*Germania* 14). On masculinity and war, see Alston 2013: 205-222.

[19] For a discussion of the interaction between the civilian population and Roman soldiers, see Isaac (1990); Kennedy (1996) and Pollard (2000).

SANCTIONED FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Social stratification, from the lowest slaves, to clients, *patrones* and members of the elite, was a routine part of Roman social life, as it was part of all ancient societies. Rape, torture and putting to death may also be said to have been a part of the relationship which the ancient middle classes and elite could have with slaves and other disempowered groups. As I hope to demonstrate in this study, the arena is thus an interesting institution and venue for extending these aspects of society.

Sanctioned and institutionalised forms of violence, such as the gladiatorial games and even chariot races, are arguably one of Rome's biggest exports to modern times. The ancient Rome that is popularly known today is therefore characterised not so much by chance acts of brutality and violence than by intended, 'normalised' acts. These acts were seen as beneficial to both the elite and the masses and therefore gradually became a fundamental if complex component of society. The lasting image of Rome is signified by the bloodshed of the arena (Kyle 1999: 34-55). The transformation of punishment into spectacle desensitised the people, with the component of deterrence increasingly becoming of secondary significance to the spectacular visual theatre such acts provided. The games became part of the politics of punishment. Strabo (6.2.6) writes of the Sicilian rebel he personally saw being mauled by a bear in a quasi-theatrical performance in the forum and the poet Martial penned a pointed epigram with an emotive description of this notorious criminal's public death in the arena:

> so did Laureolus, hanging on no sham cross, give his naked flesh to a Caledonian bear. His lacerated limbs lived on, dripping gore, and in all his body, body there was none. The criminal had outdone the misdeeds of ancient story; in him, what had been a play became an execution. (*Spect.* 7, transl. Shackleton Bailey)

1.1: Gladiator mosaic from the Archaeological Museum, Verona, dated 3rd century CE.

1.2: Gladiator wall painting from Pompeii, dated 1st century CE.

As I hope to convey in this study, the role of politicians and prominent state figures, hoping to win over the masses by *panem et circenses*, played a cardinal role and could explain why Rome, and not ancient Greece or Persia, for example, travelled the road of bloodthirsty entertainment. At the same time, the constant wars and the pressing perception of the ubiquity of death may help to clarify the

popularity of gladiatorial shows all over the Empire. Gladiatorial arenas were built across the Roman Empire, and everywhere the people of the Roman Empire did not shy away from depicting death, as the two illustrations below (Fig. 1.1 and 1.2), one with weapon detail and the other with the realistic wounds, indicate.

Panem et circenses at the same time affirmed the moral and political order in which war had been converted into entertainment that was dramatically replayed through the sacrifice of human victims (Cameron 1974: 18-20). Enthusiastic participation, by spectators from all social strata, raised the tensions of the audience and then acted as a safety valve, a form of collective therapy in a society which also on occasion idealised impassivity.[20] As I hope to demonstrate, gladiatorial shows provided a psychological release as well as a socio-political safety valve for the metropolitan populace.[21] The crowd therefore confronted death whilst expiating their fear through observing it in real time, although at a safe and ceremonial distance. Roman writers themselves often condoned the 'bread and circuses' phenomena on the practical grounds that they accustomed the spectators to death and to disdain wounds, as referred to above on p.4, and gave scope to present themes of Romanness, such as barbarity versus civilisation or confirming social class distinctions. Since they were seen to champion solid Roman virtues, they have been described as a virtual symbol of what it meant to be Roman.[22]

LIFE, DEATH AND THE ROMAN SOLDIER

The high-risk game of life and death, an element in both warfare and the gladiatorial games, was a cardinal ingredient to the personal identity and social status of the Roman man. The Romans venerated and treasured legends from early days when their heroes had suffered pain and death on behalf of their patria, as Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* admirably demonstrates.[23] Vegetius (*Mil.* 1.1) in the writing of an anthropological synthesis of what it meant to be 'Roman' highlighted one decisive superior quality: a vocation for dominion assured by the exercise of arms (*armorum exercito*), camp

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[20] Stoic *apatheia*, for example. On the distinction of Stoic impassivity from *apatheia*, see Kaufman 2020: 133-150.
[21] This is actually given some scope in the person of Gracchus, the fictional senator in *Spartacus* and through Commodus in *Gladiator* and his bid to win the hearts of the people: 'He will bring them death, and they will love him for it'.
[22] As discussed by Dunkle 2008: vii, with examples.
[23] Naturally, soldiers were not the only cause of violent death. Funerary inscriptions on headstones sometimes cited the cause of death, giving details such as 'death by animal attack; drowning at the baths; falling from buildings; the crush of a crowd; during surgery; and even of children at play' (Hall 2013: 3) . Many tombstones reflect violent death with some even offering extended and moving testimonies: Julia Restuta's tombstone states she was, 'murdered for her jewellery' (*CIL* III 2399), and 'Marcus Valerius, who was 'murdered by robbers' (*CIL* III 14587), calling to mind Juvenal's warning not to walk the streets after dark as criminals would often brazenly attack anyone' who travelled alone or without guards (*Sat*. 3.299). Then there was domestic violence as attested by Julia Maiana's epitaph; 'killed by her husband after 28 years of marriage' (*CIL* XIII 2182). Pomeroy offers a useful survey of discussion of domestic violence and its prevalence in the Roman world (2009).

discipline (*disciplina castrorum*) and skill in the use of an army (*usus militae*), in other words a refined science of war which had become the foundation of the Roman type (Giardina 1993: 1).

Wars in the outer reaches of the expanding Roman Empire were ongoing, and civil conflicts were no stranger to the Roman world. The Sullan period, to name one example, is defined by full-scale long-term warfare where the private armies of early Rome used their legions to pursue their own sectional struggles when it suited them (Beard 2015: 244).

Training in the use of weapons and killing on the battlefield were part of life for the Roman soldier, leading to a measure of brutalisation in those who survived.[24] Many veterans discharged from active service were unable or unwilling to reintegrate themselves into civil life, often forming entire veteran communities.[25]

Added to the problems of the veterans were the deserters or the soldiers who had fought on the losing side in the civil wars and had had their units disbanded. These facts are well attested throughout literature as is the connection between war overall and the gangs of bandits who roamed the countryside. Septimius Severus, for example, had to fight defectors and rebels for several years after his civil war victory (*CIL* III 10471-73; Dio Cass. 77.10).[26]

THE SOURCES & SOME METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The present study can broadly be defined as qualitative since it is based on a critical evaluation of evidence, both the ancient texts, iconography and epigraphy, on the one hand, and the three films on the other, set against what we know of the time and context in which they were created. The study will also be interdisciplinary since it will combine historical analysis with modern film criticism and reception studies.[27] The sections below will detail the approach and method to be used throughout the thesis.

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[24] Decimation, a practice which occurred throughout Roman military history as punishment for perceived cowardice and mutiny, and its subsequent psychological effects on the soldiery is well known, e.g., Plutarch *Crass*. 10.2; App. *BC*, 1.118.549–550 and *BC* 2.47.191-195; Sall. *Hist*. 4.22; Cass. Dio, 41.26.1–2 and 35.5; Front. *Strat*. 4.5.2; Suet. *Div. Jul.* 69.1–2. There are also several grim anecdotes for the proscriptions carried out by Sulla in the mid-80s BCE, and by Octavian/Augustus in 43 BCE, for example.

[25] See Mann 1956 and Keppie 2000. This is well illustrated in *Rome* where the character Pullo, who leaves the 13th Legion, becomes a criminal and an assassin before being caught and sentenced to die in the arena. Initially he is unable to deal with demobilization, and his loyalty to his former military commanders defines his later career.

[26] Alföldy 1989 has a full discussion of such military activity.

[27] On subjecting popular media to serious academic criticism, see Rutsky & Wyatt 1990.

HISTORICAL METHOD

The present study aims to examine both the nature of gladiature itself, as well as its context in Roman history, before moving on to how it was represented in the modern era. In order to achieve this, the historian's goal is to collect and then study all the available primary sources relating to violent entertainment in the Roman world. Since the evidence cannot without careful inspection be accepted as accurate, a number of other disciplinary approaches have been utilised for this purpose.

The biases and limitations of the literary evidence have already been mentioned, and great care must be taken in the interpretation of this type of source (Groot 2008: 9-10). Knowledge of the genre and its characteristics is as important as information about the author and his possible biases and intent in writing the piece. Other evidence such as material testimony can also be used to corroborate or discredit this literary evidence, even though it is usually the literary evidence which forms the backbone of our knowledge of the ancient past.

- Ancient literature[28]

Taking into consideration the interest the Romans had in the games and the general popularity of gladiatorial combats, the amount of literary evidence on gladiators for our period is not as vast as might have been expected. For the early history of gladiatorial combat, we are mainly reliant on Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, who derived some of the material from the public records such as the *Annales Maximi*, the lost or fragmentary works of earlier Roman authors like Fabius Pictor (writing in the late 3rd century BCE) or Ennius (239-169 BCE) and probably stories and legends which were in circulation.

The literary sources are without exception written by members of the elite, and moreover display a range of rhetorical *topoi* and other conformations to the specific genre which means that they need close scrutiny (Lim 1999: 357). For the focus period of our study, the bulk of the information comes from Cicero, Suetonius, Seneca and Cassius Dio. Unfortunately, none of these authors offer in-depth discussions of the topic, nor make any attempt to be other than subjective in their description of the gladiatorial spectacles. Both Suetonius and Dio describe various gladiatorial games, but their main objective is to bring to light their extravagance and the emperors' thirst for blood.[29] The games therefore serve to add 'colour' to the events Suetonius and Dio describe and their presence highlights the madness and extravagance of the emperors. We may therefore expect some of the 'invention' referred to earlier, and at the very least some manipulation of the evidence to suit their literary

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[28] A detailed list is provided as Appendix 1.

[29] Cassius Dio i.e., 59.10, 59.13, 60.33, 68.15, 73.16-21. Suetonius, *Caligula* 26, 32, *Claudius* 21, 34, *Nero* 4, 47, *Titus* 7-8; for more discussion of Suetonius' attitude towards the arena, see Bradley 1981: 129-137.

purposes. Plutarch also has a number of relevant passages but is also not writing primarily about the games, with information arranged around the historical figures in his *Parallel Lives*.

Cicero and Seneca have a more personal/individual approach, but again one must be wary of their literary and rhetorical techniques. In one of his letters (*Clem.* 3.24.2), Seneca writes how the games served a useful purpose, providing a necessary interlude from the tedium of daily routines. The spectator's mind was momentarily distracted, if only for an instant, which was of value not only for the psychological balance of the ordinary person, but also for those who were educated.[30] Seneca also recognised an aspect of the political importance of the games, in that they offered people an opportunity to voice their political feelings.[31]

Seneca was, however, more anxious about the effects of bad example (*Ep. ad Lucilium* 7 *'On Crowds'*), as much as from the entertainment as from being part of the crowd of spectators. He warned against attending the games because of the sort of people you rubbed shoulders with and deplored the demoralising effects of the spectacle itself (7.2-3).[32] This letter is often used to justify the modern argument condemning gladiatorial spectacle and their exclusion from the category of true athletic sports.[33] But Seneca was not primarily objecting to the games but rather to the fact that the noontime shows were extreme, relentless, boring and finally that they demonstrated no skill ('*quo artes?*', 7.4).[34] The mere fact that he went to the games and expected to be entertained is an indication that he shared the popular enthusiasm for gladiatorial spectacles.[35] That his expectations were not met is also an indication of the decline of the games in terms of the items offered to the spectators. We will be exploring this more fully later on, when we come to a comparison of *Spartacus* and *Gladiator* and their historical contexts.[36]

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[30] Danda est animis remissio; meliores acrioresque requieti surgent . . . nascitur ex assiduitate laborum animorum hebetatio quaedam et languor.... Legum conditores festos instituerunt dies, ut ad hilaritatem homines publice cogerentur, tamquam necessarium laboribus interponentes temperamentum (Sen. *Tranq*. 17.5-7)

[31] There is an interesting parallel with football hooliganism as a public 'voice', discussed by Taylor *et al* 1988: 234-241; also Guttmann 1986.

[32] In an oft-quoted passage of his *Letters*, the philosopher Seneca (*Ep*. 7.2.) advises the youthful Lucilius to avoid the arena: 'nothing is so damaging (*damnosum*) to good character as the habit of lounging at the games (*aliquot spectaculo desidere*); for then it is that vice (*vitia*) steals subtly upon one through the avenue of pleasure (*per voluptatem*).*'* See also *Ep*. 7.3-4, where he criticises the influence of the masses on the young 'The young character, which cannot hold fast to righteousness, must be rescued from the mob; it is too easy to side with the majority'.

[33] For example, Gardiner 2012, Harris 1972, Guttmann 1978, Craig 2002, Poliakoff 1978.

[34] Although he is now considered out of date, this argument is also one extended by Auguet 1972: 192.

[35] Seneca himself was the author of some of the bloodiest tragedies in circulation; on the violence in Seneca's tragic plays, see Wistrand 1990; Arcellaschi 1996; Aygon 2008.

[36] Because Roman gladiators (and sometimes even condemned prisoners) could display virtue while lacking all such conventional goods, they were in Seneca's mind appropriate objects of Stoic admiration. Thus, such a noble death was also embodied by the kind of quiet, Stoic embrace of death.

The invective of Tertullian[37] is echoed by many other Christian writers such as Lactantius (*Epit*. 58.8), Cyprian (*Ad Don*. 7), Augustine[38] (*Conf.* 6.8), Dio Chrysostom and the various Acts of the Martyrs. Augustine is particularly interesting as a source, since one would expect a bias against the games, but he was a keen observer of psychology and knew the powerful effect that gladiatorial spectacle could have on a crowd. One of his particularly dramatic narratives is intended to highlight the bloodlust prevalent in the arena and how beguiling those sights and sounds could be to a young man.[39] He describes how his friend, Alypius, is seized by the *crudelita amphitheatri*[40] when he was dragged to a gladiatorial show by his friends. Alypius kept his eyes closed, determined not to watch, until he heard a huge roar from the crowd. Opening his eyes out of curiosity, Augustine tells us, Alypius:

> was stricken with a deeper wound in his soul than [the gladiator] … was in his body, and he fell more miserably than he upon who's fall raised that mighty noise.… For as soon as he saw that blood, he drank down savageness, nor turned away but fixed his eye upon it, intoxicated with the bloody pastime (Conf. 6.8.13, transl. Pusey, adapted).

Many Christian writers felt that money and time should be spent on more worthwhile causes. Most of their writings are highly tendentious as their aim is invariably to make the games look more terrible, or the martyrs correspondingly more heroic. Other critics of the games such as the sophist Libanius of Antioch probably feared competition from these shows, or were political competitors who resented the sponsors (Lim 1999: 360).

As the above indicates, there is no literary evidence which can provide an unbiased glimpse into the nature of ancient spectatorship. Not only were the authors influenced by the demands of genre, but their work was written by, and for, the elite. Any perspectives on the spectator masses usually have a class-bias and needs to be treated carefully as evidence.

- Material evidence

There is a substantial body of evidence of gladiatorial spectacle in inscriptions, ancient graffiti, mosaics and wall paintings, and of course there are the theatres, the remains of gladiatorial equipment and even in rare cases the skeletal remains of gladiators. The mass of ordinary spectators receives

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[37] Despite his invective Tertullian is not above using the imagery of the arena in *Ad martyras* 3, where god is the cosmic *agonothetes* (i.e., *editor*) and the world a giant arena.

[38] There is the suggestion that Augustine was actually referring to himself in this piece of writing but covered this fact by ascribing it to his pupil Alypius.

[39] Augustine and Seneca overlap here in their sentiments about the influence of rubbing shoulders with bad company and the corruptive influence of the games. Augustine's criticism was also centred on the fact that pleasure was a problem and he was equally critical of both theatre and the circus. Quintillian (6.3.7-9) further reinforces this with his observation that laughter was an emotion that adversely affected the face, voice and the whole body and that laughter was not far removed from derision. See further discussion on this in Carter 2015: 39-52.

[40] Christian rhetoric against the games in the Latin West is well covered in Jürgens, *Pompa Diaboli: Die Lateinischen Kirchenväter und das Antike Theater*, 1972 and Weismann, Kirche und Schauspiele: die Schuspiele im Urteil der lateinischen Kirchenväter unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustin 1972 who reflect the official negative attitude of the Church fathers towards predominantly Roman theatre through the reflection of Patristic theological texts.

some (usually negative) attention in literary narratives but are seldom represented visually, which is somewhat surprising given the attested popularity of the Roman games. The few occasions which show them rarely represented individualised spectators.

Although the mosaics, frescoes and architectural edifices usually represent the views of the elite, graffiti and inscriptions provide the voices of ordinary individuals, and are therefore an essential part of the study, particularly since films strive to present the non-elite under modern influence.

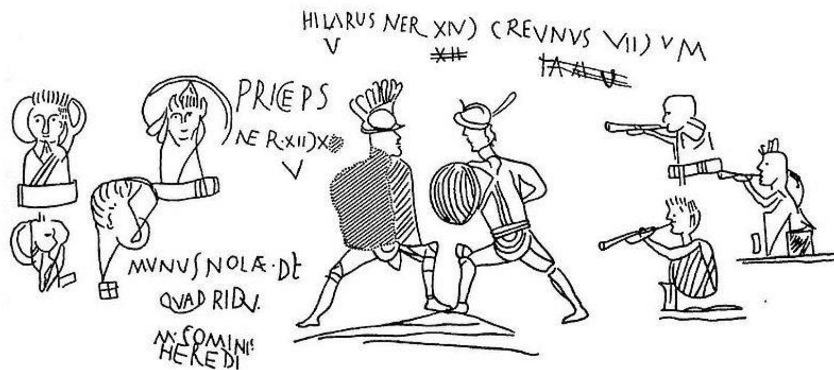

Fig. 1.3: Graffiti (inscription in *CIL* IV 0237).

Visual representations of fighting men do not necessarily always need to represent gladiators, but an indication is given by their dress and that they are often accompanied by musicians, as in the graffito from Pompeii, Figure 1.3.[41] There is a considerable tradition in mosaic art featuring gladiatorial contests which has invited the attention of entire volumes dedicated to this field, and attests to an interesting attitude of Romans who wanted this type of decoration in their homes, and this is also valid for lamps, jugs and other objects decorated with gladiatorial combat.[42] Attention will be paid to all these elements in this study, primarily because these non-literary testimonies to the history of violent entertainment are an important check on the impressions created by the literary narratives (for example that gladiators fought to the death on a regular basis, which is countered by the historical anthropological evidence as well as epigraphical testimony). In addition, since we will be exploring the degree of verisimilitude in the three selected filmic productions, the material evidence is equally as important as the literary material.[43]

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[41] On musicians at gladiatorial *spectacula*, see Simpson 2000 (his example is from late antiquity, but features interestingly parallels with musicians in mosaics from the period studied here).

[42] General studies such as Dunbabin (2016) but also articles focusing on particular mosaics, e.g. Balil 1962, Newby 2002. See also the discussion in Chapter 4 on gladiatorial decoration in homes, as well as the discussion in Chapter 7 on *Rome*. On jugs and lamps, Hope & Whitehouse 2003, glass cups, Cassibry 2018.

[43] Further examples of graffiti in Garraffoni & Funari 2009: 185-193.

RECEPTION STUDIES AND FILM THEORY

- Classical Reception

The films selected for study here will be examined as examples of classical reception, in other words, as defined by Renger and Solomon (2013: 11), they will involve 'research that considers the practices, premises, and constituting effects of creative work that deals directly with past traditions in a variety of media and discourses including, but not limited to, literature, film, and the visual arts'. Broadly speaking, we will be following Martindale's view (2006: 12), that all products are receptions of one kind or another, and the ancient authors such as those discussed above are also 'receiving' and in a sequence of reception of the ancient gladiator inasmuch as the modern films are.[44] As Späth and Tröhler (2013) have argued, popular culture has utilised and translated the ancient story in the same way that the ancients used and adapted their myths to refer to their contemporary situations. This will also bring in my initial premise, that much of history is 'invention', as well as the view that current interpretations of the ancient past are part of a process that influences both new and ancient media products.

Because the three selected cinematic products are essentially products in popular culture,[45] the understanding of classical reception differs slightly from Hardwick's definition (2003: 5) that classical reception studies are concerned with 'the artistic or intellectual processes involved in selecting, imitating or adapting ancient works'.[46] The reason for excluding it from this definition is that the three films under examination do not purposely recall the ancient text or evidence, since the target audience will scarcely know anything about the latter and the film versions are in a sense a new introduction to the ancient world. There are no metaphors and arguments, no intertextual allusions that allow us to think more deeply about and understand the products of the past, nor is a knowledge of the past needed to unlock hidden meanings in the modern medium. Intertextual allusions are more evident in the relationship which these three filmic products have with each other, as I shall endeavour to illustrate in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 which deal with each of these.

To some extent, the study will encompass a field of study known as the 'classical tradition',[47] where receptions were seen as a continuation of an idealised past (Hardwick 2003: 2-11; Martindale 2006: 1-13), but this tradition will in itself be subject to critical examination. It will also apply mainly to the

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[44] 'We all approach the reading of texts with the baggage of our values and our experience, with certain categories, assumptions, prejudices and 'fore-understandings'' (Martindale 1993: 5).
[45] As a genre the historical film does not include the documentary, but see further discussion on pp. 31-32.
[46] See Hardwick and Stray 2008 for further views on reception.
[47] The study of the classical tradition was aimed at pointing to the lasting value of antiquity in the history of the modern West, while reception studies do not presuppose such a positive attitude to the ancient past and its products.

study of Kubrick's *Spartacus*, since at the time this film was produced, Rome was still seen as a heroic antecedent of the West.

- Film theory

Literary storytelling is limited to words which stimulate the imagination, whilst cinematic storytelling predominantly rests with images combined with suitably evocative music and language. The differences between textual and visual narrative are clearly delineated in Chatman's (1980) *What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)*.[48] The language and imagery are indebted to the apparatus theory of film scholars such as Baudry, Mulvey, and Metz. According to them, film can be seen as a sort of pleasure machine, plugged into and powered by an audience, with its own circuitry, its own wiring, brought to the film machine set-up, which in turn was explicitly designed with them in mind (or a version of them projected by studio executives, armed with information from polls or focus groups, etc.) (Apostol 2015: 91).

To understand the reasoning behind particular representations of the past, the historical products must be examined along with how the historical has been taken up and made relevant for its modern context. What, if anything, do historical films convey about the past, and how do they convey it? What is film's potential for telling us about the past in a way that is meaningful within the time and cultural context in which it is presented? And to what extent do films provide us with evidence of the popular views of ancient Rome?

Film will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 2, but at this point suffice it to say that, in order to answer these questions, this study will be utilizing Chapman's differentiation between actuality, realism, and authenticity (2013: 31-35). It is 'authenticity' that is most often applied to the historical film, whereby the content is understood to be 'true to life' or 'true to history' even if they are not actuality. 'Realism' is also applicable in the form of 'social realism' as well as 'psychological realism' whereby the characters and surroundings behave in a manner which we would expect of that time. Verisimilitude is when something is given an appearance of being real 'in accordance of the contentions of film' (Chapman 2013: 137), in other words the viewer knows and accepts that it is not real. We know, for example that Kirk Douglas is not actually Spartacus, he is playing a role as an actor, but we accept that he is Spartacus for the duration of the film.[49] Another good example is the crowds in *Gladiator*, which were simulated by computer technology, and close inspection reveals that they are not real. Since some elements of the narrative are more convertible or 'amenable to

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[48] Something recognised in the ancient world when the philosophical orator Maximus of Tyre (*Oration 22*) compared the benefit the soul may derive from historical accounts, which represented the past in words, with the pleasure the eye may derive from pictures, which represent their objects visually (Winkler 2009b: 177).

[49] Here we also take note of Jean-Louis Comolli's 'le corps en trop' or 'a body too many' (1978: 41-53), a metaphor he developed to distinguish the body of the actor, which clashes with the historical figure in the public imaginary. In our specific case this applies mainly to Kirk Douglas and Spartacus.

display in film' (McFarlane 1996: 13), whereas others have to be adapted, it follows that not all the elements of the film medium will have the same levels of authenticity. Where elements 'must find quite different equivalencies in the film medium' (McFarlane 1996: 13), the viewer and the scholar must evaluate to what extent these have been successfully applied.

OVERVIEW OF SEMINAL SCHOLARSHIP IN THE FIELD

Modern research on ancient gladiatorial combat began in the 18th century and has continued until the present. As has been noted above, historical studies have been influenced by the authors' own socio-political contexts just as the film productions were influenced by theirs. Modern hypotheses have therefore been moulded more by contemporary attitudes to violence and idealisations of Western 'roots' than by the actual sources themselves.

THEM AND US

Foucault in *Society Must Be Defended* (2003) found that modern historical discourse is shaped around the idea of perpetual war, which places the narrator on the one side against a 'constructed' idea of the Other in the discourse of history. Civilised society defines itself through this dichotomy, and therefore it follows that which is termed civilisation has a complicated relationship with supposedly uncivilised aspects such as violence. Therefore, if one reads the scholarship around gladiators with this in mind, it tells us as much about modern Western cultural attitudes, and its notion of itself as the seat of civilisation, as it does about the violence in ancient entertainment.[50]

Arising from this thinking, it has become something of a necessity for particularly Western scholars to attempt to explain gladiatorial combat and its roots as an interruption, a discrepancy. The thought that violence, at the very heart of gladiature, could actually operate as a sophisticated and choreographed support system for the spectacles to amuse the masses seems to have resulted in a desire to rationalise this in terms of modern perceptions (Stepney 2013: 13). More often than not, when Rome is held up as the shining example of ancient civilisation many are happy to believe that this 'barbaric' custom originated somewhere else, from an 'oriental' Etruscan milieu (Welch 2007: 18; Stepney 2013: 43). Conversely, when gladiators are part of the discourse, Rome assumes the characteristics of the Other due to modern discomfort at the obvious pleasure taken in violence.[51]

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[50] See for example Burton's discussion in his article on 'Pax Romana/Pax Americana: Perceptions of Rome in American Political Culture, 2000-2010', 2011: 66-104.

[51] Rome and Ancient Egypt were treated almost interchangeably in films of the 50s and early 60s, as 'sublimated master metaphors for the Soviet Union, the menace of a godless imperium which would brazenly flaunt its capricious power over its people' (Morton 2014: 35).

The study of the gladiator in antiquity is particularly revealing as to how the modern West would like to relate to Rome as a mirror of its own history and identity. On the one hand, the gladiator is, as Barton (1993: 11) describes him, a warped or even perverse sportsman/athlete, and as such embodies qualities like brutality and cruelty. And this is deeply embedded in a culture which the West claims to stem from and therefore wishes to admire (Stepney 2013: 3).

In the mid-to-late-20th century scholars were clearly horrified by the games, often leading to rather extravagant claims, for example that 'extremely few epochs of human history ... have achieved cruelty on a scale as numerically lavish as ancient Rome', and that these 'bloodthirsty holocausts in the arena', those 'orgies of cruelty', cannot be sufficiently condemned (Grant 1967: 10).[52] In a similar vein, the games have been dismissed as 'unbefitting for, and incompatible with, Roman civilisation' (Auguet 1994: 15). Only in the last two decades has this emotionally one-dimensional and negative image of the gladiatorial games begun to shift, and to take more note of studies like that of Paul Veyne, who was one of the first scholars to suggest, in *Le pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (1976), that the arena was a socially useful and necessary interchange and tool for both the audience and for those in power. His argument was that any organised spectacle within Roman society could be seen as patronage in which benefactions were donated by private individuals. There were also some good arguments around the power of individuals in the manipulation of the people. Syme (1939: 468-469), for example, examined how Republican politicians wooed the people with public entertainment, while the first princeps excelled at utilizing his skills and resources to produce magnificently choreographed bloody entertainment to further enhance his power base.[53] But scholars still tend to disagree on the purpose of the games and what meaning they held for the different parties involved.

GLADIATOR, ARENA, AUDIENCE

There have been a large number of monographs on the ancient gladiator and the arena, and some have been more significant than others. Quite a number of monographs are largely descriptive, such as Shadrake (2005) or Nossov (2009) and do not postulate any particularly new or original theories around gladiature. Early studies, like that of Michael Grant's 1967 book, are now more a subject of scholarly critique than a resource, as indicated in the paragraph above, but not entirely without value.

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[52] Similar sentiments from Ugo Paoli in the 1950s, 'All this horrifies us.... To say that we condemn this revolting custom is too little; we cannot even begin to understand' 1958; and Michael Grant in the 1960s: 'the arena was one of the most appalling manifestations of evil that the world has ever known. Nearly all the spectators wallowed unrestrainedly in blood-lust' 1967: 104. Grant also compared the cruelties perpetuated in the arena as being on par with Nazi extermination procedures, 1971: 8. And more recently Kyle 1998: 2, 'revelled in killing as in the thrills and the reassurances, the self-validation, of a love-affair'.

[53] The developments in the context of the Roman Republic, as opposed to Empire, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Others, like Dunkle (2008; 2013), *Gladiators: Violence and Spectacle in Ancient Rome*, or Golvin & Landes (1990), *Amphithéâtres et Gladiateurs* are excellent works of broad value for anyone interested in familiarizing themselves in this field and contain a wealth of technical information.[54]

One of today's leading scholars on the interaction of Roman institutions and the people is arguably David Potter, whose 1999 volume *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire* (co-edited with archaeologist D.J. Mattingly) offers an excellent basis for sources and approaches to the topic of violent entertainment. Potter's 2011 volume, *The Victor's Crown: A History of Ancient Sport from Homer to Byzantium*, also contributed solid insights into the originality of particularly *Gladiator*.

Kathleen Coleman's work is more specific to the Roman arena with her 2006 text edition of Martial's *Spectacula*, the publication of *L'organisation des spectacles dans le monde romain* with J. Nelis-Clément in 2012, and numerous articles as listed in the Bibliography here. These often also deal with the mass-and-elite phenomena around the Roman games, as do the publications of Jonathan Edmondson (1996, 2002), following on the early study of Paul Plass (1995, *The Game of Death in Ancient Rome: Arena Sport and Political Suicide*) with his application of game theory to the way in which mass and elite negotiated spaces for ritualised killing. Wiedemann provides another study of the interaction of mass and elite (1992: 2002) in a refreshingly non-judgemental 200-page assessment.

Among the more recent authors, Michael J. Carter is the most prominent, and in addition to broader insights on gladiatorial combat also offers valuable insights into spectacles in the provinces, which is of the most relevance for our study of *Gladiator*.

Many studies have looked at the evidence from particular disciplinary perspectives (such as Hopkins' sociological study (1983; 1985), or Fagan's *The Lure of the Arena: Social Psychology and the Crowd at the Roman Games* (2011)), or made detailed studies of particular types of evidence, such as the individual contributions to Wilmott's *Roman Amphitheatres and Spectacula: a 21st Century Perspective* (2009) and Dunbabin's book (2016) on the representation of the arena and circus in mosaics, frescoes and reliefs, which have proved valuable in assessing the authenticity of various aspects of arena combat in the modern films. Other valuable publications which offer alternative perspectives from their detailed study of particular types of evidence are, for example, the study of Fabian Kanz and Karl Grossschmidt (2006). This type of study offers some archaeological defence of the position that gladiators were a valuable commodity, something which is looked at in all three filmic products. Their research, using CT scans, established from the remains of 67 gladiators analysed that only one had a wound that could be associated with death during combat. This work thus confirms that the gladiators most often did not fight to kill. It would appear from the lack of peri-mortal bone injuries that the gladiatorial fighter, like our modern sports celebrities, were considered

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[54] Also useful from this perspective is Nossov 2009.

to be valuable commodities, ones that operated under strict rules of combat (Carter 2006/07: 93-113). Moreover, some of the gladiatorial types appear to have been very rare, such as the scissor (*CIL* IX 466 = *ILS* 5083a). The same can be said of other examinations of the archaeological evidence of gladiatorial remains, for example by Redfern and Bonney (2014), 'Headhunting and Amphitheatre Combat in Roman London, England: New Evidence from the Walbrook Valley'.

Scholars who have looked at other material evidence, from inscriptions to iconography, have also proved invaluable, also in terms of cross-checking the information conveyed by the literary sources. A perfunctory but important introduction to the archaeological evidence for Spartacus's revolt, for example, can be found in A. Russi (1999), *La romanizzazione: il quadro storico*, in Dinu Adamesteanu, ed., *Storia della Basilicata*, vol. 1: L'Antichita' (Rome: Editori Laterza, 1999), p. 531-7, and in the same volume, A. Small, *L'occupazione del territorio in eta' romana*, p. 577. On graffiti and wall paintings of gladiators and other violent entertainment, particularly useful detail is contributed by Jacobelli's *Gladiators at Pompeii* (2003), though limited to that particular city, and the chapter by Garraffoni and Funari (2009) 'Reading Pompeii's Walls; A Social Archaeological Approach to Gladiatorial Graffiti'. Most informative has been Langner's 2001 illustrated monograph, *Antike Graffitizeichnungen: Motive, Gestaltung und Bedeutung*.

Altogether the amount of scholarship in most of these interlinked areas is enormous and the above overview cannot be expected to provide a complete prospectus. It merely serves as a broad guideline to studies seminal for the present investigation, which in itself also gives some indication to the direction that the present work will take.

THE FILM WORLD AND US

Many epic films55 of the 50s, 60s and 70s had a strong focus on Christianity as the saving of Rome, and spectacles were often presented as one-dimensional renderings of death in the arena, failing to reflect that spectacula in the Roman world embraced far more. Only more recently have there been attempts to understand the position of spectacle within the parameters of Roman society, here probably best reflected within HBO's Rome. In his 2013 volume, Film and History, Chapman explains how important innovation has proved to be in visual and graphic narratives. As society develops and we have an increased capacity to study and understand our human history, so the film world has developed better and more convincing ways of representing history. In this way, films can themselves be studied as historical texts, since, as stated above, they talk as much about the time and context in which they were produced as they do about the ancient past.

[55] See Chapter 2 for the discussion on the epic film.

Classical reception scholars interpret both the past and the contemporary in their work on Graeco-Roman historical films. Maria Wyke was an early prominent scholar in this field, but her work concentrated more on early cinematic productions, particularly Italian cinema. There have been a number of general works with the return of the epic film, for example by Burgoyne (2008, or 2011), Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011) and Elliott (2014), but the most prominent scholars in the field have been Monica Cyrino and Jon Solomon, both of whom have written articles and published edited volumes relating to the modern receptions under discussion.

This study has also taken into account critical reviews of the three filmic productions in the popular media, since these are an important indication of filmic popularity and popular culture, such as in *The New Yorker*, *Esquire* and *Time Magazine*.

Finally, the bibliography will indicate a number of works around spectator psychology, such as more general approaches such as Michael Apter's *The dangerous edge: the psychology of excitement* (1992), and then also the inclusion of some works on the effects of violence via television and film industry. This section opened with the literature that saw the ancients and ourselves as somehow different. The last two types of study mentioned here will indicate that, in fact, 'they' are us.

STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY

Violent entertainment in Rome has been the topic of serious scholarship since the 19th century, and the present study does not aim to cover all this ground in extensive detail. Hence, the themes I have selected in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are essentially themes that arose out of the modern filmic products on gladiature of the 20th and 21st centuries.

In order to deal coherently with these themes, the thesis is divided into eight chapters. The contextual background, rationale for the study and the approaches to the evidence that will be used have been included in the present chapter, Chapter 1. The discussion is then launched in Chapter 2, on the writing of history, the presentation of film and the correlation, if any, between the two, and takes up the conversation on the representation of historical truth versus the need for filmic sensationalism. This chapter would be considered lacking without some reference to deliberate distortion through film, those incidences when the representation was deliberately slanted to serve a propaganda purpose.

Chapter 3 is entitled 'Violence and the Spectator', taking up the media's popular by-line 'if it bleeds, it leads'. Here I will examine firstly the subject of violence itself, and our human fascination with it. Then I will attempt to establish what is meant by 'violence' and the social-relational nature of violence, as well as the links between moral and immoral motives for violence and its public display. Although human psychology offers explanations for the trans-cultural and trans-historical appeal of violent spectacle, the appreciation of that psychology can deepen our understanding of the experience. This chapter then goes on to explore the public fascination for extravagant displays of spectacle and the use of violence for entertainment purposes. Realism or verisimilitude plays a part in its

presentation as the motion picture becomes the window through which we can 'safely' experience the past.

Chapter 4, 'Violent entertainment in Rome', interrogates violence in the Roman period with a particular focus on how it was presented as a form of entertainment. A rapid survey of the games, their origins and their participants, serves as a background to the examination of the ancient sources and related scholarly arguments.[56] Various factors influencing the sources will also be taken into consideration, such as geography, gender, class, religion and genre. For example, did the elite condone violence for the masses as they considered it more akin to their nature?

The following three chapters, Chapters 5-7, will each focus on one of the selected films, examining the authenticity and realism in the filmic versions and what would be the motivations for deviations from the 'historical script', as it were. Each of these three chapters will follow essentially the same layout in terms of its subsections, as far as possible and where relevant. Because of the popular nature of the focus of this thesis, I have used visual stills or screenshots of the three films under discussion as evidence to support my arguments and points. In order not to overwhelm the text, some of these are quite small, but can be enlarged in the electronic format of the thesis for closer and detailed examination where necessary.

Chapter 5 will commence with a look at earlier filmic renditions of ancient Rome and discuss violent representations in the 60s version of *Spartacus* (heavily sanitised because of the sensibilities of the audience). The ancient material from that period on this historical rebel gladiator will be examined for what it may reveal about the world of violent entertainment, and why and how this was taken up in the Kubrick film version and its successors. Lastly this chapter will attempt to answer the question if we, in the present day, have changed our perceptions of what is acceptable in the violence of the ancient Roman world.

Ridley Scott's film *Gladiator* is discussed in Chapter 6, examining the nature of violence in public performance at the close of the 2nd century CE in the ancient source material and discussing the historical and contemporary influences on its representation in this 2000 film. This chapter will also dwell briefly on the changes in violent entertainment compared with the period of the Republic.

The two seasons of HBO's *Rome*[57] will be discussed in Chapter 7. Since the series presents many more viewing hours than the two films, violence is examined more from a broader social perspective

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[56] Socially such examples are: Var. *R.* 1. 69. 4; Gel. 10. 3. 1–3; Gel. 10. 3. 5; Liv. *Per.* 74; App. *B.Civ.* 1. 54; Val. Max. 9. 7. 4; D.S. 37. 12; Dio 57. 14. 9; see Hor. *Epist.* 1. 18. 19 for Castor; Tac. *Ann.* 4. 3–12; Suet. *Aug.* 45. 2; Galen *Meth. Med.* 10. 3 = 10. 672K; *P. Ryl.* 2. 124; Suet. *Nero* 5. 1.

[57] *Rome* is a dramatic series of two seasons that portrays the fall of the Roman Republic, as represented in the assassination of Julius Caesar, and the rise of Rome's Empire, as represented in Augustus' defeat of Marcus Antonius. The series was screened on a Sunday night between August 2005 through March 2007 'The historic narrative is tied together through the more dominant, master narrative, of two Roman soldiers, Titus Pullo (Ray Stevenson) and Lucius Vorenus (Kevin

such as the stratification of the different types of violence in the series. The series presents a wide variety of public entertainment, and the analysis will therefore examine a wider frame than gladiatorial contests.

Chapter 8 will then be the concluding chapter, attempting to draw together all the threads of the ancient evidence and the modern film receptions, to validate or disprove to what extent the depiction and representation of Roman violence in these samples of popular culture is reliable and what is the result of filmic sensationalism.

Additionally, if it has been possible to finally ascertain if the 'historical' film, in the form of the three examples chosen, provides a counter discourse on perceived violence from the past.

McKidd). Producer Jonathan Stamp describes Pullo and Vorenus' dramatized world as the A story, and the historical record as the B story' (Episode 12, '*Kalends of February*,' Audio Commentary, Season I; Stamp 2005). *Rome* was nominated for 8 Emmy awards and achieved four statuettes (Cyrino 2008b: 140).

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY AND FILM

The present chapter is intended to give some background to the later sections of the thesis which will deal with the three specific visual media products. The chapter is divided into sections on the nature of historiography, the involvement of the film industry with history, and the relationship between popular culture and Rome and the Empire, ending with some brief comments on violence and viewership.

WHAT IS HISTORY?

For the purposes of this study, it is as well, to get an exact definition of what is understood by the term 'history' at this point. As most readers would know, the word is derived from Herodotus' *historia*, 'inquiry' or 'research' (Hdt. 1.1), examining the events of the past as to how they came about, and how they influenced later events. This therefore goes beyond annalistic records, and because it is based on investigation, it also moves away from mythology and legend.

Despite his claimed 'inquiry' emphasis Herodotus continued to be admired as the master of a good story, with his aetiologies, geographical digressions, and fabulous stories, many redolent of private intrigue and sexual adventurism. He was writing so that the great deeds of men might be remembered and to show what the *aitia* of the war was, that is, who was to blame for it (Hdt. 1.1), emphasis fell on the first motif, which was in effect an echo of the opening lines of Homer's *Iliad*. Consequently, Herodotus was often taken less seriously than he might have been. Later scholarship, however, has vindicated Herodotus to some extent, showing that history and entertainment are not, in fact, as mutually exclusive as Thucydides would have us believe.[1]

For the historiographers of the ancient world, from Herodotus to Procopius, history should do three things: inform, edify, and gratify. As the Roman historians for our period of study illustrate, the

[1] Thucydides, though he never mentions Herodotus by name, outlined his aims with an implicit rebuke of his work: 'The absence of romance (μυθώδης) in my history will detract from its interest… I have written my work not as an essay to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time' (1.22.4) – in other words, with a didactic aim. On Herodotus and restoring his reputation, see Branscome 2019.

audience for whom the history is being written directly influences its very nature – who is this history being written for? Who will read it? And why will they read it?

We are therefore compelled to ask the question, what is the value of history? Cicero felt that history was 'the witness of past times, the light of truth, the vital force of memory, the guide to life' (*De or.* 2.636), and as he states elsewhere:

> To be ignorant of what took place before you were born is always to remain a child. For where is the meaning of one's life unless it is woven into the lives of our ancestors through the records of the past? (*Orat.* 120, trans. Hendrickson and Hubbell).

History therefore seems to be intimately intertwined with our own identity, and when combined with the very literary nature of historiography, this arguably constitutes its weakness if one wishes to get to the heart of 'what really happened'. The subjectivity of the historical narrative was commented on in the 18th and 19th century by writers such as the American poet, Ralph Emerson (1841): 'There is properly no history – only biography'. Voltaire (1784-9) swept away all notions of historical objectivity: 'All our ancient history … is no more than accepted fiction',[2] and in the 20th century Karl Popper (1945: 475) wrote his more nuanced perception of what history was:

> There is no history of mankind; there are only many histories of all kinds of aspects of human life. And one of these is the history of political power. This is elevated into the history of the world.

Oliver Stone, when defending his films *JFK* (1991) and *Nixon* (1998) to the press, expressed his opinion as follows:

> What is history? Some people say it's a bunch of gossip made up by soldiers who passed it around a campfire (2000: 47).

History then, is that web of links to the past that holds or binds a culture together, of its people and of its events, which speaks of the past of where that culture has been and possibly where it is going. It has many narratives, and not of just one particular culture but of encounters with others and broader interconnections. History is inevitably subjective, and even though elements of fiction may be less present in the historical works of today than in ancient times, the works of modern historians are still selections of what is relevant, and their interpretations of that selection.[3]

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[2] Detailed discussion on the French thinker's view of history in Plagnol-Diéval 2011: 158-161; Sakman 1971: 24-59.
[3] Supported by White 1966: 131: 'the methodological ambiguity of history offers opportunities for creative comment on past and present that no other discipline enjoys' and that 'if historians were to seize the opportunities thus offered, they might in time convince their colleagues in other fields of intellectual and expressive endeavour of the falsity of Nietzsche's claim that history is 'a costly and superfluous luxury of the understanding'.

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT – THE USES AND ABUSES OF HISTORY

Thucydides (1.22.4) was the first to express his views on the usefulness of history, in other words its educational aspect, and this has filtered down through Polybius, Ammianus and others. History's purpose thus also came to be seen as a vehicle to teach by providing examples for future generations – from the ancient Greeks up to today's historians, history was a storehouse of examples to guide future actions. This was based on another idea first mooted by Thucydides (1.22.4),[4] that the past would always be repeated, and that past and present were linked in this way:

> To learn about the present in light of the past means also to learn about the past in light of the present. The function of history is to promote a profounder understanding of both past and present through the interrelation between them (Carr 2001: 62).

One of the consequences resulting from the 'past in the present' argument is, as many scholars argue, that historical film uses the past to work with current issues or debates, particularly when concerning violence and national identity (De Groot 2009: 208). This has clearly happened in many instances, most obviously illustrated in *Spartacus*, in which some of the 'name and shame' scenes were used by the blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo to censure those who had collaborated with McCarthyite Hollywood blacklisting. Representations could be deliberately slanted to serve any number of propaganda purposes.[5] Carmine Gallone's *Scipione l'Africano,* produced during the Fascist regime of Mussolini,[6] and aspects 'borrowed' and lovingly recorded by Leni Riefenstahl in her attempts of glorification of the Third Reich in *Triumph of the Will* are good examples of this type of film-making.[7]

Conceptual reconstructions of antiquity in popular culture are inevitably, in one way or another, filtered through the lens of contemporaneity and informed by a producer's or a scriptwriter's own understanding of Greek and Roman culture, combined with what he/she aims to achieve in the context of their current audiences' tastes. As Franzoni, *Gladiator's* screenwriter, openly acknowledges, 'the movie is about us. It's not just about ancient Rome, it's about America'.[8]

If we accept that the past is made up of things that have happened, and the present shapes how we recall them, the historical film looks to both the past and the present and brings the two into dialogue

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[4] Thuc. 1.22.4: 'events … which will some day, in all human probability, happen again in the same or a similar way'.

[5] The importance of the new medium was quickly seen by several famous propagandists. Lenin and Trotsky for its value for their political message, and the German film industry was appropriated quickly by Goebbels who produced feature films and German weekly newsreels that were masterpieces in the art of deception, Raack 1983: 411.

[6] In one of his early published speeches Mussolini is quite explicit: 'We dream of a Roman Italy'. Much of that which was the immortal spirit of Rome is reborn in fascism, with the very word coming from the *fasces* as carried by Roman officials as a sign of office, according to Mussolini. The new Italian Empire was glorified through the images and narratives of the old Roman Empire, Sontag 1975; Stone 1999: 205-206; Goldhill 2004: 276.

[7] On this aspect see Hay: 'The historical film was certainly the clearest expression of cultural essentialism and nationalism in Italy during the 1920 and 1930s', 1987: 150.

[8] Quoted in Cyrino 2005: 125.

with each other.[9] More often than not, it cultivates a sense that it faithfully represents the past, all the while constructing this past in a way that is shaped and informed by its own context in the present.

So, we know that the writing up of an historical account is a reflection of the persuasions or beliefs of an author, rather than an unbiased reflection of what actually occurred. As reported items become transferred into historical events, their presentation is inevitably shaped and is both explained and presented in ways that serve, consciously or unconsciously, the ideological needs of the teller and his intended audience. Since all the early historians, even the otherwise rigorous Thucydides (1.22.1), used some creative licence in the use of speeches (for example in the use of speeches to which they had not been privy, or could not remember the exact wording), these were really literary and dramatic fictions to vividly illustrate the arguments within the narrative. Other dialogues took place between historical figures who had never even met, or who lived in different eras. Such speeches may therefore constitute examples of psychological or social realism, even if they are not actually what was said or what happened.

There were also controversies in the ancient past with respect to authenticity and entertainment. Duris of Samos felt there should be an element of gratification in historical writing ('their narratives lacked naturalism and pleasure', *FGrH* 76, F1). Conversely Polybius attacked Phylarchus as a source due to his commitment in creating reading pleasure through sensationalism and fabrication,[10] writing to engage his readers rather than presenting the facts, 'carelessly' and never missing 'an opportunity to emphasise the lurid details'. The writing up of Roman origins which blended myth, history and popular imagination was certainly not immune to sensationalism, and anyone familiar with Suetonius' writings will know about the inclusion of lurid palace gossip (Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 18). These resourceful methods bear a resemblance to historical drama or historical fiction, where selection and elaboration created a stimulating and engaging package. Referred to as 'sensational historiography', historical amplification through the elaboration of historical aspects was a unique and distinguished practice as it generated 'pleasing effects' and in turn, stimulated and engaged audiences in the numbers required to make them popular.

Ancient contexts were also occasionally exploited because they could convey prurient versions of decadent sexuality, whereas not everyone in ancient times lived on a Fellini set of Petronius' *Satyricon*. Apostol (2015: 91) speaks about the host of Roman sexploitation films, and how slavery and sex have always gone hand in hand, since they both conformed to the fantasy where one person receives complete control over the body of another, to do with as they will.

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[9] Polish cinematographer Boleslaw Matuszewski suggested as far back as the 1890s that film was a medium suitable for historical narration as well as a historical source for research. Matuszewski worked with the famous film pioneers the Lumière brothers during the 1890s, publishing a book entitled *Une nouvelle source de l'histoire* in the year 1898.

[10] 'To provoke the pity and compassion of his readers by means of graphic descriptions' (Polyb. 2.56.7).

HISTORY AND ENTERTAINMENT

Livy, in his preface to the *History of Rome* (1.2), implies that the writing of history could take one of two forms: the historian could simply accumulate evidence or otherwise excel in the writing of history through a personal literary style.[11] The need to beguile the listener, reader, and later the viewer, was embedded in the historiographical genre from its earliest exponents.

Because history, and particularly ancient history, involves dramatic events, it is particularly suited to a visual medium such as film, as Andre Bazin comments: 'as soon as it is formed, the skin of history peels off as film'.[12] The last 50 years have seen an unprecedented interest in history in all forms of media, but primarily in literature and television.[13] Cannadine has pondered on this:

> Was it because there are more history graduates than before with a lifelong passion for the past? Was it because the time allocated to teaching history in the schools was so limited that the media has taken over as the prime educator about the past for young people? (2004: 1)

Cannadine's thoughts certainly demonstrate that views of the past and the visual media were becoming inextricably linked, with the communication of historical information becoming part of popular culture. Film and television have shown that they are by far the most important vehicles for the presentation of history to mass audiences since the 1960s when the first conference *Film and the Historian* was held (Rosenstone 1995: 1-12).[14]

More than any other medium, film is able to provide both vivid experiences and powerful emotional relationships with a time that for most people, especially today, is unfamiliar. The revival of cinema's interest in antiquity prompted by the release of *Gladiator* in 2000 shows little indication of fading. The public's desire for films dealing with ancient history and mythology remains seemingly strong. Many universities worldwide now offer established classics-and-film courses, paving the way for the noticeable increase of reception studies being offered within the fields of classics and ancient history.

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[11] Liv. *Pref.*1: … 'new historians, who believe either that in their facts they can produce more authentic information (*in rebus certius*), or that in their style (*scribendi*) they will prove better than the rude attempts of the ancients' (transl. Foster). Roman writers, like their Greek predecessors discussed in the preceding chapter, were certainly familiar with the link between poetry and history, viz. Quint. *Inst. Or.* X.1.31. Livy himself uses the poetic in his work to enhance its enjoyment for the audience or reader, see discussion in Moles 1983:157.

[12] Andre Bazin cited in David Forgacs (2000: 23) *Rome Open City*.

[13] For a discussion of the growing popularity of docudramas, see Musburger 1985: *Setting the Stage for the Television;* McKerns 1980: *Television Docudramas: The Image as History*; Breitbart 1981: *From the Panorama to the Docudrama: Notes on the Visualisation of History*; Hoffer & Nelson 1980: *Evolution of Docudrama on American Television Networks: A Content Analysis, 1966 – 1978*.

[14] Resulting from this event the *International Association for Audio-visual Material and History* was begun, followed by volumes such as Smith's *The Historian and Film* 1976 and Chapman's *Film and History* 2013, as discussed in Chapter 1, p. 16.

HISTORIANS AND HISTORY FILMS

Traditionally historians regarded the historical film as a competitor, one that shaped the perception of history without limits and one that had a profound and unpredictable influence on the public (Bernstein 1989). For Rosenstone (1995: 121), complaints surrounding film's use of history are based upon two misconceptions: that historical films are subject to the rules of historical practice as they are 'written history transformed to the screen' and that facts are facts and history is 'little more than an organised compilation of such facts'. This is undeniably true and particularly the latter is indicated by the previous section on the nature of 'history' and its subjective compilation by writers, ancient and modern. While the interface between cinema, television, and historical representation provides a rapidly growing area of scholarship and student engagement, it should be recognised that both form a historical consciousness and are the creators of history albeit through different techniques, methodologies, approaches and different targeted audiences (Cufurovic 2018: 1). While it must be admitted that historical filmic versions of the past often take liberties with, for example, the cross-pollination of periods for specific visual effects, academic historians who criticise film for deviating from 'historical reality' fail to take into account that written history is just as 'much shaped by conventions of language and genre' as film is by 'production and popular imagination', especially films representing the ancient past (Rosenstone 1995: 34-5). There are indeed varying degrees of verisimilitude on both sides, as will be discussed below. Academics are now examining how the historical film and/or television series reflects the societies in which they are made and hypothesize on how the popular imagination's attitude towards the past has been shaped by filmic depiction. This can, in effect, change the cognizant use of past-as-commentary to an unconscious, almost Freudian, exposure of our deepest fears, much as dreams are thought to be exposés of our unconscious thoughts. We perceive the past through our own moment and while anachronisms may remain as a continual danger, 'presentism' can also make history important. Certainly, it cannot be denied that film offers a new way of considering the past and, as Toplin (2002: 1) says, 'even the most derided Hollywood films can arouse emotions, stir curiosity and prompt viewers to consider significant questions'. Certainly, there are some valid grounds for criticism, as history is sometimes represented on the screen uncritically and there is nothing to control its historical quality. It seems that, for many historians, professional history on the one hand, and public visual memory on the other, remain antagonistic realms of historical consciousness.

Thus, the role of the scholarly historian versus that of the filmmaker and their respective responsibilities remains unresolved. Historians write to put across what they claim to be the 'true story' while filmmakers capture realities to craft good and convincing stories. The medium for many professional historians and academics, remains without doubt, the written word. End notes and extensive bibliographies carefully verify accuracy, accountability, and attribution. The film maker might genuinely state that their approach to the idea of 'accuracy' comes from a different viewpoint, intending to present what they might call the 'bigger truths' in his/her recreation of the past. Film and historical novels can present perspectives which scholarly history finds more difficult to investigate,

since the latter is more dependent on evidence, whether literary, documentary or material remains, and this is inevitably skewed more towards the elite male minorities of the ancient past.

The production of historical films/series and the writing of academic history unavoidably then represent two fundamentally differing ways of appropriating the past. The 'why' and 'with what result' questions are the focus of academic history which then produces 'intellectually overdetermined and emotionally underdetermined texts' (Kansteiner 2017: 170). The more emotive context is focused on in historical film and TV which presents the 'how' questions (for instance, how did Cleopatra charm Mark Antony?), resulting in a highly suggestive and often mesmeric visual product.[15] These can, be subject to ideological and commercial manipulation or some other end-purpose which skews the portrayal and many viewers are therefore sceptical about their realism and authenticity. Yet, when film and history overlap, it is because of 'an ontological similarity between them' (Schwartz 2013: 1). Both film and history insist that they have reference or a relation with that distant but real world in fairly literal ways; 'both are also fundamentally concerned with issues of temporality'(Schwartz 2013: 1).

Some in fact 'see the introduction of films as the chance to broaden the cognitive arena of historical reconstruction and deepen students' understanding of historical methodology' (Hanley cited in Montfort 2004: 18). Film then has the capacity to inform the 'linearity and internal logic of conventional historical discourse with the sentiment and simultaneity of lived experience' (Strand cited in Montfort 2004: 18).

Reuse of the past is a significant issue and has often been used to provide powerful intellectual support for the authenticity of developed concepts, where ideas derived from classical sources were felt to have a particular authority and influenced contemporary views of nationhood and Empire (Hingley 2005: 15).

Popular media, particularly television and video games, are often seen as forms of escapism from an increasingly stressful world, particularly in urban contexts. As entertainment 'addictions' these have in fact been compared with the arenas and circuses of ancient Rome. We can, and do, spend much of our free time watching mental chewing-gum on TV, much as Cicero and Seneca went to watch the games.[16] Films, television series and video games have taken central stage in the majority of daily lives and as a consequence, they influence individuals and their social relationships. When entertainment dominates a society, it changes more than the culture; it also reshapes the economy. From the rise of digital entertainment, it can be seen that 'circuses' are where the money lies, and a

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[15] In many ways the historical film is closer to the historical novel and uses fictional characters/elements to make the story more entertaining, facilitating identification of the audience with the main character.
[16] For example, Cic. *Vat.* 115; *Phil*. 5. 20; *Phil* 9.7; *Mur.* 73; *Tusc*. 2.41; *Fin.*1.20.69-70; Sen. *Brev*. 16.3; *Prov*. 4.4; *Ep. ad Lucilium* 7.

good proportion of people's income nowadays goes towards digital content and the electronic devices to support it (Schroeder 2011).

Big-screen cinema may have been the medium that dominated modern audio-visually saturated culture but that is now being superseded by the television - feature films, miniseries and documentaries are where the general population, in the main, obtains its information about the past. As stated by Becker (2019) in his American Historical Association address:

> Woven … out of the most diverse threads of information, picked up in the most casual way, from the most unrelated sources … Daily and hourly, from a thousand unnoted sources, there is lodged in Mr. Everyman's mind a mass of unrelated and related information and misinformation, of impressions and images, out of which he somehow manages, undeliberately for the most part, to fashion a history, a patterned picture of remembered things said and done in past times and distant places. …. the history … will inevitably be an engaging blend of fact and fancy, a mythical adaptation of that which actually happened.

POPULAR CULTURE – THE HIGHS AND LOWS

In the 1980s the impoverishment of American higher education through the loss of reading the classical texts and their substitution with varying forms of popular culture (in particular film) was bewailed by many such as Allan Bloom (1987: 344). Many academics consider film and the filmic history of ancient Rome and Greece as a perceived struggle between Culture and Anarchy or high versus low culture.[17] Rosenstone (1995: 11-12; 44) has distinguished 'mainstream' or 'standard' films from 'serious', 'experimental' or 'post-modern' historical films, where the former presents the past in a relatively evolved, polished format that serves to discourage rather than encourage questions, while the latter utilises media's particular capabilities to form multiple interpretations that interrogate the very evidence on which our familiarity of the past rests on. Even with this, however, it cannot be denied that there are large variations of actuality, authenticity and realism in the filmic renditions of historical productions.

Those who study film feel strongly that to omit history films from discussions surrounding the meaning of the past is to overlook a key aspect in our comprehension of events of the past (Rosenstone 2006).[18] Historical films, even those with ideologically slanted renditions of history, have an effect on a public that habitually receives its knowledge through the medium of moving images, through visual and aural experience. Many of whom may otherwise never have heard of Octavian or

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[17] Interestingly this debate can be reflected in the controversy around the fantasy *Game of Thrones* where any accepted historical narrative has been transmuted into something richer, stranger, and more archetypal. Much has been made of the general influence of the ancient and medieval past on *Game of Thrones* to the extent that there are people who now actually think *Game of Thrones* is historical!

[18] See further examples of the arguments presented by Rosenstone, 1988 through to 2006.

Commodus. Admittedly, when the ancient past is presented via an onscreen representation it can result in attitudes to the past being moulded in popular imagination that are unwarranted by the historical record.

At the time of writing this chapter a public debate arose on the racial composition of ancient Roman society involving Cambridge Classicist Mary Beard in the issue of the likelihood of black-skinned people in the world of Roman Britain. The online discussion around the issue was set in motion by a television programme showing a Black Roman soldier in a military detachment building Hadrian's Wall.[19] The entire debate nicely highlights what the general viewing public expects as reality in representations of the ancient world. As quoted by Luke Heighton (2017) of *The Telegraph*, the inclusion of the Black Roman soldier caused 'an almighty fall-out', it would appear that many saw this inclusion as a sop to political correctness and felt that the likelihood of black-skinned people in the world of Roman Britain was remote. Mary Beard contributed to the debate, stating:

> One thing is for sure, the Roman empire – Britain included – was culturally and ethnically diverse, from the Syrians in Bath to Quintus Lollius Urbicus, the Ethiopian who met Septimius Severus on Hadrian's Wall and the wonderful couple from South Shields, Barates and Queenie ('*Regina*'), he from Palmyra, she an Essex girl. There is no doubt about that. The trouble is that pinning this down in specific cases to precise ethnicities is much harder than many would like and it requires an array of historical and scientific techniques.

This debate then degenerated into a series of personal and misogynistic attacks on Beard by others via social media (Olusaga 2017) from those unwilling to accept that this was a possibility, despite her additional blog post indicating that the character was, most likely, taken from what was known about Quintus Lollius Urbicus, a man originally from what has now become Algeria, and who was eventually promoted to governor of Britain circa 139CE. An Ethiopian soldier in the Roman army is moreover actually attested in an ancient source (*SHA: Severus* 22).[20]

In itself it is an interesting question around the realism or authenticity of ancient film productions, which in the early years were virtually exclusively White, or, where Black people appeared, they were displayed in menial positions such as slaves. Could more diversity plausibly be represented? This argument can be extended to other groups that are underrepresented in the ancient literature, for example with regard to gender and gender relations. Then, by extension, the question of the filmic image of Rome as exceptionally aggressive and warlike and steeped in the blood of the arena, can also be interrogated.

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[19] On the topic in general, see also Potter 2011a: 529-530.

[20] https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mary-beard-takes-up-arms-against-an-army-of-trolls-dx3bmd05h. On this topic also Potter 2011a: 529-530.

STAGING SPECTACLE THROUGH WORD AND IMAGE

Writers, ancient and modern, place many verbal descriptions calculated to evoke mental images in their work.[21] Ancient authors thus 'staged' many of their descriptions of spectacles, particularly when they involved the re-enactment of events in the legendary past, intending to paint this history almost as though it were unfolding before the reader. When it came to film, staging such events meant that they had to be carefully planned in order to create a balance between the traditional, so that they could be understood, and the novel, so that they would make an impact. Additionally, because many of the more spectacular events of the shared past lived on in public memory through the writings of the poets and historians, technology became a useful tool to go beyond that which was known. The staging of ancient spectacle was a very important and often overlooked element, and shows did not simply display brutalizing violence but involved complex planning and choreography. In the case of the events at the Colosseum, a variety of mechanical devices or 'stage-machinery' were utilised. Hence characters could be seen to fly; people and animals could ascend and descend through trapdoors; the Colosseum could host a simulation of the battle of Salamis, amongst others.[22] This inventiveness fed expectations and contributed to the *panem et circenses* which bought off the masses of the late 1st century CE in Juvenal's satirical social commentary, briefly referred to above:[23]

> But what of Remus' mob [the masses]? They are followers of Fortune, as always, and hate those who are condemned. This same crowd, if Nortia had supported her Etruscan, if the aged emperor had been smothered off his guard, would be hailing Sejanus as Augustus within minutes. It's way back that they discarded their responsibilities – since the time we stopped selling our votes (*ex quo suffragia nulli vendimus*). The proof? The people that once used to bestow military commands, high office, legions, everything, now limits itself. It has an obsessive desire for two things only – bread and circuses (*panem et circenses*). (*Sat X*, 72-81, transl. Braund) (my emphases)

Circenses can be taken to refer generally to the public entertainment sponsored by politicians for the masses, in which chariot races in the Circus Maximus were very popular,[24] but in which gladiators also played a prominent role (Sandford 1951: 19-20). In Juvenal's lines the masses, as an outsider group, have essentially taken over, viewed by the jaundiced author as a primary sign of a general social decline (Stepney 2013: 48-49). Though Juvenal gets in a dig at the elite by referring to selling of votes, the greater satirical criticism is directed at the lower orders, who are only concerned with two things, bread and circuses. In Juvenal's satire, therefore, both orders are to blame for the decline of society, but the greater responsibility lies with the masses, who are easily swayed and led by the

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[21] Descriptive terms such as *mirare* and *ostentatio,* associated with evoking visual perceptions in literary descriptions of spectacle, are discussed by D'Arms 1999.

[22] This could go back as far as the *deus ex machina* in the early world of ancient theatre, or when the Alexandrian engineers invented *automata* in the 4th century BCE, Bergmann 1999: 13.

[23] See p.1 n.4 above.

24 Köhne 2000: 9 estimates that the Circus Maximus held up to 20% of the population, which would make it the equivalent of a blockbuster today.

nose.[25] Juvenal clearly implies that the masses had a great deal of latent power, even under the emperors, and had to be kept quiescent by being bought off. Certainly, during the last fifty-odd years of the Republic, wooing the masses was a very real aspect of Roman politics.[26] But at least during this time the masses still had some say in the voting assemblies such as the *comitia centuriata* or *concilium plebis* and were worth wooing for their votes, while by Juvenal's time they had essentially been disenfranchised. And if people feel that they are not part of the system, that they are of no account, they are much more likely to riot and destroy, and buying them off really entailed keeping them passive.

Although historical time is linear and continuous, historical narratives, whether in literary form or film, rarely present things in this form, with events in perfect sequence like a row of dominoes. Films in particular either compress/accelerate time (indicated to the viewer either by subtitles or text on the screen, or by the aging of the protagonist, for example), employ techniques like slow-motion or flashbacks (for example to indicate aspects that reveal the thought processes of characters in the story).

DOCUMENTARIES

There is also another tradition of historical programme, usually referred to as 'documentaries', which attempt to advance the more serious question and as a consequence make thoughtful explanations of the past. This includes such productions as the recent *Civilisations* series on television, a production which has a different approach to history on screen in that they tell a multicultural story, the 'big picture', using a number of perspectives such as that of art history. They make observations about cultural histories which allow viewers to make cross-cultural comparisons, creating a broader understanding of the past. Documentary cinematics therefore undeniably has a closer relation to ancient evidence, even though they contain a popular and entertainment aspect to it. Documentary can function like journalism or on-the-spot news, though it must not be forgotten that although documentary is thought of as 'objective', there really is no such thing – it still remains a constructed, subjective product and can even embody social persuasion or propaganda. The separation of films into 'fiction films' and 'documentaries' should not be based on their verisimilitude, nor a matter of being considered reliable or unreliable. Such separation should be overlooked, and every product be

25 I differ here from Stepney's interpretation of Juvenal's text, that: 'the plebeian class are essentially too irrational for meaningful political participation, and always have been', since Juvenal clearly harks back to his usual idealism of the long-gone golden age ('Time was when their plebiscite elected generals, heads of state, commanders of legions; but now they've pulled in their horns'), 2013: 49.

26 The view that the power of the masses (*potentia multitudinis*) was a double-edged weapon has been observed by both Roman writers and modern scholars, see the overview by Blom 2007: 4-9.

judged on its own merits, as the product of human endeavour. There are no 'reliable or unreliable resources, everything depends on the question you are studying' (Salmi 1995: 50).

REVISIONIST HISTORY

And finally, there is the contentious subject of revisionist and negating history. Since the beginning of recorded history including those ancient Greek and Roman writers, people have been editing their recorded past, or radically reinterpreting its more conventional reading. Modern historical revisionism is considered to have come about in the 20th century, following World War I: the first global military conflict that actually stunned the world. The aftermath of this war changed the way both scholars and laymen perceived historical preservation.

It normally involves the unmaking of collective memory and rewriting the accepted historical narrative. This can range from the inclusion or omission of details that have little impact on the collective memory to large-scale whitewashing. Not wanting to bring to the fore issues that have otherwise been forgotten may be understandable, but we run the risk of reaching that point when any resemblance to 'what really happened' is entirely swept away and eventually forgotten.[27]

THE EDUCATIONAL AND FORMATIVE VALUE OF FILM

VISUAL IMAGE AND WORDS ON A PAGE

Words on the page give the appearance of being solid and instructive whilst those images from film are more ephemeral. The words used in textbooks have been created through the application of evidence rules and tacit understandings by the writers of what is valid and important, whereas film is presented as being part of the 'entertainment industry' and transient because it has been made accessible to an audience of a specific era. With visual historical narratives it is more difficult to notice and recollect everything that appears on the screen (Sorlin 1980: ix).[28] This is not so easy, even in our current digitised, rewind and replay era.

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27 A case in point here would be Holocaust denialists - it is estimated by Dr Nicholas Terry, a history lecturer from Exeter University, that there are now thousands of 'low-commitment Holocaust deniers' online as the subject claims a new internet-based generation who are taking over from disgraced historian David Irving. Then there are the Moon landing conspiracists who claim that no American astronauts ever went there and that it was rather the product of a movie set faked by NASA and the US government who were desperate to beat the Russians in the space race. Some have even claimed that Stanley Kubrick directed this ruse. One need not even begin to take sides in the debate on Creationism versus evolution.

[28] Herlihy 1988, O'Connor 1990 and Toplin 1996: 8 further endorse the distinction between 'history in images' and 'history in words'. White 1988: 1193 coined the term 'historiophoty' as a means of distinguishing the study of visual histories from written history, using it to define 'the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse', or the cinematic representation of the past and the thought about it.

The medium in which that past is conveyed – the written and the spoken word, a sculpture, painting or photograph or moving image – also unconsciously shapes and limits our perception of the past. Benjamin (2008) amongst others argues that film, has created ‘unconscious optics’ as it changes our concepts of time and space as life is now depicted in a manner in which the naked eye cannot perceive it.

It can therefore not be discounted that 20th century filmic representation, with all its perceived flaws and drawbacks, has been crucial to the formation of a historical awareness of ancient Rome along with the dissemination of the same (Wyke 1997: 3). The question put forward by Wyke is: does cinema/television have a place in the investigation of antiquity’s reception? If the answer to that is ‘yes’, and the number of articles and books that have been devoted to this topic seems to support her view that it is, then our particular focus is a legitimate area of enquiry.

Hughes-Warrington (2007: 1) quotes the US-based *Presence of the Past Project* that indicated that out of 1500 people interviewed at the time, 81% watched historical films or television programmes, a far higher percentage than those who read books about the past. It also transpired that interviewees recorded a stronger connection with the past when it was represented visually than when they studied the same at school but, and quite importantly, it was a medium that was trusted less and that people were more ambivalent towards film. This confirms that, at least in the West, it is visual media, more than any other, that shapes the public’s perception of the past and there is no reason to think that this is not something that will continue and even grow. With the increase of electronic media and the decline of bookshops and libraries[29] there is the chance that the mere act of reading a book, not to mention a history book, will become an esoteric pleasure (Rutsky & Wyatt 1990).[30]

Film-study scholars are divided between the requirements of acknowledging film as a distinctive form of art and interrogating its capability to inform, educate and empower viewers (Polan 2007: 14, 25). Hughes-Warrington (2009: 1-2) acknowledges that there is scepticism when historical films are compared with ancient evidence and its scholarship in the conventional way, where the latter offers a more thoughtful and nuanced explanation of past phenomena than that advanced in film. Rosenstone’s (1988: 1175-6) counter argument is, however, that film offers alternate ‘ways of thinking about the past’ and suggests that the attitude towards written histories is inclined to be that it is an accepted and undemanding metric for history making, which, as the above discussion has indicated, is hardly the case. A demand for strict historical authenticity disregards the very nature of film as a primarily dramatic narrative medium; it is imaginative to tell a story most effectively and is

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[29] Although books and the digital are not mutually exclusive, it has become the norm to attribute the decline in reading and its associated industries with the rise of the internet and subsequent digital devices.

[30] Within this argument must also be included the prevailing attitudes that are gaining traction daily of ‘why is history taught’, how does it benefit people about to enter the ever-competitive employment market; in reality this attitude stretches into many of the humanities as can be seen by their rapidly shrinking departments in universities worldwide.

not obligated to be indebted to or dependent on the principle of authenticity (Sorlin 1980: 201). Thus, it is possible to criticise films such as *Spartacus, Gladiator* and even *Rome* for their historical inaccuracies and anachronisms, but for most viewers it is ‘the artistic truth of the characters within the drama is what counts, not their relation to history’ (Pasinetti 1953: 135-6). It is not the objective of an entertainment medium, which above all aims at commercial success, to maintain a scrupulous adherence to historical authenticity (Dunkle 2008: 289), even though, as briefly referred to above, producers market their use of ‘historical experts’ in the making of the film.

ROME IN THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

One of the earliest directors of historical film, D.W. Griffith, claimed in 1915 that the treatment of historical subjects would be one of the greatest contributions of the film industry (cited in Silva 1971: 98, 59). Historical films were amongst the earliest films made and have been popular since the birth of cinema at the beginning of the 20th century.[31] They served as mediums of artistic ambition and as agents of public debate from the very commencement of the art form. Film based on events and people of past eras were among the first films made in many countries such as India, Japan, France, and Russia, as historical film became a regular part of screen fare (Rosenstone 1995: 8).

Films portraying the ancient Greco-Roman world have proved to be popular with audiences within the wide reach of the Hollywood film, audiences who generally have some connection with the Western cultural heritage. The concept of the Roman Empire has been used as the proto-origin myth for many peoples in Western Europe and their colonial world, conveyed via education, art, architecture, literature, politics and film, emulated throughout Europe and the USA even today. Images and texts of Rome have been modified and used across differing media to suggest and bring to life a Rome traditionally taken to lie at the origins of Euro-American culture (Joshel, Malamud & Wyke 2001: 4). The Italian film industry in the years preceding World War I, for example, concentrated on their Roman past to support the formation of a national identity for a recently unified Italy. Much classical scholarship on film productions relating to the ancient world have concentrated on allegorical and analogical constructs, involving contemporary cultural influences, such as the aftermath of the wars of the 20th century.[32]

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[31] The very first films included for example *The Dreyfus Affair* (1900); *The Assassination of the Duc of Guise* (1908); *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1908); and *The Capture of Rome* (1905).

[32] ‘Awareness of historical precedent for a rise to world power, however, must surely also evoke the knowledge of the eventual fall of Rome and raises the unavoidable question about the possibility (or even inevitability) of the American Empire’s future decline and fall’ (Winkler 1995: 141).

Despite concerted attempts to promote the use of historical sources and consultants in their production,[33] the cinematic image of Rome produced by Hollywood still owes more to the 19th century historical novel than to any academic treatment, as Jez Butterworth commented to *The Observer* (on the impending release of his first historical TV series, *Britannia*, screened by Sky Atlantic in 2018). Butterworth stated that his objective was to:

> try to create something tricksterish and unreliable that doesn't wear its research on its sleeve and is more interested in character than in definable historical events (cited in Hughes 2017).[34]

In direct contrast, the creator of *Vikings* and *Alfred the Great*, Michael Hirst (2018), maintains that:

> the show's characters and stories are grounded in real history, although there are some elements included in that show that could be considered to give the drama a fantastical tone.

Butterworth would then subscribe to a film that has realism, rather than authenticity, while Hirst brings in the element of fantasy in his productions that take it out of realism but gives it a certain authenticity by its grounding in historical events. The greater the authenticity of a production, the more it can contribute to an analytical, sophisticated understanding of history, rather than a reliance on clichés (Schneider 2006).[35]

Chapman (2013: 4) points out that history presented through film is both similar and different to other types of history.[36] Along with other areas of history it aims to show what happened and attempts to explain how and why it happened as it did. Where film and history differ is in the nature of the primary sources on which it is based, which in the former case is usually indirect. In addition, the historical film has the primary aim to entertain where the primary aim of the professional historian is to analyse and explain.

It is the camera's viewpoint that determines the field of vision and configures the viewer's impression of reality. These elements are, for example, accurately reproduced in the street scenes in *Rome* and a

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[33] Such as the use of Harvard professor Kathleen Coleman in the making of *Gladiator*, which, as the following online article confirms, is often more lip-service than any real indication of a film's authenticity and realism, https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2001/2/28/latin-professor-who-consulted-on-pwhen/ (Heineman 2001).

[34] The phenomenon is essentially Anglophone, with Hollywood films looking back to earlier films, to plays, to novels, and to earlier novels in English. *Quo Vadis* (1896) was originally written in Polish, but it was the English translation (1897) which made the impact on 'toga' plays and Hollywood films of the 20th century. Historical novels were certainly written in German and French in the 19th century. From the French tradition Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbô* (1862), set in ancient Carthage, is probably the best-known historical novel but there were numerous novels on this type of subject and also an early film (*Cléopâtre* [1899], dir. Georges Méliès) — probably reflecting the interest of the French colonial experience in North Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries (Stevenson 2015: 94 n.6).

[35] Chapman's definition of the differences between actuality, authenticity and realism when applied to film, as discussed in Chapter 1 p.12, has been employed here.

[36] Rosenstone (2006: 8) in fact maintains that 'film makers can be and already are historians, but of necessity the rules of engagement of their work with the stuff of the past are, and must be, different from those that govern written history'.

great deal of research went into the creation of authentic settings,[37] whereas it is the story of Octavian and his related family that provides a lot more than what the primary sources impart, and fall under 'authenticity' and 'realism' rather than 'actuality'. The materiality of depictions of the past suggests both the importance of the visual to fully comprehend 'these historical eras' and while at the same time it also privileges the 'history of material culture in ways that written histories have not' (Schwartz 2013: 4). Film works in a myriad of ways with what evidence it has and urges viewers to reflect upon the various possibilities in the past. It is through this that 'popular art' and 'culture' often succeeds in keeping the past alive for many by making it psychologically accessible to the modern world (Winkler 2005: 24). Looking at history from the margins can change and enrich our understanding of the past. History, when seen from the boundaries can both alter and enhance our perceptions of the past. Using geographies and other forms of physical evidence, from technology, literature and film to objects and biographies can generate many alternate understandings of history. At the same time, this allows the perspectives of characters that had no voice in the ancient world - women, commoners, slaves or other disempowered groups – who are poorly represented in the ancient evidence, to emerge.

If there is one civilisation that has dominated popular perception of what a historical epic should be it is ancient Rome. Without a doubt, we know that the Western world is indebted to the Graeco-Roman civilisation which has been drawn into our present life through law, literature, architecture, administration and the problems of Empire. Thus, part of the filmmakers' obsession with Rome is that it offers manifold and versatile parallels for a modern audience. The sheer vastness of Roman achievement is another factor that appeals to present imaginations and can be used as a measure against which other peoples can define themselves, a way in which 'to measure their own cultural, political and material achievements' (Joshel 2001: 2).

ROMANTICISING THE EMPIRE

For centuries, Europeans have viewed the Roman Republic and Empire as a symbol of military glory. One can wonder why, in a world where, as Jane Austen's character has it, history presented 'wars or pestilences in every page'[38] and military exploits dominated the recorded narrative of many other ancient cultures, it was Rome, in particular, which developed this warlike reputation.[39] Perhaps we

[37] The executive producer/writer Bruno Heller is quoted as saying about the series: 'This is a pre-imperial period. It's Republic. It's about the people of Rome, so it was very important to get the fine detail right so that you felt that you were in a real world and not in a costume drama' (cited in Pierce 2005).

[38] Jane Austen's character Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* on the reading of history, cited on the frontispiece.

[39] Most people today would agree that warfare played a central role in the ancient Mediterranean, from Bronze Age Greece to the period of late antiquity. During the classical period, for example, the city-state of Athens was at war on average two years out of every three. This can be attributed to the fact that our sources, created by elite male citizens mainly for members of their own group, saw warfare as an excellent arena in which to display examples of intense male rivalry, as

can equivocate on this and say that it was something in the nature of the Romans, and also in the circumstances through which they built up their Empire, that made them more fascinating. And of course, the sheer scale of what they achieved.

Rome was the epitome of the warrior culture but also claimed the reputation of being the enforcer of peace and unity. Conquered or allied peoples that could successfully integrate Roman symbols into their identity lent themselves an air of stability, glory, and power, and this was potentially transferred to modern nations. Nations all over the world, especially in the West, used Roman architecture and statuary as a template for their own buildings and monuments. Reference to ancient Roman policies provided both imperial and anti-imperial actors with at least the outlines of political power. Principally, European and American writers, scholars, and politicians, but also those from the former European colonies have in the past created role models from the ancient world for particular and often even conflicting purposes. The similarities between ancient Rome and modern societies have allowed Rome to provide a lens through which modern tensions and concerns could be studied (Joshel 2001).

FAMILIARITY THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE

Familiarity with antiquity widened considerably when popular culture discovered the classical past. Middle- to low-brow novels, such as Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur* (1880), became a publishing phenomenon, and stage adaptations of such works as well as 'toga plays' written directly for the theatre attracted wide audiences. The historical novel gained popularity during the 19th century, particularly those featuring ancient Rome with their vivid representations of well-known places which then became a staple of the literature of the Victorian era.[40] The evergreen pertinence of ancient Rome to current issues guaranteed their readership. Image-making through the use of differing mediums emerged in the 19th century; this included the lithograph, the photograph and, ultimately film, all of which made the visual experience and associated literacy an important aspect of many parts of life.[41]

The early days of cinema initially adopted antiquity as one of its favourite subjects in response to the popularity that antiquity displayed in theatrical, literary and educational circles at the turn of the century (Solomon 2001: 16). The pomp and spectacle of the ancient world made for exceptionally good silver-screen entertainment and since the production of Arturo Ambrosio's *Gli Ultimi Giorni di Pompeii (The Last Days of Pompeii),* epic cinema inspired hundreds of imitators, with the production

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we see in the epic poets from Homer (*Iliad*.1.1-2), and ancient historiographers from Herodotus (1.1) and Thucydides (1.1.1-2) onwards. As Tacitus remarks, 'renown is more easily won among perils' (*Germania* 14). On masculinity and war, Alston 2013: 205-222.

[40] Biblical epics were also popular during this period.

[41] The earliest cinematic expressions of ancient Greece and Rome were in themselves indebted to classical settings in other media, especially theatre, opera and novels, and the ancient world epic film demonstrated the continuity between these media in the 19th century, in particularly Britain and the USA, Richards 2008: Foreword.

of more than 600 films about ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt, covering the historical and the pseudo-historical. In fact, 40 percent of all films made in the fifties were set in the past (Eldridge 2006: 1).

The transposition of Roman historical narratives rarely escapes the introduction of large-scale fictional elements into their plots but the need to supplement these accounts is justifiable. The filmmaker has to conform to both the visual media and the dramatic form when creating the past. It must be one that fits within their demands, practices and traditions and can involve having to go beyond 'constituting the facts to inventing some of them' (Rosenstone 2012: 185). *Spartacus* provides an excellent example here. Although the rebellion is reasonably well-documented[42] and to some degree, consistent, not much else is known about Spartacus as a fully fleshed out historical character. Although we are told in the ancient sources that he was a Thracian of nomadic origins (Plut. *Crass*. 8.2), everything else about his personal life is pure conjecture. But since there is quite a lot of information about the life of a gladiator (including visual representations in mosaics and wall paintings), this has been used to build his background and training to complete a plausible hero on film.[43]

THEMES AND MOTIFS IN FILM

The 'underdog theme' and fighting for freedom against structures of oppression were probably the main reasons for picking this subject for a film. Gladiators and the arena with all the associated violence and more abstract narrative oppositions have been a persistent and popular feature of cine-antiquity from the early days (Bright 2020: 2). Examples include: DeMille's *The Sign of the Cross* (1932); Daves' *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954); Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960); Fleisher's *Barabbas* (1962); Mann's *Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964); and by extension Terry Jones' *Life of Brian* (1979). Gladiatorial style combats feature in most films set in antiquity, Chaffey's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963); and Rossen's *Alexander the Grea*t (1955) in which the turning point for Alexander's ambitions begin with gladiatorial style combat between a Macedonian Greek and Persian. Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011: 222) indicate that the prevalence of one-on-one combat offers a perfect opportunity for the physical on-screen expression of abstract narrative oppositions including good and evil, new and old, East and West, paganism and Christianity.

The relationship between two gladiators of different races established a pattern that would continue through to *Gladiator* and is a popular motif. In *Spartacus* the 'alternative, progressive representation of black masculinity' is encapsulated in the figure of the gladiator called Draba (Wyke 1997: 68). A similar theme is incorporated in *Gladiator,* where the director Scott provides a new take on the

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[42] On Spartacus and the Third Servile War, Plut. *Crass*. 8-11, Appian *Civ*. 1.7, Florus *Epit*. 2.8.3-14.

[43] In his *Life of Crassus* Plutarch writes of the attempts to subdue and overcome the rebel army. It is Appian in *B.Civ.* 1.120 who states that the body of Spartacus was never found.

concept of 'gladiatorial pairs' by chaining Maximus and his black friend Juba together, and the pair use their chain to garrotte an adversary (a Nubian who has pulled a trident from his stomach).

Notwithstanding that the foundational legends of the Roman Republic were a standard feature of 18th and 19th century cultural representation of Rome – topics such as the rape of Lucretia were a staple of French history painting tradition, for example – the era of early Rome is largely absent from filmic representation other than a few Italian film-makers. It was the more violent aspects that gained prominence, even though stories now considered relatively obscure.[44] In addition, the fact that there are very few attempts to film the story of, for example, Romulus and Remus, is no doubt due to the absence of empire and the successful story of imperial success and growth.[45] Much the same can be said for the middle and early Republican periods, and the late Empire and the Byzantine eras are also very poorly served by cinema. The sheer spectacle associated with Empire and the fact that films can tag onto an existing filmic tradition and expect at least a modicum of familiarity with the context and certain historical characters assist this choice. Thus, the combination of sex and violence constitutes a storyline and has the potential that the protagonists are not depicted one-dimensionally.

Like many of our ancient historiographical texts, films are a mixture of fact and fiction as are other recreations of the past in other mediums such as painting and literature. Films which recreate antiquity can go a long way towards illustrating what life-back-then would have been like through depicting the small details of everyday life and humanising what are often dry historical accounts, adding a stronger personal storyline, with an emphasis on human emotions – love, desire, hatred, envy and so on – with which its target audience can identify. For many a film *aficionado* the fiction is more important than the facts and the appeal of authenticity is limited because it is the human level which interests. At the end of the day the majority watch a film for the primary storyline of its hero and main characters. Since most of the ancient historians also artistically shaped the past to suit the sensibilities

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[44] Such as an account in Livy concerning the dispute between Rome and the neighbouring town of Alba Longa. This story, according to Livy, concerns two sets of triplets from Rome, the Horatii and from Alba Longa, the Curiatii who settled the dispute between the two towns through single combat. The sole survivor, one of the Roman triplets on his return home finds his sister mourning the death of one of the rival triplets and so, rather harshly slays her on the spot. It is telling that he is subsequently acquitted of the murder by the other Roman citizens. This is a tale of self-sacrifice and duty that transcends familial bonds and was painted by Jacques Louis David in his *Oath of the Horatii* in 1784, Blanshard & Shahabudin 2011: 77. It should be recognised that such a story is often considered unsuitable for popular cinema and reflects ideas that translate uncomfortably for many.

[45] One of the few attempts to film this story was firstly Sergio Corbucci's *Duel of the Titans* released in 1962 and in the UK with the title of *Romulus and Remus* which actually skirted the traditional foundation narrative with the legendary origins of Rome playing second fiddle to a disputed love-interest; secondly, Richard Pottier's *Il ratto delle Sabine* (1961) which has tenuous connection to the traditional storyline and rather focuses on the theme of reconciliation instead of war and on the women rather than men. The enthusiastic personal involvement and patronage of the Italian dictator Mussolini in the Italian epic *Scipio Africanus* henceforth cloaked such narratives with some suspicion, Blanshard and Shahabudin 2011: 79. The Fascist era may not, contrary to expectations, have thrown up a horde of costume films but *Scipio Africanus* more than made up for the paucity, and showed epic form more than ever serving national fervour, Elley 1984: 84.

of the day and their audience, this is not really as much of an invasive element as purists would maintain. Maria Wyke, when writing on the cinematic depictions of ancient Rome, argues that:

> Historians should try to understand not whether a particular cinematic account of history is true… but what the logic of that account may be (1997: 13).

We can therefore say that what is selected, omitted, and changed is not so related to accuracy, but is one that has become a way of probing the differing contemporary forces at play that shaped those differences. For Wyke, is not 'historical accuracy' or 'film's use of historical evidence' that matters, but the historical questioning and debates that the film generates in the audience and the historical profession with respect to the past it purports to present and its implication on history. Nevertheless, many people (not only scholars) would like to know 'was it really like this', and therefore a discussion around such a film in relation to the historical evidence does have value, while simultaneously examining the aspect Wyke emphasises here.

Paul (2013: 143) has contended that in a time of insecurity and post-traumatic stress, whether it be the cold War aftermath or in the world after September 11, that epic storytelling once again comes to the fore. This sentiment is echoed by the historical novelist Manfredi, speaking after the release of *Gladiator,* who attributes the resurgence of interest in the classical world to 'post-millennium confusion…people are terrified of the future, but by going back to the classics they are rediscovering the youth of mankind' (*Sunday Times*: 2002 cited in Paul 2013: 143).[46] The epic's focus on assumed 'important' events often leads to a covert form of allegory and many of the older epics of the 50s and 60s, although dealing directly with ancient conflict, still resonate with contemporary concerns such as the aftermath of World War II, the Cold War, Zionism, and internal political division.

CORE WESTERN VALUES

Ancient Rome is one of the most popular historical *topoi* of the West's myth-historical foundations (Meier 2003: 3) because, as has been previously indicated, Rome plays a key role in shaping the Western notion of its historical self. Classical Rome, says Hingley (2005: 19), shares a special place in the definition of Western history and thought, stemming mostly from the range of practices and beliefs that people of Western origin are often argued to share – core Western values. The inheritance of imperial Rome has retained a vital role in the definition of political leadership. Civilisation is therefore thought to have passed from classical Greece to Rome and on through the Christian Middle

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[46] The flurry of new ancient-world films since 2010 has produced a similar range of politicized attempts to explain their appeal. 'The current crop of films are in part, a study in the decline and disaffection at the edge of empire and at the end of empire', Leith 2010; 'Rome gives us an ideal template for thinking about that other Empire, the United States', Higgins 2010; 'We Americans are wondering about just what phase of our own empire we're in. And those anxieties certainly fuel mass culture's fantasy life', Sherwell 2010.

Ages to the modern European imperial powers to form the inheritance of contemporary Europe and the USA.

This therefore looks beyond the lauded inheritance of Roman law, the Latin language, Greco-Roman aesthetics, and literary traditions themselves. For the sake of its image of civilisation the West has a deep need to articulate historically not only its construct of civilisation but also to explain its supposed roots, its beginnings. These are felt to have stemmed from the Mediterranean world's socio-political organization some two odd millennia ago. Within this construct, opportunity has been sought to provide 'multiple, mutable and conflicting images' (Hingley 2005: 15) which reference current positions in relation to Rome and seek to provide powerful intellectual support for the authenticity of developed concepts where ideas derived from classical sources were felt to have a particular authority and influenced contemporary views of nationhood and empire (Edwards 1999: 3).[47] Adapted images and texts of Rome can be found underpinning most Euro-American culture (Joshel, Malamud & Wyke 2001: 4).[48]

The arena is therefore that violent, unruly space within a civilisation which Western modernity identifies as its ancestor. This certainly problematises issues of power, social structure and violence, and brings with it that we in the modern world can be made to reflect on our own engagement with violence, the human body and the spectacle of power (Stepney 2013: 4).

FROM IDEOLOGY TO ART

But the Rome visually represented on the big screen is often a manufactured version that bears little or no resemblance to the Rome of the classical world – a striking example is the idealised cleanliness and sanitised appearance of screen antiquity. The HBO series *Rome* therefore probably depicts the city with the most realism, showing it rife with prejudice and violence, a 'breeding ground for class hatred, racial animosity, religious intolerance and sexual exploitation' (Sidebottom 2018). So, undoubtedly the Romans considered themselves civilised, there are multiple many aspects of their society which would be considered unacceptable according to today's standards – but nonetheless, or perhaps even for this very reason, it makes for very good scripts.

[47] See also the extensive study by Eva Hausteiner (2015), who demonstrates how imperial elites (her primary focus is the British Empire) justify their domination through the use of historical examples such as the Roman Empire.

[48] Spain, for example, accords more importance to their Roman remains in comparison with any Visigoth, Arab, Moorish or Iberian remains. This bias contributes, to a degree, to a vision of their nation as it identified with the Roman Empire. False ideas of territorial unity were promulgated through implicit analogies between Hispania, which was a Roman province, and present-day Spain (Asensio & Pol 2017: 757)

THE MODERN SUB-TEXT

An important subtext of the 'toga films' was the master narrative of, for example, the 'Cold War, the global binary of East and West', or the encounters between 'totalitarianism and the free world' (Murphy 2004: 3-4). It also presented the tensions within the Western bloc such as between the old imperial power of Great Britain and the new American superpower. George Sanders, James Mason, Laurence Olivier, and Richard Burton all classical British actors, represent the imperialist with a sandaled foot clearly on the neck of the lower orders (Wood 1989: 182-84). An American actor then plays the part of the 'heroic underdog', the 'persecuted Jew', or Christian, or slave.[49] Such an 'international theme' is as old as Ryall Tyler's 18th-century drama, *The Contrast*, which counterpoises 'American innocence and homespun republicanism to English hypocrisy and class hierarchy' (Murphy 2004: 4). The ultra-urbane, almost effete Romans symbolise 'culture' on the big screen, while the American/Judeo-Christians embody 'nature'. Murphy (2004: 4) goes on to indicate that when a British accent was not available, the eastern seaboard served as the counterfoil to the American West.

VOYEURISM AND CENSORSHIP

Part of the thrill that gives films such as *Spartacus* and *Gladiator* their 'charge' is our awareness of just how transgressive such lethal entertainment must seem in modern Western society. Despite Rome being thought of as the cornerstone of civilisation, the gladiator denotes the dark side and represents, for us, the otherness of a society that found it acceptable to watch men tear each other apart or be eaten alive by wild animals. We in the modern world may express our squeamishness, even a moral revulsion, at the spectacle of deliberate human carnage, yet it brings with it a double frisson: a horror based on our cultural superiority on the one hand countered by a voyeuristic fascination with this spectacle and the uninhibited behaviour of the involved crowd.

In the normal way of things this may have been subjected to censorship, particularly in past modern decades, but placing it in an ancient context has gone some way towards circumventing the censor. When a film is set in ancient Rome it can use the authority of the classical to show scenes of violence, sadism, sexuality or spectacle which would otherwise be regarded as dirty, cruel or unpleasant. In her introduction to *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World* Monica Cyrino remarks:

> The process of screening antiquity has . . . allowed filmmakers and television producers to exploit the audience's pervasive and prurient fascination with the unbridled and alluring sexualities of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Modern fascinations about love and sex are thereby projected back vividly onto the ancient world onscreen (2013: 2).

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[49] Other filmstars typically cast in these roles included Victor Mature, Kirk Douglas, Charlton Heston, and Robert Taylor.

THE BIG SCREEN EPIC

The generic labels 'epic' and 'historical epic' are labels that are not entirely exclusive nor fixed and are often subject to redefinition over time. As Russell (2007: 8) writes, 'one person's horror film is another's psychological thriller'.[50] In some regards the Hollywood historical epic does bear resemblance to that of the ancient poetic traditions, the narrative poems of Homer and Virgil in terms of extended length and thematic richness. Aristotle's description of epic given in his *Poetica* is still applicable to modern film:

> it is clear … that the [epic] poet's job is not to say what happened but what could happen (9.1, transl. Halliwell *et al*)
>
> and
>
> [epics] should not be like ordinary histories, in which one deals with not a single affair but with a single period and all that happened to one or more persons during it and all the various consequences (23.2).

Moreover, in the Hollywood sense epic is a term used to convey that the resultant product will be big, involving greater levels of investment to bankroll a gigantic budget, a film cast of thousands and which will eventually result in a lengthy running time[51] – with the expectations of generating high box-office takings. It will inevitably contain a historical, mostly ancient world narrative and/or a heroic narrative played out on a grandiosity of scale with a variety of spectacle being central to expectations. It is most often a reinterpretation of a literary version, with spectacle on a scale that is the filmic epic's special transformation of the grandiose (Elley 1984: 1).[52] Sobchack (1990: 24) arguably holds that epics 'function as stimulants' for the yearning for history and that their 'complex production histories and their scale' simulate the 'bigness of history'. It is certainly true that historical epic films also bring with them a rise in the purchase of books on the topic, although the rise of free reading material via the internet has probably scaled down on this today.

Traditionally, the epic film has been understood as an especially vibrant expression of the 'myth-making impulse at the core of national identity' (Burgoyne 2006: 111). The epic film combines myth

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[50] If we apply the term 'genre' to film it means an indication of certain types of movies such as the comedy, the romance, the western or the historical and so on. This application, however, cannot be applied with any exact precision as whilst a film may be thought to be typical of one specific genre it inevitably contains elements of others (Dirk 2005: 184).

[51] *Gladiator*, for example, has an extended running time of 154 minutes, in contrast to the average action movie of 90-100 minutes. Sobchack (2000) suggests that the the epic which invariably runds for three-to four-hours is to make the audience feel or be appreciative of the passage of time, although this is not entirely convincing.

[52] When considering the historical epic one can see some of the aesthetic effects used in *Gladiator*, such as the lingering scenes of ranked armies in Germania, a packed Colosseum from above or the riotous streets of Rome, all of which contribute to the impression of lavish expense while actually being generated by the technical wizardry of CGI. Film-making technology today is able to create graphic images with amazing verisimilitude, enhancing the visual experience but at greatly reduced cost to the studios.

and history and intermingles realism and authenticity, 'what might have been' and 'what actually occurred'. It thus gives a narrative structure based in historically recorded events, but 'trading on received ideas of a continuing national or cultural consciousness' (Elley 1984: 13), it converts the historical elements of the past into an inspirational form (Burgoyne 2006: 111).

THE SOCIAL MORES OF EPIC

The general purpose of the literary epic was to entertain in a morally uplifting and instructive manner. The cinema, as the mass entertainer of the 20th century (a role rapidly being usurped by its offshoot, television), for the most part has a similar purpose. Like a modern version of the literary epic, the epic film also seeks to embody the universal concepts desired by society through the medium of entertainment. The literary epic therefore offers a clear reference point to interpret epic film. Many literary precursors have been repeatedly plundered by Hollywood filmmakers for story material. Hainsworth in his *Idea of Epic* maintained that:

> Heroism, empire, destiny and faith are all necessary myths that have been sustained and sometimes created by art. The art was that of heroic poetry at the beginning of literature, when heroic poetry reached society as a whole. In those times society listened; in the 20th century society, views. In its capacity to create myths while entertaining and to reach whole peoples, the modern heroic medium is film and not necessarily the productions that are held in highest critical regard (1991: 148).

Hainsworth thus acknowledges that film shares societal functions with epic poetry. Its outward face then is as mouldable as that of the literary epic, both being shaped by different cultural ideals and norms, changing social patterns and various types of audience. Elley (1984: 1) maintains that epic film is 'cinema's transformation of the literary taste for the grandiose, realised on a sufficient scale to impress the modern audience', and we can see changes in its expression even within the two films that we are studying here, which are calculated to appear to different audiences in different decades.

It is that 'turning point of the culture', the spectacular moment in time, that decisive historical event that the historical epic focuses on, which because of its depiction on screen makes it the more memorable and emphasises its cultural import. In this type of epic, the spectacular events will have been recorded in the historical record (for example the revolt of Spartacus) but considerable liberties can be taken with the detail, interspersing all types of conflicts, political swings and even 'defining spiritual and religious events' (Russell 2007: 10). The epic therefore offers filmmakers the chance or present the now allegorical as history which although it may not be the subtlest or sophisticated form of social or political commentary, its 'obviousness' is nevertheless a great strength. For example, the function of many of the Hollywood epics in the Cold War years was to ideologically reaffirm the superpower image of the United States, and thus represented contemporary concerns (Hayward 2006: 119). Ultimately the contemporary epic historical film must be seen and understood as an attempt to understand what has passed whilst understanding what is now on the largest possible screen with the greatest possible production resources.

Historical epic emerged as a major genre with the development of the medium itself and stems from Italian origins produced during the silent era (Neale 2000: 51). The Italian filmmaker Enrico Guazzoni inaugurated the epic form with *Quo Vadis* in 1912, the story of St Peter's martyrdom and subsequent legend. An early version of the story of Spartacus, *Spartaco* (1913) by Ernesto Pasquale soon followed. It was with the international success of *Cabiria* in 1914 that the final elements of epic cinema were established and many of the features now traditionally associated with screen depictions of the ancient world, such as gleaming white marble columns and statues, mosaics, inlaid pools, gilded couches, togas, eagles, and scarlet cloaks, were introduced. The historical epic, with its 'nation-centric form', has achieved international prominence and accomplishment during the history of film becoming an eminent part of the entertainment industry (Burgoyne 2011: 2). But it is in the Roman Imperial genre that the American film industry came into its own, since there was a natural empathy between the two civilisations which is far from fortuitous. Hollywood epics gave its writers as well as its audiences good markers and signposts for their response and appreciation of the films (Kramer 2004: 167).

The historical epic became a fundamental feature of the American film industry production strategies in the 1950s and 60s, in part thanks to technological possibilities as well as Hollywood's financial capabilities, with films such as *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ben Hur* (1959) and *Spartacus* (1960) going on to assume the 'classic' status for that generation of film-goers. All of these played their role in defining the essence of a historical epic film and have had key influences on filmmakers ever since.

But the centrality of the historical epic genre in early American cinema began to fade from the 1970s. The decline was spurred by the extravagant and irrecuperable expenditure of *Cleopatra* (dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz) and the box-office failure of *Fall of the Roman Empire*[53] but part of the history of many related cycles and connections are often only visible retrospectively. Thereafter epics appeared only sporadically and were not fully reinstated until the success of *Gladiator* in 2000. This success inspired another wave which drew directly on the films *Ben-Hur* and *Spartacus.*

The majority of scholars working in the field are in agreement that there is a certain group of films that have comparable styles, settings and themes which fell out of favour in the mid-1960s, but which have regained popularity over the past decade. Even more compelling is that all point to *Gladiator* as the first instance of this kind of film's revival (Elliott 2014a: 4). Additionally, many also credit the film as the catalyst, if not the cause, for the revival of the epic. The resurgence of these toga films may be held to herald 'a return to the mainstream historical imagination of epic narratives and of classical heroism' (De Groot 2009: 226).

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[53] Detailed discussion of this film in Winkler 1995: 135-154 and on Gibbon's influence on *Fall*, Winkler 2009a: 145-173.

As referred on the previous page, the historical epic film has been dominated by modern messages of personal and political freedom against a background of decadence, decline and some form of imbalance or abuse of power. In *Gladiator*, for example, this is represented in Commodus (representing decadence and decline), and the hint of the reestablishment of the old Republic, the rebirth of freedom when he finally dies. Thus, good triumphs over evil, while at the same time representing:

> The same Manichean duality that can blind an American or Americanised audience to the idea that their empire is the modern equivalent of the Roman Empire (Renger & Solomon 2013: 6).

In expressing 'what did occur' along with 'what might have happened' modern films inevitably show the influence of contemporary context on forms of historical representation. At its best, the epic spectacular combines the elements of heroic political history with contemporary elements such as pluralism, polyvalence and democracy (Dean 2009). Santas sees the epic film as a modern mythmaking taking his inspiration from works from Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell and Otto Rank, arguing that:

> The enduring popularity of the epic film can be explained largely by its ability to preserve and re-create mythical patterns and thus remain in touch with the deeper wishes of national identity…it is capable of embracing popular trends and ideals that define or represent an era (2008: 4).

Any epic film featuring gladiators has a paradox at heart. It needs to attract a large audience to recoup costs, and violence forms part of the spectacle that attracts viewers to epic films. However, in societies which today condemn such violence, most films such as *Spartacus* and *Gladiator* use their good-versus-evil dichotomy, where the responsibility and instigation of gladiatorial combat is placed on the side of those wielding political power, and the hero is simply the victim of this.

THE HERO AND HIS ANTITHESIS

The archetypal hero and heroic cults predate our earliest literary form, the ancient epic. In ancient times they could occupy the class of 'the powerful dead' which fitted between the gods and men and the 'ordinary dead' which covered poets to athletes, founders of cities to rulers such as Alexander the Great who were idolised and accorded appropriate honours. In our modern society the hero has a somewhat different function and is more of an exemplar, suitable models imbued with predominantly positive attributes such as virtue, courage, compassion and so on (Paul 2013: 177).

Hollywood is always in search of ideal heroic characters, although there are times when the cast star persona eclipses the character-as-written, as we shall see.[54] The extraordinary character functioning

[54] See Chapter 5 pp.140 on the Body Fiction of Spartacus,

in an ordinary world and the ordinary person operating under extraordinary circumstances are two of the most frequently created dramatic situations. Here the ‘hero’ has to make a choice, and, wrong or right, it must be one that is reflective of their moral values and their integrity. This in turn reflects the overarching meaning represented in the story (McClean 2007: 103). Hollywood thus reinforces the image of the hero (who in the epic film is generally a physically strong male figure) by for example announcing his name or identifying him as the hero in the titling, *Spartacus, Ben-Hur, Alexander* and then by concentrating on this heroic stature in the marketing of the film. If the focus does not fall on a single person then it is on a single event: the slave war (*Spartacus*); conversion of a man from paganism to Christianity (*Quo Vadis*); the vengeance of a man who falls victim and is wronged by Rome (*Ben-Hur* or *Gladiator*).[55] All this can be seen to mirror epic poetry: Achilles’ vengeance and wrath (*Iliad*), for example (Paul 2013: 178). Similarly, it is necessary to pair the single heroic protagonist with an equally important protagonist, as in the epic pairings of Achilles and Hector or Aeneas and Turnus as hero and anti-hero. In film this is generally amplified as the heroic protagonist alongside the equally important but villainous protagonist, such as have Marcus Vinicius and Nero (*Quo Vadis*); Ben-Hur and Messala (*Ben-Hur*); Spartacus and Crassus (*Spartacus*) or Maximus and Commodus (*Gladiator*). Hollywood itself is very aware of the necessity of a clear distinction to be drawn between the hero and the anti-hero and in most epics this was done through the use of accents.[56] The mid-20th century saw representatives of the Roman elite typically speaking with British accents (implicitly equating them with America’s own historical experience of imperialist oppression). The actor Joaquim Phoenix adopts an assumed English accent in *Gladiator*, whilst Russel Crowe slightly weakens the structural paradigm by having an antipodean-accent.

Films, in line with their mission to play to themes popular with contemporary audiences, tend to focus on unequal contests, for example emperor and commoner (*Gladiator*) or aristocrat and slave (*Spartacus*), where the former is a representative of greater power, even over life and death. The chosen films/series therefore centre on the role of the hero who is made more heroic by being pitted against seemingly impossible odds. Spartacus’ heroism mutates in different productions adapting to the different mores and conditions of the modern context, but he is always the hero. Maximus in *Gladiator* is the hero who single-handedly takes on an evil emperor who is the ruler of a world power. The world is temporarily a better place because of his heroism (Winkler 2005: 24). He represents the ideal family man whose primary objective is to be with his wife and family and to protect them from

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[55] Oliver Stone, the director of *Alexander*, later acknowledged that not allowing Philip’s murder to come to the fore resulted in an ambitious and sincere film failing to find a focus for its elusive subject, Ebert 2004; Mendelsohn 2005.

[56] Roland Barthes 1978: 2013 ‘The Romans in Films’ considered the way that ‘Romanness’ could be shown in such a simple manner as a person’s ‘fringe’. Story-telling needs reference to either convention or genre to make it succesful. Film makers understanding quite cleary how visual symbols, objects, and ‘signs’ can function in relation to the broader conventions of verbal story-telling, as it is film that integrates ‘symbols and narrative structures’ particularly in the historical film where it is the physical surroundings that can symbolise the power of a political regime in a far stronger manner than when it is spoken about.

all harm and when he cannot achieve this, to avenge them. He does not revel in his violence but rather accepts it as performing his duty for the Empire firstly and then for his family.

One of the key aspects in the portrayal of the hero is the risk encountered on his journey and so a sense of danger must be evoked. In the past in film this was done by putting actors (or their stunt doubles) into genuinely dangerous situations. Now, however, as is exemplified in *Gladiator,* this is achieved by the use DVFx which cheats the proximity of danger and exaggerates the magnitude of fires, falls and perilous states. But just the impression of the nearness of the brush with death enhances the emotional stakes and adds another level of drama.

THE HERO AND MASCULINITY

The hero's masculinity is an integral part of his character,[57] expressed not only through physical combat but also through selflessness and even self-sacrifice.[58] The crucified hero image represents the ultimate in self-sacrifice.[59] Crucifixion – literally but also in the figurative sense – is a recurrent feature of classical epics, as seen in *Spartacus*, *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* (1961), *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) and *Gladiator*. Several of the Italian 'sword-and-sandal' films or *pepla* invoke the idea of crucifixion, sometimes only fleetingly, through a visual reference or even through a recurring motif, reflecting the Catholic socio-political culture in which they were produced. During the time of the post-war culture, Hollywood-produced epics referenced Christian themes and imagery quite openly, particularly where the ideas of church, family, patriotism and wholesome entertainment were intimately joined, standing in contrast to the 'godless' Soviet Union. In his discussion of *Spartacus* and *El Cid* (1961), Leon Hunt notes that:

> The epic hero embraces crucifixion with some degree of acceptance/willingness; it is the moment where he demonstrates his control over his own body through his ability to give it up (1993: 73).[60]

In this way Spartacus gives his body for the sake of a noble cause, so that the life of his friend Antoninus may be spared, while through this action he also wins immortality as a symbol of freedom. His crucifixion denotes a triumph over a Roman Empire that he could not defeat on the battlefield.

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[57] There are a great many studies in this field, notably Alston 1998, 'Arms and the Man: Soldiers, Masculinity and Power in Republican and Imperial Rome'; Hunt 1993 'What are Big Boys Made of? *Spartacus*, *El Cid* and the Male Epic'; Hark 1993, 'Animals or Romans: Looking at Masculinity in *Spartacus*' and O'Brien's 2014 monograph, *Classical Masculinity and the Spectacular Body on Film: The Mighty Sons of Hercules.*

[58] Even when films cast female heroines, they are usually depicted as transcending their femininity and behaving more like male heroes, and in that way they actually echo the literature of the ancient world (De Marre 2020: 31; 33).

[59] On this theme see also Drever 2012: 331-361 on entertaining violence and the 'commercialization of suffering'.

[60] Likewise, O'Brien 2014: 216, referring to Spartacus, who by his crucifixion demonstrates ultimate mastery of the corporeal through its voluntary surrender.

Although Spartacus the man is defeated and most of his followers lose their lives, the message is that the legend of Spartacus lives on also through his own son, shown to him as he dies on the cross.[61]

An intense religious/historical significance is lent to characters and scenarios within this type of context. The Judeo-Christian majority in the West easily identifies with the religious signification it gets from the epic genre and it is therefore not surprising that this theme occurs in both *Spartacus* and *Gladiator*. In *Spartacus* this is obviously indicated by the crucifixion of Spartacus and his compatriots, but in *Gladiator* it is done more subtly when the final shot turns vertical, going from the shadowed Colosseum to the illuminated sky of Rome, denoting the body's emancipation and its elevation to a higher plane, while the hero's body is arranged on the screen in the shape of a cross.[62]

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND VIOLENCE

A fundamental fact about human sociality identified by relational model theory acknowledges that we do not behave in the same way with everyone; we have differing feelings, thoughts and reactions to our families from those we have to our rivals or enemies. Social behaviour moreover varies not only from one society to another but from one historical epoch to another, with dominant themes running through all, such as need for dominance and authority, all bound within differing complex rules and formulas and represented through different contexts (Haslam & Fiske 1999: 241-250).

Within such a sociological model, violence is often considered antisocial, or an expression of our animal nature, something that emerges when the cultural norms of civilisation collapse. Many psychological and sociological studies are conducted on what motivates violence, what causes people to hurt and kill others or themselves and more strongly why are others drawn to witness such executions of corporeal violence. Some studies reveal that individuals carry out violence because they are convinced it is 'the right thing to do'; they may feel that morally it may be necessary, or the correct way to control social relationships in accordance with cultural principles, examples and prototypes (Fiske & Rai 2015: i).[63]

Frequently, it is the hero/villain conflict that drives the historical narrative and the implicit understanding that by the conclusion of the film this will be resolved through the demise of one, or even both, of these clashing protagonists. Thus, *Gladiator* ends with the death of both Maximus and Commodus, whereas in *Spartacus* it is just the underdog, Spartacus, who is condemned by Crassus to die by crucifixion. His death does not detract from the importance of the slave revolt, which tacitly

[61] This will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on *Spartacus* below.
[62] Discussed and illustrated on p. 151.
[63] This is nicely illustrated through Shakespeare's Hamlet character, in his soliloquy in Act IV, *scene iv,* when he berates himself for not having carried out his moral duty in killing his uncle and through that act avenging his father.

encouraged the oppressed to rise against suppression. In his analysis of the *Aeneid,* Winkler alludes to another aspect, the sustained focus on the main hero and anti-hero where:

> Bodies will litter the ground on both sides. Montage and camera shifts give rapidity of motion to the external action, which mirrors the agitated emotions of the participants. Also effective is the alternation between mass and individual, letting the champions stand out against the background of their forces. The fight is essentially between Aeneas and Turnus, but the principal victims will be the masses on both sides (2001: 228).

This poses the question, is film suggesting that displayed carnage filling the screen is justified by the hero's potential success? Is it simply another case of 'that was them'? They clearly do not try to hide the degree of death and destruction, considering the long sweeping shots of the hundreds of crucifixes positioned along the Appian Way, and the multitude of decapitations and impalements in *Gladiator*. It would appear that it is the image rather than the story that provides the answer. This can be clearly seen in newspaper reports and on-line war journalism, in fictional novel's alternate history, the story of any competing faction's rivalry and the reliance on historical fact takes a back seat to any imagery it inspires. Through cinematic spectacle's manipulation of historical legend, the historical epic creates a counter history to which the masses are integral.

CHAPTER 3: 'IF IT BLEEDS, IT LEADS' VIOLENCE AND THE SPECTATOR

A few ancient writers saw violence as something from which civic society had sprung, a phase left behind with the progress of civilisation. In ancient Athens, philosophers, poets, and historiographers all saw urban settlement as initially plagued by violence.[1] Roman writers likewise recalled a heritage of violent origins – from legends around the arrival of Aeneas, or the rivalry between Romulus and Remus, to struggles between plebeians and patricians ending only in the early 3rd century BCE (Dion. Hal. 1.1-90; Liv. *Praef*.). Most of our ancient texts therefore imply that uncontrolled or involuntary violence is considered to be at odds with civilised or ordered society.

Ancient writings do not, however, place contemporary war and military violence within that same frame of uncontrolled violence. Warfare was a sanctioned mode of conduct in ancient society, one which was a 'natural', even an honoured practice.[2] Similarly, the entertainment that was sponsored by the elite (either by Republican politicians or through an emperor's largesse) was seen as controlled and actually a carefully choreographed feature of their society.[3] In fact, it was a means of controlling the ever-increasing masses from performing those very acts of involuntary violence, revolution, and tumult. As Futrell puts it, 'violence in support of order instead of disorder' (1997: 31). The arena is therefore a substitute intended to bring about a form of catharsis, thereby avoiding personal participation in uncontrolled violence and pre-empting potential social disruption (Girard 2013: 369). The slowly decreasing role of people's assemblies throughout the period we are studying meant that the masses had fewer spaces through which to voice their opinions, and *panem et circenses* became

[1] Hesiod (*Op*. 109-201) starts with his Bronze Age of violence, and Thucydides tells us (1.12) that Greece was originally settled by peoples who were expelled from their land by stronger neighbours, which resulted in brigandage and piracy. In his Platonic dialogue (*Prot*. 332b), Plato's Protogoras similarly conveys that the formation of human society occurred as a result of men's vulnerability and fear of harm, but that this brought about an era of lawlessness until Zeus intervened and gave man civic justice.

[2] On war viewed as natural, without shame or affectation, Rihll 1995: 77-78. There is not much doubt that during the Graeco-Roman period warfare was either immediately present, or formed an influential backdrop, even though it may have not been an immediate reality for every individual. As the series *Rome* demonstrates so well, returning soldiers were very much a part of the city of Rome, even if most Roman wars occurred far away from the city.

[3] On this aspect, see Chapter 4; see also the following excellent collection of articles and monographs: Bergmann & Kondoleon 1999; Hammer 2010 and particularly Bomgardner 2021 for the varied use of technology in the arena.

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increasingly important over time, although, if one looks at incidents in the later periods (such as the famous 6th century Nika riots in Byzantium, Procop. *Pers*. 1.24), it becomes debatable who was controlling whom.[4] It is interesting to observe far less evidence for riots at the gladiatorial games than at other forms of entertainment such as chariot racing and even mimes (Slater 1994). Only one disturbance at a gladiatorial show has come to light, from Pompeii in 59 CE, and this was the result of rivalry between Pompeii and the neighbouring town of Nuceria, rather than of the gladiatorial show itself. Nonetheless, Nero closed the amphitheatre for the next ten years.[5] This lack of evidence for rioting at the gladiatorial games therefore supports the interpretation that this form of entertainment expiated a personal lust for fighting.

Earlier writers who condemned the *munera* focused also on the effect that it had on the audience and rarely on the participants but despite the public spectacle appearing brutal to the modern conscience the majority of ancient Romans did not find this of central concern. This fact is further reinforced as mentioned earlier by the inclusion of such scenes within domestic interiors where there would have been an intentional and conscientious internalisation of what the audiences witnessed in large public spaces (Kondoleon 1999: 323).

Because our ancient sources deal with viewership and violence predominantly from the perspective of the elite, and we do not get much insight in the experiences of the *hoi polloi*, the greater part of this chapter will explore the ambivalent attitudes to violence and viewership from a more modern angle, since these have been studied extensively from a number of disciplinary perspectives. This will then form the basis for views on the modern popularity of films involving gladiatorial games, as well as analysing the presentation of spectators in our three films under examination later.

VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN ROMAN DAILY LIFE

Death has always been a part of life, but as people came to live longer lives, they started to cling more to life and to fear its ending. Ariès (1981:28) suggests that people were not afraid of death until life came to be considered more precious, and this may go some way to explaining the difference between the ancient attitudes to death which we encounter in the evidence, and our own.

Fagan (2011a) discusses exactly how violent Roman society was, despite this being somewhat unquantifiable due to the lack of demographic material and sparse and diffuse evidence. Individual members of Roman society quickly resorted to acts of violence against others, and there is an apparent nonchalance, even normalcy, with respect to interpersonal violence, as can be seen reflected

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[4] Hopkins 1983: 9; 14 sees the amphitheatre as 'the only surviving assembly of citizens' during the imperial period. See also Pottier 2012 on the efforts of Valentianian and Theodosius to curtail violence in the Empire.
[5] Czarnecki 2021 compares this with the punishments meted out to soccer clubs for the behaviour of their fans.

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throughout the literature of the time. In Apuleius' novel, *The Golden Ass,* for example, the acceptability of violence is usually in direct correlation to social status, and much violence was administered through proxy rather than in person (Millar 1981: 70-75; Riess 2001: 399-400). Death was a very present reality for all inhabitants of the ancient Roman world, and even shaped into spectacle by the elite classes.[6]

The system of slavery in ancient Rome legitimised the absolute power of one human being over another and this also helped to accustom its citizens to a culture of violence, in particular violence carried out on those considered to have low status (Gardner & Potter 2017: 216). The plentiful slave population often provided the victims in violent entertainment (Schumacher 2011: 589).[7] This situation was however not an anomaly or even unique to ancient Rome, since slavery was, firstly, practised by many other cultures and further, the position of the slave was taken over by that of the criminal in later epochs. This has been used to argue that crowd participation and fascination with violent spectacles is universal and that it is just reaction and articulation to it which is governed by sociocultural context (Fagan 2011b).

Punishment was severe for the runaway slave if he were caught, and regular runaways could be branded or tattooed on the forehead and had to wear a collar around the neck. Professional slave catchers were hired to hunt them down, notices are posted with detailed descriptions of escaped slaves and rewards were offered for their return. They were considered disposable property rather than part of the Roman community and as such were without protection of the law.[8] A well-known extract from Cato the Elder (that old slaves, like worn out oxen, should be sold off) bears this out (*De Agric*. 2.7). Nevertheless, this did not automatically mean that slaves were treated inhumanely, but their situation depended on the inclination of their master and the type of work that they had to do.[9] The subject of

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[6] When looking through the lens of history there have been many instances where violence to others is considered as a spectator sport or entertainment, for example, the punishment of those convicted of serious crimes in England. Gladiatorial fights have also re-surfaced at differing points in history in Christian Europe, one in 14th century Naples and another in 16th century Lyons, which were as violent and lethal as those held in Rome (Friedländer 1908-13: 192-3). There have been other societies on record where executions were carried out using gladiatorial-type combat. Among the Aztecs, prisoners were armed with a blunted weapon and pitted against four opponents equipped with the normal weapons of war, so essentially an execution.

[7] Harris (1980: 118) places the figure between sixteen and twenty percent of the total population, though any estimate remains speculative. By the late Republic, it has been estimated that slaves comprised 70% of the population of Rome. Fields (2009: 18) provides some numbers compiled from ancient texts of those who were enslaved during the 2nd century BCE alone, for example: 5632 Istrians are mentioned in Livy 41.11.8, captured in 177 BCE; 50 000 Carthaginians by Orosius (4.21.3) in 146 BCE; and in 142 BCE, 9500 Iberians are recorded as being enslaved by Appian (*Iber*. 68). Such information is of course not verifiable, and ancient authors from the time of Homer and Herodotus are notorious for providing only general impressions of such figures. The crushing of the Jewish revolt in 73 CE, for instance, brought approximately 97,000 slaves into circulation (Madden 1996).

[8] This attitude however is not exclusive to Rome and its slaves and is something found in all cultures and periods.

[9] The works of Seneca contain many examples of harsh treatment meted out to slaves by their masters, since he felt that the Romans of his time were particularly abusive towards their slaves, acting in a manner that was 'excessively haughty, cruel and insulting' (*Ep*. 47.11). Seneca argued that slaves should respect (*colant*) their masters rather than fear (*timeant*) them, and that 'respect meant love (*amatur*)' (*Ep*. 47.18) (Fitzgerald 2006: 42). Apuleius, on the other hand presents an

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slavery remains an emotive subject over the past two centuries and has generated much debate resulting in its frequent representation as a negative in film based on antiquity.

- Spectators and the games

Against this violent background of regular warfare and the exploitation of social status, it is then not so surprising that the Romans indulged in this bloody form of entertainment. For Manilius (*Astron.* 4.220), writing under Augustus and Tiberius, the gladiatorial games provided a source of foes to conquer when one had run out of enemies, while for Cassius Dio (43.24.1) the arena is an extension of civil war and he interprets popular opinion on Caesar's bloody games in 46 BCE that Caesar's lust was stimulated but not satiated by the internecine war.

Most modern viewers, perhaps greatly influenced by filmic representations, see the Roman audiences as active participants rather than the more passive audience that was reflected by the Roman authors, writing from their elite *ennui*. This passivity allowed ancient writers to apportion blame for any alleged immorality of the games to the performers whilst continuing themselves to support and attend those very performances (Lim 1999: 359). It also made room for early Christian writers, who condemned audience participation at the games, to infer that the audience lost control of themselves and that only abstinence from such sights would redeem them.

Grouped with numerous other texts is a key passage from one of Seneca's letters where he comments on the Romans' attendance of the games, and its debasing effect on them. The passage is often interpreted as an expression of an ideal Stoic intellectual subjectivity that reveals ancient thinking about crowd psychology:

> But nothing is so damaging to good character as the habit of lounging at the games; for then it is that vice steals subtly upon one through the avenue of pleasure (*voluptatem*). What do you think I mean? I mean that I come home more greedy, more ambitious, more voluptuous, and even more cruel and inhuman, because I have been among human beings. By chance I attended a mid-day exhibition (*meridianum spectaculum incidi lusus*), expecting some fun, wit, and relaxation, an exhibition at which men's eyes have respite from the slaughter of their fellow-men. But it was quite the reverse. The previous combats were the essence of compassion; but now all the trifling is put aside, and it is pure murder (*homicidia*). The men have no defensive armour. They are exposed to blows at all points, and no one ever strikes in vain. Many persons prefer this programme to the usual pairs and to the bouts 'by request.' Of course, they do; there is no helmet or shield to deflect the weapon (*Non galea, non scuto repellitur ferrum*). What is the need of defensive armour, or of skill (*Quo munimenta? Quo artes?*)? All these mean delaying death. In the morning they throw men to the lions and the bears; at noon, they throw them to the spectators. The spectators demand that the slayer shall face the man who is to slay him in his turn; and they always reserve the latest conqueror for another butchering. The outcome

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uncompromising view of slaves used in a flour mill, a scene which, although fictional, is probably not unrealistically drawn (*Met.* 9.12).

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> of every fight is death, and the means are fire and sword. This sort of thing goes on while the arena is empty. You may retort: 'But he was a highway robber; he killed a man!' And what of it? Granted that, as a murderer, he deserved this punishment, what crime have you committed, poor fellow, that you should deserve to sit and see this show? (*Ep.* 7.3-6, transl. Gummere).

One may allow for a bit of rhetorical exaggeration here, and this is undoutedly Seneca's personal interpretation. What distresses Seneca most is the blood lust of spectators whom he describes as relishing the undefended and unarmed deaths of the condemned, with a thirst for violence unslaked by the skilled combats of the morning sessions. From the side of the organisers of the games when languor threatens it must be avoided. Seneca's letter draws a unique division between viewing gratuitous violence and violence conducted with skill, since he differentiates between the types of responses generated by the type of spectacles that are viewed: the civilised response (i.e., to gladiatorial combat between armed men, displaying skill and a sense of 'fair play') and the response of the Other, identified by Seneca as 'the spectators' who seem to prefer the sight of unarmed men being killed in the arena (Stepney 2013: 53).

Comment must be made again on the dichotomy between the spectator, from his safe vantage point, and the spectacle, which was forever dangerous. At a safe remove, the spectator could observe and experience peril without ever being imperilled.

Figure 3.1: 'Habet! In the Colosseum A.D.XC', by Simeon Solomon (1865).

What appears to have fascinated and even excited Western society since the Renaissance is that image of the Roman audience, the crowd – the 'baying, feverish, vibrant mass fixated by the spectacle of human death' (Goldhill 2004: 245). For the modern viewer, we are as absorbed in looking at the spectators as in the staging of death. Simeon Solomon sharply reflects this mixture of violence and eroticism in his painting *Habet!*

Shown in Fig 3.1, this painting reflects the moment of a gladiator's death as reflected in the women's different bodily expressions of desire and power.

Giving unmixed pain, or affording a morbid gratification, it fails to contain a sufficiently evident moral intention. The exclamation 'He has it!' leaves us in no doubt that a mortal thrust or blow has been delivered, and it is the more *frappant* because women are the willing or delighted spectators. The artist offers a variety of reactions to the gore, from horror and swooning to blatant bloodlust –

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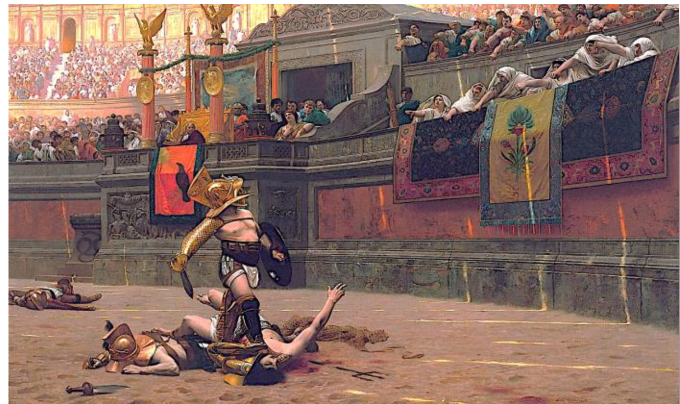
the blonde woman, clutching her necklet and baring her teeth in evident excitement, gives the thumbs down. Most striking of all is the central figure in her blood-red robe, presumably an empress, who has yet to make her decision. Heavy-lidded, full-lipped, she coolly calculates the fate of the defeated gladiator (Moore 2018).

The painting by Gérôme, shown in Fig 3.2, reflects the same Roman gesture 'thumbs down', death to the loser, and it appears that in artistic interpretations of the 19th century there was a predilection for showing that victorious gladiators killed the defeated gladiators at the will of the crowd. Ancient evidence shows, differently and that gladiators were not routinely killed (Rens & De Cupera 2015: 123-124).[10]

Figure 3.2: Jean-Léon Gérôme (1872), entitled *Pollice Verso.*



Although it appears that all Romans attended gladiatorial spectacles at least once (even the more fastidious writers of antiquity seemed to have known a lot about them, at any rate), there were also subtle class differentiations in the depictions of the spectators (McAuley 2017:186). Cicero, Seneca and Pliny the Younger present the level of enjoyment of the games as related to one's social level: 'I rejoice both at … your health of mind, in that you have disregarded these spectacles at which others idly marvel' says Cicero (*Fam.* 7.1.1) to M. Marius who had not gone to the games. Cicero provides a description of the games indicating his own boredom and that of any educated man, whereas 'The public gaped at all this; it would not have amused you at all.' (*Fam.* 7.1.3). Seneca's jostling with the crowds was discussed in Chapter 1, and Pliny says much the same of the Circus, 'The Races were on, a type of spectacle which has never had the slightest attraction for me.' (*Ep.* 9.6.1). To the later Christian critics, the games were associated with sin and disrepute and contrasted with devotion and grace. A good Christian avoided events that could jeopardise the soul (McAuley 2017: 187). This again confirms the general argument in this study that the difference between them and us is not so great as may be supposed, since much of this type of criticism of the games was echoed by

[10] See above p.15

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professional critics of *Gladiator*, *Rome* and also STARZ *Spartacus* (McAuley 2017: 187). Social differentiation of spectators is also introduced on the basis of the type of sport that is class typically watched, a phenomenon that is well-known in the present day.

VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN MODERN SOCIETY

As the ancient writers above have implied, the construct of civilisation presumes the exclusion of violence from social order. In modern times, it is the violence of earlier periods (particularly ancient and medieval) that is considered to be barbaric,[11] whilst the present is held to be the culmination of centuries of efforts to refine societal advancement, with the creation of concepts such as human rights.[12] However, any study of contemporary violence and attitudes to it will show that this rests on a certain amount of self-denial, since real and symbolic violence pervades modern society. As Dalby maintains:

> Warriors are inside, but not inside, of us, but an uncomfortable reminder of complicity in acts that are unworthy, a guilty reminder of that part of the body politic that civilised society has supposedly transcended (2008: 144).

Historical sociologists such as Norbert Elias maintain that the identified central myth of civilisation (the view that modern society has more-or-less repudiated violence as a form of regulating itself) is a misconception (Elias 1994, cited in Hansen-Miller 2011: 2). Western societies have only altered its contexts and the methods of its application (Taussig 2006: 172-178) as violence has become legitimised or justified within the confines of state apparatus.[13] While admittedly in the modern world state-sanctioned spectacles of organised or sanctioned mutilation and torture are on the decrease, we still show a proclivity for violence, particularly via media such as the internet.[14] Urbanisation may have heightened possibilities for crime and its associated violence, but at the same time it has also increased our awareness of these activities, for with this growth came competitive newspaper sensationalism, followed by other news media devoted to depicting violent death.

Those of us in the fifty-plus generation may have observed how our own responses to violence are governed by societal shifts of the kind that have taken place since the industrial revolution. Dunkle

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[11] 'The cinema is a particularly violent form of entertainment, developed in and catering for what we have come to think of as an age of violence' (French 1968: 59, my emphases)

[12] In the contemporary West, as a continuation of the philosophy of Enlightenment, there is social acceptance in the loathing of all methods of violence perpetuated on other people and considering such violence and any subsequent warfare as an 'inhumane and barbaric throwback from the past, unenlightened, ages' (Malešević 2010: 119). In a comparable situation of perpetuating an acceptable historical past, Baumann (2013: 12), writing about the West's relationship with the history of the Holocaust, writes that our popularly conceived Western common heritage is one of how we became progressively more civilised, and this has been supported by scholars from sociologists to historians.

[13] Examples of this discussion can be found in Judith Butler's 2007 article on concerns about our reaction to war.

[14] See for example the article on the ethics of photographing and publishing horrific violence in the media today, Dollery 2021.

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(2013: 29) reminds his readers of the 1960s American television series *The American Sportsman* which lasted for twenty-two seasons[15] in which celebrities and famous hunters entertained their viewership by killing big game such as elephants, rhinos, lions and bears.[16] Here we clearly see the shift in societal expectations as it is only in the 21st century that attitudes to hunting and the treatment of animals[17] have changed to such an extent that mainstream television no longer has that audience.[18]

MILITARY VIOLENCE AND GENOCIDE – OUR MODERN CONTEXT

Like their ancient counterparts, modern cultures separate warfare clearly from other types of violence: murder of another person is considered a shocking and illegal offence whilst killing numbers of opposition soldiers in the execution of war is considered not only acceptable and obligatory but in some cases as an act of exceptional heroism.

At the same time, political labels pinned on other cultures in such military conflicts (such as those of the Yugoslav Succession) use terms such as 'barbarism' rooted in 'ancient hatreds' (Kaplan 1993: 112) and the Taliban as 'medieval vandals' whose actions represent a deterioration back to 'medieval barbarism' (Singh 2001), which all reflect a widespread view that we believe we currently exist in a world with considerably less violence than did any of our ancient and medieval counterparts.

However, 20th century violent deaths, according to Eckhardt (1992: 273), make up about 75% of all deaths in battle over the last 5000 years, translating into the statistic that in the past 100 years we have 'managed to kill twenty-two times more people than our predecessors managed over the past 4,900 years'. Mann (2001) estimates that the 20th century saw as many as 120 million people perish due to genocide and ethnic cleansing strategies. Our modern times profess to be a regulating world which treasures human life and disdains violence and war, all the while perfecting killing at an exceptional and unprecedented rate, creating both a moral and sociological dissonance.[19]

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[15] In terms of television series there is one season per year, therefore 22 years.

[16] Obviously with the advent of modern weaponry, the huntsman was at less risk than his Roman counterpart, the *venatio*.

[17] The Romans had initially adopted wild animal hunting in the arena from Carthage (Potter 1999b: 308), and fighting involving animals continued long after the demise of centralised Roman authority. Those between men and animal were still organised under the Byzantines in the East and the medieval states in the west of the old Roman Empire and continued through the centuries. In 1969 in Amsterdam a ban was placed on 'bear, bull or other fights with such creatures as dogs, bulldogs, pugs or dig-foxes' within the city,
more because of concerns with public order rather than compassion for the animals involved (Meijer 2007: 7).

[18] For the thousand years that followed the Roman Empire gladiatorial spectacle was succeeded by 'one-sided cruelty like bear-baiting, or a fight-to-death between animals, the human appetite for brutality is unmistakable' (Akbar 2016). Cock and dogfights still go on somewhere in the world. Further debate currently surrounds the morals and ethics of bullfighting, not from the matador's perspective but from that of the animals involved, and it might be said the bullfighting may have run its course and is facing its demise despite the predilection for praising the 'gracefulness' or 'heroics' of the matador.

[19] In the last three centuries we have seen the invention and honing of any number of large-scale destructive devices from the guillotine to the atom bomb, and it was during this time that concentration camps and many torturing techniques were conceived.

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MODERNITY AND VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT

Since modern Western societies' abhorrence of violence declares their status as part of civilised society, modernity has explicit issues not merely with violence, with the enjoyment and entertainment associated with the violence. In modern times there is an expectation that violence begs a reaction of disgust, and even more so when it is displayed as entertainment. In the West, as an ever-increasing loathing of violence has developed in public discourse, such entertainment was, until fairly recently, discretely veiled from the public view.

NORMAL DEATH FADES FROM THE PUBLIC GAZE

Gradually, with the changes in societies, religions and developments in the medical field, 'normal' death and dying has slowly receded from the public gaze and become virtually invisible (Goldberg 1998: 28).[20] People who were no longer as exposed to the 'the real thing' in terms of death could accept a fairly realistic representation as a substitute for the experience. Substitutes first took the form of woodcuts and broadsheets, and then moved to photographs and now there is film.[21] As a substitute for the real experience, film clearly has some advantages over the written word:

> Film creates a fully defined and immediate physical reality that requires dramatization and exploration; it brings characters visually realised into direct relationship with their environment and in immediate proximity to the viewer (Konigsberg 1977: 6).[22]

So, while natural deaths became increasingly removed from the public gaze and 'smothered in prudery', violent deaths became part of an ever-increasing fantasy industry offered for the consumption of the masses (Gorer 1955: 51). Cinema could not only offer a more extended and personal view of death; it could also be artistically and ideologically manipulated. Westerns and films about WW II, for example, kept the heroic death on display. Exaggerated death which had previously been considered the domain of the lower-classed and adolescent boys soon moved into mainstream movies. As an industry it became more advanced in its special effects, with the result that it removed the terror of death to a distance and allowed the audience to appreciate the technical ability on a technical or acting level. For the past century moving images have been used as a replacement reality,

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[20] Exponentially, as death receded so mourning became religiously formalised and mourning practices and customs (according to your connection with the deceased) became very prescriptive.

[21] The illness and death of famous figures such as royalty, for example, has always been closely followed news, but the advent of film (television and newsreels) has greatly expanded the community of mourners who feel 'present'. Goldberg 1998: 30 provides the following modern examples: 'Removal-by-presentation prefigured the worldwide attendance at the funeral of John F. Kennedy and Princess Diana via TV as well as the tabloid shots, taken in the morgue, of the bodies of Steve McQueen and Elvis Presley'.

[22] Although inevitably, there are contrasting opinions, as in Cousins 2003, *Why the Film so Rarely Beats a Good Book*.

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on the one hand increasing the fear, but on the other to calm down by the unlikelihood of this ever happening to oneself (Goldberg 1998: 51).

TYPES OF VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT TODAY

Violent entertainment today has a vast repertoire across a variety of media. Goldstein's list (1998: 2): 'murder and horror stories; comic books, television programmes, films and cartoons depicting war and fighting; video-games with martial arts and military themes; toy weapons and military material; and aggressive spectator sports like boxing and wrestling' was comprehensive for that decade, but today there are many more offerings. Thriving television series cover 'real' disasters and 'real crime' which continue to receive high ratings,[23] while there are many more socially marginalised activities such as bare-knuckle fighting, cage fighting, and the more baroque violence of art-house films (Nossov 2009: 168-169). Even state executions, although not mainstream, can require a public audience in America, and can be bought on DVD for repeated viewing.[24]

The field of sport is virtually a category on its own. Modern sports and the Roman gladiatorial games have more in common than many would give credence to, and violence played out in the field is often a contributing factor to their success. Football is one of the most watched forms of TV entertainment. The *Nielsen ratings* indicate that 37 of the 50 biggest broadcasts in 2017 were football, and it is an accepted fact that sports are best enjoyed live. Other contact sports also attract large viewing audiences, even when those times are most inconvenient. Many get up in the middle of the night to watch championship boxing matches, where 'killer' punches are shown in slow motion and frame-by-frame analysis as one is invited to watch not only the skill of the dominant fighter but the potential trauma and damage done to the loser (Guttman 1998: 7).[25] Physical violence is very much a part of many sports and, as in the gladiatorial combat, each contact sport is a theatre of conflict. In comparison to chariot racing, many a F1 race has drawn spectators on the basis of the 'danger' and the replayed moments and highlights are just as likely to be those demonstrating near-death as they are of the victor crossing the finish line. A further analogy can certainly be drawn between gladiatorial entertainment, popular American culture, and the celebrity athlete cult.[26]

Today's computer/video games are another form of violent entertainment. These have advanced considerably from the unsophisticated 1976 Pong-calibre graphics of Death Race and the 1980s Pac-

[23] Admittedly, as Mittell 2010: 119 points out, while tragedy dominates television news media coverage, it fills the '24-hour cycle with unfounded speculation, ill-informed opinions, and most of all undiluted emotional manipulation'.
[24] There are countries such as North Korea, Iran or Somalia which still have public executions.
[25] Akbar 2016, the author of an online article on Mohammed Ali, defines controlled violence (in entertainment such as boxing) as 'constructive' violence and says that modern society is 'schizophrenic about violence', violence being both 'the poison and the antidote of human nature'.
[26] For parallels of spectacle in ancient Rome and America, see Malamud 2001: 43-58.

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Man. Today we have now progressed to first-person shooter games whose realism enabled the planning of such mass murders as occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.

There appears a tangible and extensive attraction, even extending as far as an 'obsession with violence' (Malešević 2010: 1). The past few decades have shown a virtually unlimited desire for 'books, documentaries and above all motion picture portrayals of violent moments'. This has resulted in, people seeking out and exposing themselves to images of violence. Just as no-one forced people to attend the gladiatorial games, no-one is forced to look at a violent film or a television broadcast. Nevertheless, Violent movies or those that contain scenes of violence attract huge audiences from a young age.

Prior to the advent of television, children indulged in and enjoyed war and cowboy and Indian killing games and there is many a fairy story written by adults specifically for children which reflects gruesome mortal consequences of moral transgressions (Tatar 1998: 71-79; Goldstein 1998: 3). Many violent fables and myths for children have been produced with an aim to giving expression to the forbidden while at the same time neutralising fear by caricaturing reality. The same may be said for cartoons – Tom and Jerry cartoons caricature reality through the constant batterings and flattenings of the Tom character, which always bounces back (Cantor 1998: 88-115; Zillman 1998: 179-211).

Modern society not only displays violence, it draws passionate (or perhaps even dispassionate) crowds, revealing a fascination for the lurid displays of sliced, twisted or just humiliated displays of flesh. On screen, death itself has gathered momentum as the demand today is for greater realism,[27] to portray violence in an increasing 'realistic and bloody' manner (Goldstein 1998: 2). Currently the film industry is completely invested both creatively and economically in the production of realistic screen violence. Television, in response, has developed a predilection for violently themed reality-based programmes, using real-life violence to supplant that of fictional violence, as they compete with real executions and deaths which are distributed online. In 2002, American journalist Daniel Pearl was abducted by terrorists in Pakistan, he was placed in front of a camera, his head was sawn off with a large knife, and the video was posted online on ogrish.com. The same thing happened to American businessman Nick Berg in 2004 and, again, in the same year to Eugene Armstrong. The videos were a big success online. Nick Berg's, for instance, was downloaded over 15 million times, and any new decapitation video could earn the site that hosted it up to 60,000 visits per hour (Talbot: 2005: 2), which is more than the maximum capacity of the Roman Colosseum. These videos are some of the more famous instances of internet body horror – the general term in the literature for pictures and videos of extreme injury and violent death, from wars, gang violence, road accidents, suicides,

[27] In evaluating realism, the contemporary visual experience can be said to be largely shaped by photography, Bergmann 1999: 11; 29, and television news reels.

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murders, natural disasters, and such material that is uploaded online. Thus, the circulation of body horror is enabled in ways that evades the prerogatives of the mainstream press to produce news which accords with notions of 'taste and decency' (Tait 2008: 91). These days they are freely, easily, and legally available on shock sites like ogrish.com, documentingreality.com, bestgore.com, and liveleak.com, which are all free-for-all versions of YouTube. And, just like YouTube, users post comments on the pictures and videos, very often inane, idiotic, or offensive – but usually honest – and numbering in the hundreds or thousands.[28]

The ritualised violence from the Middle East has witnessed an upsurge in scholarly interest over the last few decades, particularly for treatments of ritualised threats and taunts. Punitive spectacles such as severing heads, hands and feet, dancing with severed heads and displaying heads at feasts have attracted the scrutiny of noteworthy scholars of ancient texts (Lemos 2006, Noegel 2016, Olyan 2016) and of ancient art (Collon 2003, Reade 2005, Bahrani 2008). Whilst these may be considered as historically idiosyncratic, they are not sporadic or rare, and this suggests thriving traditions aimed not only at celebrating the triumph of victors, but also at arousing horror in spectators.

Why We Watch – The Popularity of Onscreen Violence

Despite the virtually world-wide condemnation of violent acts as seen in normative proscriptions such as age restrictions and censorship, popular culture is saturated in images and instruments of violence, and some of the data studies on basic ratings certainly suggest that those programmes with violence are amongst those most watched (Gunter & Harrison 1998: 176-180). There appears a tangible and broad-based attraction, even extending as far as an 'obsession', with violence (Malešević 2010: 1).[29] The past few decades have shown the popularity of violence in literature, documentaries and especially motion pictures and television. Yet Holmes (1985), Grossman (1996), Bourke (2000), and Collins (2008), all maintain that the humans are not proficient, nor psychologically at ease with, the use of violence, going further even to state that humans generally avoid violent conflicts (Malešević 2010: 1). So why? Why are we so attracted to the shedding of blood when it is played out before us?

Goldstein (2009: 272) maintains that:

> The attractions of violent entertainment are many and varied. It offers something for nearly everyone. The audiences for images of violence, death, and dying do not share a

[28] The transgression of ethical space around death and suffering represented by many of these sites is an expanding subject which is now hotly debated and as such is one too vast to include in this work. See *Pornographies of Violence? Internet Spectatorship on Body Horror* by Sue Tait for a fuller picture and elaboration of some of the justifications for such viewing rationalised.

[29] There are suggestions that extreme violence represented on the screen exists for that younger audience who are 'profoundly removed from the experience of violence – insulated by class or other privilege from the direct experience of war, street violence, police harassment' and so on, Hansen-Miller 2011: 1.

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> single motive; some viewers seek excitement, others companionship or social acceptance through shared experience, and still others wish to see justice enacted (my emphases).

The first category, excitement, is the most complex of the three mentioned here. On the one hand, viewing violence can be exciting and arousing which is pleasurable in its own right, even when this excitement is closely linked to fear (Zillman 1978). The psychological explanation for this is that, although the fear response itself is unpleasant, relief from that fear is pleasant. Therefore, fear under controlled circumstances can give rise to pleasure once the fear has been overcome which in itself is an intrinsic part of the entertainment experience (Blumer 1993, quoted in Gunter, Harrison and Wykes 2011: 14).

This is what Hoberman (1998: 141) calls the 'spectator antipathy of attraction', the paradoxical emotions of pleasure and horror when watching varying forms of violence (even more so on the case of live violence). It is also explained as 'reversal theory' (Apter 2001: 3-4). Reversal theory indicates that when a person is in a particular frame of mind (technically, in a paratelic meta-motivational state), then in that frame of mind emotions that would normally be unpleasant, like fear, anger, or disgust, are instead experienced as pleasant. This is the explanation for why people skydive, why they shoplift when they are not poor, or why they go to watch horror films. If a friend or even a stranger were witnessed being decapitated on the street, it would be considered a horrific experience, but many will pay to see the same thing happen to a character we have gotten to know in a horror film, because it is known that the decapitation is fictional, and thus carries no consequences and demands no action: the decapitation is still frightening and disgusting, but those emotions feel good, not bad, because they have been reframed by our physical, not emotional, detachment from the violence (Apter 2001: 3-10).

We experience excitement because we are mentally in a frame of mind where we expect to be excited. The knowledge that at some point some form of brutality or savagery will arise actually leaves room for viewers to 'monitor' their own emotions (Goldberg 1998: 39). At the same time, viewing the same type of thing repeatedly, as we see in films, even gives it a ritual aspect, and this may tone down levels of excitement. If we have seen characters die multiple times it helps to create a barrier against the reality of death, much like Cicero's *ennui* expressed in his letter to M. Marius mentioned earlier in this Chapter on p. 53 (*Fam.* 7).

Experience of impending menace, however inchoate, is similar in that it precipitates a mood of dread. Mood is argued to be powerful in shaping perception, particularly in the sphere of visual arts: when a 'strong expressive force' is symbolically and visually displayed this is argued to affect the intuitive recognition of that which governs personal and interpersonal experiences in daily life (Aijmer 2000: 3). One need only think of numerous spectacles in our own time, such as the IS beheading videos, or social violence on newsreels closer to home.

At the same time, mood is not only a result of seeing, but also causative: moods can shape what and how we see (Morgan 2012: 22-25, 33). Powerful dispositions, such as dread or disgust, can influence

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the visual construction of what is real and configure a field of visual relations, whereby particular elements stand out to us and are juxtaposed.

Social acceptance is fairly self-explanatory and has already been implied in Augustine's account of Alypius mentioned earlier (p. 9), who was persuaded to attend the games by his friends (*Conf.* 6.8.13). Most people do not like to be out of step with their peers. Modern research focuses heavily on peer-pressure under teenagers, but in reality it is something which affects people of all ages. Coleman in her 1998 article coins the expression the 'contagion of the throng' as a way of describing the lure of the Colosseum, and the category of desiring social acceptance has both 'pull' and 'push'. Likewise, the results of the study done by Minowa and Witkowski (2012) (where modern consumption theory was applied to the ancient textual and material evidence) indicate that spectators attended the games as much to see as be seen, and to integrate themselves with their community.

The revenge/justice motif is probably more significant in Goldstein's list of motivations for watching violence in today's world, particularly since much of today's entertainment is private viewing and social acceptance is marginally less important than it used to be. Violent entertainment is most appealing when it is dressed up in an engrossing fantasy of basic justice or revenge in which 'the good guys beat up the bad guys', something often denied to people in real life (Goldstein 1998: 4). Most viewers consider retributive and also redemptive justice to be morally vindicated and this reinforces the assumption that the world in which the viewer lives is a just place. Research carried out on violence represented through film and television suggests that many viewers have an almost euphoric feeling of elation when an extremely violent, evil character suffers or dies, in other words gets what he deserves. When watching a movie, an arena spectacle, or internet body horror, one grows positively or negatively disposed towards people, based on moral judgements. Viewers have a tendency to identify with and mentally encourage the success of a positively portrayed character. When violence is done to those the viewer is positively disposed towards, it is considered unpleasant, and the viewer reacts empathetically mirroring their affective responses, feeling fear, anger, and sadness when they do. But when violence is done to those received negatively, it is considered pleasant – the response is counter-empathetic. The more they hurt, the more you enjoy it. This is known as disposition theory or affective disposition (Gervais 2013: 8). This is invoked by Fagan (2011b: 241-273) as one explanation of Roman enjoyment of the games. In the arena, the narratives encountered are simpler, sometimes nearly non-existent, so the moral judgments used to form negative dispositions often rely on prejudice – and there is abundant evidence for prejudice at the Roman games, since the people chosen to perform on the sands almost always belonged to marginalised or alien groups (Gervais 2013: 8).

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In the case of films, this is intensified by the fact that we are now viewers of the viewers, voyeurs, watching both crowd and spectacle.[30] In Kubrick's *Spartacus*, for example, one is able to observe the interactions and responses from the spectators of the private match between Spartacus and Draba and compare their reactions while the violent spectacle is played out before them. The idea that there is an affinity between 'us and them' is a cause of some discomfort, since it makes that uncomfortable connection between violence and pleasure which we are at such pains to deny in our current 'civilised' contexts (Stepney 2013: 299-300). As Cyrino (2004: 140) indicates, our view on the Roman spectators in *Gladiator* is 'an unnerving mirror-image of ourselves, eager to be entertained at all costs'.

Against this background, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a certain level of cultural confidence inside today's so-called civilised societies that their viewing public is not expressively affected by, or even anxious, about violence on screen. Although peace and 'brotherly love' may well be the declared ethos of our age, it is violence and war that attract the most widespread attention (Pearl 1982: 6). Critics have accused primarily television, but also film, of using violence to attract viewers instead of quality scripts (Gunter 2003: vii). As stated by Richard Corliss in 2000 (regarding the box office success of *Gladiator*):

> A pity the slaves must die for the public's sport, and a pleasure that we get to watch. Violence is an issue directors love to deplore and exploit.

Excessive displays of violence may no longer be acceptable to our modern aesthetics but that does not mean that human violence and cruelty has been relegated to obscurity, merely the form and the medium has changed. Importantly, wars, revenge, and honour killings still make for headline news and television, and film and computer games[31] blur the line between reality and fiction.

FICTIONAL VIOLENCE ON SCREEN

In the world of film, it must be accepted that although attempts are made to achieve realism, realism is not actuality. Actuality is in fact not even desired. Although real violence on film, such as decapitations, do draw a large internet viewership, films that lack theatricality and special effects but are bloody are often not considered appealing. Benjamin (1968: 223) has suggested that film technologies alter one's sense of the uniqueness and mystery of (and distance from) the human and natural world by transforming reality into something that can be transported and reproduced. Popular cinema reaffirms the meaning of violence which otherwise can be hidden inside an organised world

[30] This is also a ploy actively used to allow the audience to receive subjective experiences of the different characters and allow them to see development of character and relationships, something integral particularly when in a series.

[31] 'Game creators are more anxious than moviemakers about their cultural status; the marketing tends to emphasize drama and character', Scott, Dargis, Stanley & Suellentrop 2013.

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of modern democracies. This fulfils a desire to know and to comprehend that which can be considered opaque despite their often seldom being straightforward, valid or true.

The medium of film makes use of various special effects to choreograph its representation of violence, carnage and bloodshed - fast cutting or slow-motion work towards controlling and containing the chaos and horror within a two-hour or forty-minute viewing period (Gardner & Potter 2017: 217). Even if the viewer is conscious of the camera, the special effects, the music, and above all their position as a viewer, they may yet still be affected by these elements. The suggested image where violence is implied rather than on display, can fiercely provoke the imagination of the viewer. Equally, the depiction of events most viewers have never seen in reality can also be effective:

> Chances are audience members have never seen a decapitation … so audience members don't really know what to expect … we don't want you looking away for too long or you'll miss what comes next (Gardner & Potter 2017: 218).[32]

Recent technological advances have opened a world of possibility in bringing non-contemporary representations through the use of CGI-facilitated creations of 'impossible points of view' (Gardner & Potter 2017: 219). All of these are intensely choreographed transmissions of violent reality. Sometimes the visuals of violence are so stylised that they become recognisable as not reflecting reality (Goldstein 1998: 3).

Cinema and television provide its audience with the illusion of at least some control over the world and in doing so offer a limited period of illusionary fulfilment, to virtually experience something which is otherwise concealed. It offers the viewer the opportunity to buy into the ideology of entertainment, moving into one hermetically sealed world (where violence is fun) from real-world violence (which has more ambivalent attitudes to bloodshed) (Gardner & Potter 2017: 223).

Spartacus and *Gladiator* were huge successes partly because of their audience's frisson at the thought of games as entertainment – of being there, seeing 'the real thing'. The lure of such feelings is also directly fostered by the gigantic entertainment industry, which produces military, sexual and personal violence on so many levels that it feels almost immersive, particularly on the big screen.

RETRIBUTIVE, REDEMPTIVE AND SADISTIC JUSTICE ON SCREEN

Within violence shown on screen, producers usually make a clear distinction between sadistic, retributive, and redemptive violence. The latter two are usually presented as morally justified, where redemptive violence is that which is used to control and protect society, and retributive violence is essentially revenge for a wrong done to a character and implies justification from some character's perspective, irrespective of how likeable or unsympathetic that character may be. This is apparent in

[32] Audio-commentary taken from a 'making-of' featurette from the second season of STARZ Spartacus

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all the versions of *Spartacus*, in *Gladiator*, and to some extent in *Rome*, where violent deeds by the protagonists are presented as morally justified. Sadistic violence is also represented in all these productions and can for the most part be identified with exploitative violence, along the customary 'good' and 'evil' axis which forms the basis of particularly the earlier two film productions.

In film's balancing act between vicarious enjoyment and guilty pleasures, context is key. Films about Rome provide the ideal justification for all forms of deadly blood sport through popular conceptions of gladiatorial combat. Film then allows the viewer to feel some moral superiority of being 'shocked' by the Roman's enjoyment of violence – 'that was them – we're not like that, we're civilised'.[33]

Popular cinema and other mediated forms of entertainment have the potential to represent the field of civilised violence (aesthetically, ideologically and generically) in a manner that can be understood and 'handled' by the spectators. Popular cinema offers a coherent interpretation of the state of play that can assist the spectator's effective resistance to violence also because it enhances the sensation that the viewer has some control over his/her experience of the violence.

Ancient Rome and onscreen violence

Since the human psyche is so susceptible to the thrill of vicarious pain, and the spilling of blood draws both attention and spectators (Coleman 1998: 80), ancient Rome has always been a popular backdrop for filmic depictions of 'various types of sexual extremes, decadent erotic practices and gratuitous violence' (Cyrino 2017: 300), as is borne out by the nature of the grand on-screen representations of antiquity, such as *Cabiria* (1941), *Quo Vadis* (1951), *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *I Claudius* (1976) as well as the three screen products selected for study here.

Debates around violence in entertainment

There has been a great deal of debate, research and publicity around the subject of particularly television violence, concluding that the effects of watching can vary from being mildly corrosive to genuinely dangerous. The most common view towards the end of the 20th century was that violence on television led to aggressive behaviour amongst child and teenage viewers (Pearl 1982: 6). More recently opinion has swung in the opposite direction, and the opinion proffered is that television is therapeutic, and that television violence relieves rather than stimulates hostility as a catharsis (Ratzlaff 2020: 133), a view also suggested by scholars for gladiatorial games in ancient times. It has also been noted that while 80% of high-school-age boys play some form of video games with sales

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[33] Apostol 2015: 100 cites *Gladiator* as a prime example of evoking such enjoyment which also includes a good 'dash of revenge fantasy'.

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doubling over the last two decades, the 'number of violent youth offenders has been halved' (Scott *et al*, 2013).

Another positive result from violence in films is that screen violence and the subsequent arguments that surround it have encouraged debate on those subjects which have frequently been repressed in the past, subjects around race, gender, criminality, economic disparities, dissolution of the public sphere and morality (Kendrick 2010: 113).

Within the discourse of motive for and consequence of violent viewing is the fact that these are central to understanding real crime issues and to public acceptance of criminal justice processes and legislation. Enacted violence that is not deemed justifiable or is without serious consequences can lead to undermining of moral value and an increase in violence or at the very least the acceptance of that violence as normal. Certain kinds of violence resonate most dramatically and create public debate:

In our preferred world of liberal democracy, tolerance of diversity and distributive justice, violence – especially extreme forms of mass bloodshed – are generally considered pathological or evil expressions of human nature gone awry, or a collateral result of good intentions (Atran 2017: 81).

A crucial moment can be seen in *Gladiator* when Maximus demands 'Are you not entertained?' shown in Fig. 3.3; a self-reflexive question directed as much at the film audience as at the arena audience. Much may have changed since the gladiatorial spectacles of ancient Rome, but our desire for that adrenaline rush which watching violence brings is not so different from that of spectators who lived 2000 years ago.

Figure 3.3: 'Are you not entertained?'

Huston (1992: 54) proffers an estimate that the 'average American child views about 8,000 murders and over 100,000 acts of violence on television by the end of elementary school'. Extrapolated over

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the lifetime of a typical American and based on Huston's averaged viewing rate, this could culminate in one person watching '48,000 depictions of murder and over 600,000 depictions of violence' over the average lifespan of 75 years. When comparing this too such as Pompeii, which had 39 gladiatorial spectacles over the course of one year, and including the fact that there was a law forbidding the attendance of children and unmarried adults it indicates an unpleasant truism about ourselves which makes many uncomfortable and unwilling to acknowledge. In truth, we are perhaps closer to those sadistic, 'un-empathetic Romans of our imagination' than they actually ever were (Huston 1992: 54).

SIMILARITIES OF CRITICS ANCIENT AND MODERN

McAuley (2017: 189) has observed that much of the criticisms levelled against modern films by professional critics are similar to those criticisms voiced by the ancient critics on their own entertainment. There are a variety of complaints, but it is noticeable that none of these critics complain about the levels of violence perpetrated, either at the games or in the films - it is tacitly taken for granted that this is what happens – they decry the popularity of the violence. If one looks at the vast panoply of offerings on current television today, the majority of the more popular offerings centre on brutality and violence, whether in its creation or in its resolving; such as *Bones, Banshee, Peaky Blinders* or even *The Walking Dead* where copious bloodshed, murder and dismemberment are presented according to the genre of the series. Heads being blown off has become commonplace, so much so that it no longer disturbs and the entertainment industry both feeds and benefits from this (Meijer 2007: 8)

The two drivers of the American movies that have been at the root of their both success and harshest criticisms are sex and violence. 'Movies have been transfixed by violence from their beginning' whilst many of the top-rated shows presented on television are rife with violence in varying form and degree and there have been many public debates with respect to our 'culture of violence and the violence of our cultural offerings', which previously expanded to include music and books (Scott *et al* 2013). This culture has become even more screen focused and now includes being able to watch on the small screen, the phone and on laptops. These images of violence which appear to be a source of vicarious pleasure are here to stay and images of dystopian and danger-filled happenings are familiar. The film and television industry appear to be now invested both creatively and economically in producing screen violence. Many of these fantasies have intensified in correlation to everyday existence becoming more regulated and uniform and perhaps provide distraction from the 'boredom and regimentation of daily grind and a social order organised around the brute necessity of survival' can appear attractive as well as frightening (Scott *et al* 2013).

Current debate may, to a degree, echo those attempts made to make sense of the gladiatorial games - that the viewer's reaction to violence becomes inured and ceases to have impact, that regular contact to such routine violence caused the viewers to become familiar with it which could result in a 'less caring or more callous disposition' towards violence in reality, because that violence is then accepted

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as a mode of conduct (Gunter 2003: viii). Similarly, the impression that such violence is reflective of the status of society can also be created through its regular viewing which may in turn cause them to believe that the society in which they live is a violent, dangerous, and frightening place. (Donnerstein 1994; Gerbner *et al* 1994; Paik & Comstock 1994; and Potter 1999). At this point it should be noted that this is often the prevailing attitude of those looking back at life in Rome, that it was a dangerous, brutal and intrinsically cruel place to exist, whereas they in turn may have wished to present the converse, that the viewing of the games inured their population to such brutality and made them stronger. Further, that it reinforced their values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Overall, it also appears that modern critics and commentators are in general alignment with those ancient writers, who generally had an agenda in their accounts of the pernicious effects of mass culture.[34] Martin Scorsese is quoted as having said:

> Maybe we need the catharsis of bloodletting and decapitation like the ancient Romans needed it, as a ritual but not real like the Roman circus accounted for the desire to see such happenings but with the safety-net of reassurance that such actions are not real. However, this does not detract from the integral question of are we entertained? (cited in Kendrick 2010: 27).

CONCLUSION

Much of our current criticisms and objections to the representation of the culture of Roman spectacle reveal much about our modern culture of spectacle. The modern adage of 'if it bleeds, it leads' applies not only to our watching choices and the policy applied to newspapers and television news but also to the entertainment of the ancient Romans.

The rift between popular entertainment in Rome and in this century is not as vast as we might think and the words 'the world is my arena' spoken by Crixus in *Spartacus* still applies today (McAuley 2017: 177). The two differing worlds of the entertainer and the entertained, spectacle and reality merged then as they blur now when we watch a film or television.

This chapter has endeavoured to show that the use of violence, graphic or otherwise, as a method of mass entertainment has continued to exist, albeit it in an altered form. Violence is all around us and has been represented in entertainment throughout time, from the earliest mythology and storytelling to present day viewing (Scott *et al* 2013). To understand the attraction of violent entertainment it is necessary to go beyond the theme that all these representations of violence and blood-spilling are something new to our age, or a product of popular culture and the internet, as shown by the keen and enthusiastic audiences of the Roman gladiatorial games (Goldstein 1998: 5). Conversely, it also

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[34] 'The origins of the concept of mass culture in the late 18th, early 19th century proceeded, in England particularly, from anxiety about democratic politics in the wake of the French and American revolutions' (Lockett 2010: 107).

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cannot be said that our modern age is more civilised than the eras which preceded it. It appears that the desire to view human suffering and death is a universal human trait.

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CHAPTER 4: ENTERTAINING VIOLENCE IN ROME

As discussed in the preceding chapters, violence in ancient Rome has been studied in some detail, and violence in the sphere of Roman entertainment has also resulted in a large number of scholarly works.[1] The Romans not only entertained violence for their amusement, their violence was also entertaining through the sheer spectacle of it. The complex human and social effects involved are so striking that they have deserved careful scrutiny. Scholars are in agreement that the most spectacular display of entertainment violence in history has to be attributed to the Romans, who lavished care, ingenuity and funds on various forms of blood-spilling entertainment.

This chapter will serve to give an overview of the context and nature of Roman public spectacle, with a focus on gladiatorial games, to form a background against which gladiatorial spectacle in the three filmic products in the following chapters can be evaluated and better understood.

EARLY PRECEDENTS IN PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENT

The roots of gladiatorial sport have traditionally been sought beyond Rome, but, as Stepney's study (2013) has indicated, this may be due to scholars' reluctance to attribute the origins of this practice to those cultural origins we identified as our own. On a more prosaic level, it could be attributed to the fact that there is not much information in our sources about the origins of the practice of gladiatorial combat, nor do our ancient Roman writers give a very clear idea of the mythical or more historical origins of gladiature or even appear to be very interested in where it originated.

[1] The area has become a subject of great debate about the legendary cruelty of both Roman producers and spectators: Coleman 1990 *Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments*; Fagan 2011b *The Lure of the Arena: Social Psychology and the Crowd at the Roman Games*; Auguet 1972 *Cruelty and Civilisation: The Roman Games*; Wiedemann 2002 *Emperors and Gladiators*; Lintott 1968 *Violence in Republican Rome*; Futrell 1997 *Blood in the Arena*; and Dunkle 2013 *Gladiators: Violence and Spectacle in Ancient Rome*.

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There is some evidence for similar practices and even precedents in other ancient Mediterranean cultures. Many legendary Greek heroes, for example, were reported to have also been honoured with funeral games,[2] in the manner of Homer's description of those given by Achilles in honour of his dead friend Patroclus (*Il*. 23).[3] Homer's 'sport of kings' was popular throughout antiquity, although by the 3rd century BCE chariot racing was available for the enjoyment of a broader societal class.[4] Such games, along with mimes, in time came to Italy with the arrival of the Greek settlers from the 7th century BCE. It is worth noting, however, that members of the ancient Greek elite themselves competed in this sport, whereas in the ancient Roman world, they did not normally participate (Rens & De Cupere 2015: 123; Dunbabin 2016: 39). Nevertheless, it is not surprising that it was particularly in Magna Graecia[5] that the tradition of shows and games came to be associated with a distinctive tradition in religious and funerary celebrations.[6]

The *ludi* or games were featured regularly on the Roman religious calendar throughout the time of the Republic.[7] By 186 BCE this had expanded to include the hunting and slaughter of wild animals as well as the fighting of wild beasts. Most common, however, were the games with gladiatorial shows.[8] Yet, despite the shift in nature of this entertainment, the ancient authors rarely distinguished them by kind and even included blood sports and drama in the same breath (Bergman 1999: 14). By the time of the late Republic, Cicero divided the public *ludi* by means of the entertainment venue in which they usually took place:

> The public games are divided between theatre (*cavea*) and circus, in the circus there shall be contest of body with body (*corporum certationes*), consisting of running, boxing, and wrestling; and also horse-races, which shall last until a decisive victory is won (Cic. *Leg*. 2.38, transl. Keys).

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[2] Hesiod (*Op*. 654-7) mentions he won a prize for his poetry at the funeral games of Amphidmas. On violence and its treatment in ancient Greek literature and art, see Beltrametti 2011.

[3] Early Greek festivals had their focus on the dramatic, athletic and musical contests associated with prizes (αγώνες), Although the majority of funeral contests consisted of Greek-style athletics including boxing, javelin throwing and discus throwing, in the games for Patroclus there is an armed duel which resembles the early gladiatorial matches, whilst the Greek soldiery input anticipates (but is not the same as) the practice of the Roman arena with respect to the loser, Dunkle 2008: 14.

[4] We are also told by Herodotus (5.8) that at the time of the Persian invasion in 480 BCE, the people of Thrace honoured their richest dead through the holding of funeral games in which single combat (μουνομαχίης) carried the highest prize, van Creveld 2013: 56.

[5] Textual evidence for specific early Roman spectacles is scattered and idiosyncratic, Bergman 1999: 14. The literary accounts are more evocative of the effects and experiences than some of the historical records of the actual events, von Hesberg 1999: 73; Jones 1999: 65-76.

[6] Ancient evidence attests to gladiatorial training schools (*ludi*) in many parts of the Roman world, Wiedemann 1992: 170; Hope & Whitehouse 2003: 305-306.

[7] 366 CE saw the *Ludi Romani* in honour of Jupiter and at the close of the following century the *Plebeii* and *Apollinares* as well as that in honour of the Great Mother, the *Megalenses*, McAuley 2017: 178.

[8] Over time, animals became scarcer and more valuable. As the character of a black slave in *Gladiator* says to the wounded Maximus – 'Don't die. They will feed you to the lions. The animals are worth more than we are'.

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- Chariot Races

The *ludi circenses* or chariot-races were the oldest form of entertainment that arrived in Rome (Bennet 1997: 41). Dionysius of Halicarnassus (7.72.1-13) ascribed the first initial impetus for the Circus Maximus to the Etruscan kings, and Livy (1.35) writes of the first chariot races as part of the triumph held by the Etruscan king, Tarquinius Priscus (616-579 BCE). Archaeological sources are in broad agreement with the narrations of Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, that the Circus Maximus had its first appearance as a circus around the 6th century BCE when the Etruscan kings ruled Rome (Humphrey 1986: 64-67).

In the Late Republic, Julius Caesar and Octavian/Augustus were able to monumentalise the Circus Maximus as part of their building programme. Both Pliny (*HN* 36.102) and Suetonius (*Jul.* 39.2) attribute the first significant structural developments in the Circus Maximus to Julius Caesar (Coleman 2000). They had to hold substantial audiences, and the largest attendances of any public event on record were those at the chariot races in the Circus Maximus. Under the Empire, some 200,000 Romans cheered for one of the four teams or *factiones*, the Reds, Whites, Blues and Greens, who drove their *quadrigae* drawn by four horses (Fowles 1999: 100).

Charioteers themselves were enormously popular, as the many mosaics naming them and even their horses, attest (Fig. 4.1 and 4.2) (Dunbabin 2016: 302). Nevertheless, they, like any other popular entertainers (including gladiators), formed part of the lowest social order in the Roman world. They were often slaves (who sometimes bought their freedom with their prize money) or on occasion free men. They were lionised by the public, with Martial (*Spect.* 5.25) making a satirical comment that the portraits of one charioteer could be found on every street corner (Guttman 1986: 29). The emperor Nero may have been a fan, since Suetonius tells us that Nero's wife Poppaea chastised him for coming back late from the chariot races, as a result of which he killed her by kicking her to death (*Nero* 35.3).

Figures 4.1 and 4.2: Charioteers, horses and *quadrigae*.
Mosaics from Girona in Spain, left, and from Cyprus, right, both 3rd to 4th century CE.

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- Animal Fighting

Besides gladiatorial combat, many other types of entertainment grew very popular in Rome, particularly the man against animal fights.[9] The *bestiarii* were not considered as gladiators but pitted their strength and skills in the arena against wild beasts. These could be volunteers, which caused Cyprian to complain in the 3rd century CE:

> What state of things, I beg you, can that be, and what can it be like, in which men, whom none have condemned, offer themselves to the wild beasts? Men of ripe age, of sufficiently beautiful appearance, clad in costly garments? While alive they are adorned for a voluntary death; wretched men, they boast of their own miseries. They fight with beasts, not for their crime, but for their madness (*Don.* 7, transl. Wallis, adapted).

Condemned men and women 'thrown to the lions', as illustrated in the mosaic detail in Figure 4.3, became proverbial through the accounts of the Christian persecutions.[10]

Figure 4.3: Leopards attacking a condemned man. Roman floor mosaic, 3rd century CE, Sousse Museum, Libya.

These spectacles were very popular, so much so that when they were eventually abolished in 523 CE, so many animals had died that some species, such as hippopotami from Nubia, lions or elephants in north Africa, often illustrated in Assyrian reliefs, had all been driven to virtual extinction in that area.

In addition to local hunters, soldiers were also involved in catching animals. Detachments of hunters (*venatores*) from frontier legions and legions posted in 'wild' provinces caught wild animals. Under the command of their centurion, soldiers of the *legio I Minerva* are reported to have captured some 50 bears during a six-month period (Epplett 2001: 214).

Another soldier of the Thirtieth Legion, who specialised in catching bears, was officially given the title of *ursarius legionis* (bear-hunter legionary) (*ILS* 3267). Hunter legionaries were privileged to be exempted from everyday duties and training (Rea 2001: 253; Epplett 2001: 213).

[9] Pliny (*HN* 8.52) informs that 'A fight with several lions at once was first bestowed on Rome by Q. Scaevola [cos. 95 BCE], son of Publius, when consular aedile, but the first of all who exhibited a combat on one hundred lions with manes was L. Sulla, later dictator, in his praetorship [93 BCE]. After Sulla, Pompey the Great showed six hundred lions in the Circus, including three hundred fifteen with manes, and Caesar when he was dictator showed four hundred'.

[10] The Romans carried out multiple forms of public executions: crucifixion, burning at the stake, and *damnatio ad bestias* (being condemned to be thrown to the animals) and the latter became a basic ingredient of amphitheatre entertainment. The latter was introduced as a form of execution by Aemilius Paullus Macedonicus in 167 BCE. Aemilius Paullus is also remembered for the saying that any conqueror should also know how to give a banquet and games, Livy 45.32.111. Discussion in Flower 2004: 322-344.

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Figure 4.4: Bear devouring his victim, Roman mosaic.

Certain animals held symbolic significance, for example Pompey's presentation of elephants at the Circus Maximus were meant to be symbolic of his power over even the strongest of beasts.[11] Augustus highlighted his sponsorship of gladiatorial games and animal hunts as the greatest contributions towards public entertainment during his political life, mentioning 26 *venationes* in which 3500 animals were killed (*RGDA* 22). In the Roman provinces, lions and elephants did not feature in local *spectacula* during the imperial period, as the emperors held the monopoly on such animals (Sparreboom 2016: 71).

Not all spectacles had a full programme of events. In the main though, they consisted of three major sections happening in a fairly regular order. By the time of the end of the Republic, the *venationes* made up the morning spectacle where either *bestiarii* fought against animals, or the animals were pitted against each other.

Figure 4.5: Mural of beast hunt, showing a venator or bestiarius fighting a lion/ lioness, from the balustrade of the amphitheatre in the Roman city of Emerita Augusta (modern Merida, Spain).

The *venator* was a more sophisticated animal hunter, who demonstrated his 'hunting' skills in the arena, and not always against dangerous animals, but also creatures like deer, camels, and rabbits. Sometimes he would perform tricks comparable to those of circus lion-tamers and similar performers. It is evident from the descriptions that thousands of animals might be slaughtered in these hunts at the large games.[12]

Again, their purpose was to demonstrate the superiority of Roman dominance, in this case, over the natural world

As Seneca describes in his letters (*Ep*. 7), some programmes had a break around lunchtime, at which point many of the spectators would leave either to escape the heat and/or the next event, the

[11] See also Domitian's coin depicting an African rhinoceros, Epplett 2015: Plate 1.
[12] Suetonius mentions that five thousand animals died in celebration of Titus' dedication of the Colosseum (*Titus* 7.3) and according to Dio (68.15.1), eleven thousand in celebration of Trajan's conquest of Dacia.

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executions. In Seneca's description the afternoon component was devoted to the gladiatorial games proper as the main event.[13] Here pairs or even groups of gladiators would fight each other, sometimes simply as gladiators and sometimes as 're-enactors' of mythical or historical battles.[14] These fights had a purpose: to demonstrate to the audience examples of Roman bravery and skill, and valour when faced with death. This alone set it apart from the executions and the beast hunting. These three phases of the games appear to have been completely different and distinct events, and programmes varied across different parts of the Roman world.[15] It was gladiatorial spectacle, however, which came to be seen as one of the most emblematic phenomena in the Roman world (Wiedeman 1992; Kyle 1999; Potter 1999b; Futrell 2006; Welch 2007).

CONTEXT AND CONTEST

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Initially there was a scholarly assumption (perhaps influenced by the Christian traditions of the scholars' own eras) that when combat was performed as part of funerary rites, it must have been a decorous and solemn ritual – a form of human sacrifice or ritual death, but in honour of the deceased, rather than a god. Over the decades, gladiatorial violence has been named a combat, a game, and/or a spectacle – this in itself, as Stepney points out, implies our ways of interpreting that violence today (2013: 357).

The various theories for the origin of gladiatorial combat are outlined below, but it is important to emphasise that gladiatorial games were not introduced to provide a context for executions any more than the amphitheatres were designed for that (Wiedemann 2002: 73).

In the study of gladiature three main theories of the origins of this phenomenon have been developed to date. The first of these is the Etruscan theory of origin, which arose in the mid-19th century.

- Etruscan theory of origin

According to this position, gladiatorial games came to Italy with the Etruscans, whose kings ruled Rome until the establishment of the Roman Republic, traditionally given as 510 BCE. There is some

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[13] Our ancient accounts vary on the sequences and combinations of events for the games, see discussion in Carucci 2019: 214-215.
[14] This will be discussed in greater detail further on in this Chapter.
[15] It is not as if a handbook or timetable has survived - programmes have been tentatively pieced together from a variety of ancient writers. But that is not to say that all gladiatorial shows followed the same pattern, see for example Josephus *AJ* 15.268-274. In addition to the evidence provided by Seneca, Tertullian (*Spec* 7.2-3:4.) refers to the fact that there was a midday spectacle and confirms that animals were generally exhibited in the morning. A combination of Greek games and Roman spectacles was particularly characteristic of the emperor cult, Patrich 2002: 36.

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slight textual support for this,[16] but our source, which is indirect, only indicates that the custom was 'derived' from the Etruscans, not that they originated with the latter (Welch 2007: 14). The Etruscan deity of death, Charun, was associated with the arena attendant[17] who removed the dead bodies (Potter 2001: 479). In the 7th century CE, Isidore of Seville (*Etym.*18.53), too, thought the Etruscan word for executioner could be the root for the Latin *lanista*.[18] These sparse fragments do seem to indicate that there was a connection between gladiatorial combat and the Etruscans. However, many modern historians place greater reliance on the available material evidence, pointing out that the literary evidence does not dovetail with that of wall paintings from Etruscan tombs dating to the 6th and 5th centuries BCE. These paintings depict various sporting contests - but none of gladiatorial combat (Cerchia, Lubtchansky & Pouzadoux 2015: 309-316).[19]

When one considers the other influences which the Etruscans had on Roman civilisation (such as auguries and the triumph), the Etruscan premise is understandably popular. By the Augustan period, the Romans themselves seem to have believed that they had inherited gladiatorial combat from the Etruscans.[20] The Etruscan origin theory, however, whether supporting funerary blood sacrifice or battlefield mimesis, successfully drew a line in the sand between violence and pleasure.

However, in the 20th century the image of the Etruscan origin of gladiature underwent considerable revision, and the idea of gladiatorial combat-and-death as a religious sacrifice lost ground. Another theory, popular in the 20th century, was known as the Osco-Samnite premise[21] according to which gladiature originated among the Samnites in the central south of Italy.[22]

- The Osco-Samnite theory

The theory was launched by the discovery of early 4th century BCE tomb wall paintings in Campania depicting a variety of funerary sporting contests.[23] This time the tomb paintings included gladiatorial contests between individuals bearing arms and shields, and helmets, as illustrated in Fig.4.6.[24] The

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[16] Athenaeus quotes Nicolaus of Damascus (*FGrH* 90 F78): 'The Romans used to exhibit spectacles of single combats, not only in their public shows and in their theatres, having derived the custom from the Etruscans (παρὰ Τυρρηνῶν παραλαβόντες τὸ ἔθος)'. A fragment attributed to Suetonius' *De Regibus* or his *De Spectaculis* credited the origin of Roman gladiatorial combat to the first Etruscan King of Rome, Tarquin the Elder, and saying that this practice only lasted for twenty-seven years

[17] Iovis Frater.

[18] As do many Latin proper names of masculine gender that belong in the first declension.

[19] There is the *Tomba degli Auguri* wall painting showing a character known as 'Phersu', a bearded figure with a dog on a lead, assaulting a man with his head enveloped in some sort of sack. Again, interpretation can only be speculative but has been considered (for example by Poulsen, 1922) to be a forerunner of the *venatio* or *damnatio ad bestias*.

[20] Although there were some that had other views, such as Athenaeus (4.40) who quotes Posidonius as saying that Celtic peoples had single combats at their entertainments and wounded and even killed one another.

[21] Also sometimes called the Campanian theory.

[22] The Samnites were the last of the Italic peoples to fall to the Romans in the 1st century BCE and were eventually assimilated into Roman culture, full detail in Salmon 1967.

[23] Also included are scenes of chariot racing, mourning and corpses laid out on biers, Welch 2007: 14.

[24] The tomb frescoes at Paestum also portray a variety of other contests such as a duel, a boxing match and chariot races.

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presence of referees, three pairs of fighting men and spectators indicate that these wall paintings do not depict single combatant warfare (Salmon 1967: 60-61; Kyle 1999: 45). A pomegranate, the symbol of the underworld, is also often present and places these combats in a funerary context.

Figure 4.6: Early frescoes of gladiatorial combat from Campanian tombs.

As a result of these tombs and their contents, the fact that the area was known for some of the most famous *ludi* or gladiatorial schools in later history, and finally as a result of their proximity to the oldest amphitheatres in this area, it seemed reasonable to argue that Campania was the source of gladiatorial contests.

This theory is linked to the history of the Rome's relations with the Samnites. Rome and its Campanian allies had defeated the Samnites[25] at Caudine Forks (321 BCE) and it was at the celebratory banquet that the contempt and hatred of the Campanians towards their Samnite neighbours came to the fore through impersonation intended as an insult to the defeated enemy.[26] The people of the city of Samnium had an ambiguous relationship with the city of Rome. The ancient sources refer to their bellicose nature, but this can probably be ascribed to the fact that a warlike status existed between them and the Romans, who compiled the ancient evidence that we have.[27] It is quite likely that this supposedly war-like nature of the Samnites and the link between military action and

[25] The many wars fought between Samnium and Rome lived on in Roman collective memory for many centuries. By Livy's time, the prejudice against these southern peoples had become entrenched, and one may actually expect some bias in the writing up of these accounts, Stepney 2013: 73.

[26] This humiliation is reversed by Spartacus, who, as Florus (*Epit*. 2.8) tells us, made captured Roman soldiers to fight as gladiators, not just to execute them but also to humiliate them in the process. Cassius Dio (68.32.2) writes that Jewish rebels did the same thing to both Romans and Greek prisoners in Cyrene, North Africa.

[27] The Romans fought three wars against the Samnites in the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE, with the involvement of an array of shifting alliances on either side. For the 4th century and the Social War, see Dench 1995: 3, who holds that ancient evidence for Samnium indicates that it differed considerably from the Hellenistic world in terms of social organisation. Dench also comments on aspects of Roman 'self-definition' *vis à vis* the other Italian peoples, and how this is reflected in Rome's literature and ideology.

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gladiature gained popularity among scholars in a century in which Europe was itself undergoing wars (Stepney 2013: 72). In addition, ancient authors like Livy also gave support to this theory of origin:

> So the Romans made use of the splendid armour (*insignibus armis*) of their enemies to do honour to the gods; while the Campanians, in consequence of their pride and in hatred of the Samnites, equipped after this fashion the gladiators (*gladiatores... eo ornatu armarunt*) who furnished them entertainment at their feasts (*quod spectaculum inter epulas erat*), and bestowed on them the name of Samnites (*Samnitiumque nomine compellarunt*) (9.40.17, transl. Foster).

Further support for this suggestion is that the Romans designated their first gladiator type the 'Samnite' as well as the introduction of the 'Samnite' type of gladiatorial armature (Futrell 1997: 20).[28] Another early type of gladiator was designated as the 'Gaul', representing the Roman enemy responsible for the 390 BCE sack of Rome and one who remained a threat until the middle of the 1st century BCE and Julius Caesar's successful victory over them, soon followed in the early 1st century BCE by the *thraex*[29] after the Roman victories over the Thracians in the Mithriditic Wars.[30]

- Influences of battlefield violence

New ideas and theories around violence influenced the perception of gladiatorial combat, seeing it rather as representational of the violence of the battlefield. Kyle (1999: 45) holds that the origin of Rome's bloody entertainment cannot be isolated to any one location or any other simple cultural transfer:

> Combats, sacrifices, and blood sports were simply too widespread in antiquity. Before the first gladiatorial fight in Rome had already been exposed, directly or indirectly, to all the suggested original influences, by then Rome already knew other spectacles of death: animals sacrificed, tormented, or hunted in festivals, criminals consecrated to Ceres and executed, and countless acts of brutality in war. Since the adoption of imported cultural features such as sports and spectacles usually involves cultural adaptation, whatever the origins or precursors beyond Rome, the best historical approach is to concentrate on the context of Rome's adoption and development of the gladiatorial spectacle.

Futrell (1997: 170) refers to the amphitheatre as a 'politicized temple that housed the mythic re-enactment of the cult of the Roman statehood'. She sees gladiatorial spectacle as a 'model for understanding the basis of Roman power'. In her view, the gladiator's death was in essence a foundational sacrifice in response to the 'crisis of empire' and a validation of the Romans' battle for

[28] Gladiators who fought with a rectangular shield and sword, such as the *provocator,* were said to be 'armed in the Samnite manner', Auguet 1972: 80; 215.

[29] This gladiatorial type was spelled *thraex* or *threx* to differentiate it from the native Thracian known as *Thrax,* Dunkle 2008: 312.

[30] These early types of gladiator, apart from the *thraex*, eventually disappeared and more neutral types such as *murmillo, secutor, retarius* etc. were introduced by early Empire. Degradation and humiliation of enemies continued though through the use of triumphs where the captured enemy was paraded publicly and often executed at the end (Dion. Hal. 34; Plut. *Pomp*. 14; 45; 37; Suet. *Caes*. 37.1-2; 49.4; 51.1; Suet. *Calig*. 46; Suet. *Claud*. 17; Joseph. *BJ* 7.3-7).

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military supremacy in the Mediterranean. This may be going a little too far, particularly if applied to the later centuries of the spectacles. Many later scholars have seen this type of interpretation as naïve, and it is also somewhat at odds with the violence and pleasure interrelationship that we see in the viewing of gladiatorial spectacle. But for the earlier centuries it does tally with the idea that sacrifice was understood to some degree as performing ritual death in the service of the living.

FROM FUNERAL GAMES TO POLITICAL GAMES

- Earliest records of funeral games

Our earliest reports of a public gladiatorial fight are by Livy and Valerius Maximus and date to 264 BCE,[31] the early stages of Rome's First Punic War against Carthage.[32] The ex-consul Decimus Junius Brutus and his brother staged a *munus*[33] in honour of their dead father, Brutus Pera, in the Forum Boarium, involving three matched pairs of gladiators. Ausonius[34] adds that these six gladiators fought with Thracian armour. Much academic effort has gone into explaining how the events of 264 BCE arrived virtually complete, without any traces of a preceding development.

The *munera*, the practice of honouring dead and important relatives at funeral ceremonies, continued throughout the ensuing centuries, initiated by private citizens. The next *munus* on record, 49 years later, was given in 215 BCE on the occasion of the funeral of M. Aemelius Lepidus.[35] A significant leap had taken place as this *munus* was carried out over a period of three days, and consisted of 22 pairs of gladiators, while the location had changed from the Forum Boarium to the Forum Romanum, the social and political heart of Rome, indicating that gladiatorial combat was by then the accepted Roman way to honour a deceased relative (Dunkle 2008: 154).[36]

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[31] Thus, in fact more than two centuries before the lifetimes of either Livy or Valerius Maximus.

[32] Livy *Epit.*16.6: 'To honour his father, Decimus Junius Brutus was the first one to organize gladiatorial games'. Valerius Maximus (2.4.7): 'The first gladiatorial show (*gladiatorium munus*) in Rome was given in the Forum Boarium in the Consulship of Ap. Claudius and Q. Fulvius. The donors were Marcus and Decimus, sons of Brutus Pera, honouring their father's ashes with a funerary memorial (*funebri memoria patris cineris honorando*)'. Servius (*Verg. Comm.* 3.67) also informs us that *munus* signified the sacrifice of gladiators, in the sense that there was an obligation on them to sacrifice their opponents to the deceased.

[33] The word *munus* itself has been variously interpreted. Ancient sources from the time of the Republic use *munus* in at least two senses, most often as duty, otherwise as a benefaction or gift up to when it came to denote a gladiatorial spectacle. Stepney, 2013: 65, sees the various readings of *munus* as reflecting 'the multiple versions of the patrician/plebeian figuration' and the shifting power relations between the two groups. This is perhaps a little debatable, but it is clear that the *munus* and gladiatorial spectacle developed in a socio-political framework.

[34] Ausonius, *Griphus* 36-37: 'Decimus and Marcus Junius Brutus displayed three pairs of gladiators (*tris primas Thraecum pugnas*)'.

[35] Again, recorded by Livy 23.30.15 who also says that in the year 174 BCE many insignificant *munera* bar one was given, Livy 41.28.11. Probably there were none in this period of 49 years of sufficient note to warrant finding their way into the historical record.

[36] According to Valerius Maximus (2.4.7) these *munera* were staged in the Forum Boarium. Polybius (6.53), writing roughly 2 centuries earlier, records that at that time they were held in the Forum Romanum and the rostra.

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A good number of similar events dating from the middle to late Republic up to the principate of Augustus are referred to in the ancient evidence. Livy is our main source for the earlier period, while Cicero provides a good deal of evidence for the late Republic. There is enough testimony to show that gladiators featured in urban Rome as part of several burial ceremonies for influential members of the elite, and that the gladiatorial contests became bigger and more spectacular over time, from the three pairs of fighters at the funeral of Brutus to the 74 gladiators paired up for the death of Titus Flamininus' father (conqueror of Philip V), lasting four days in 174 BCE, and 120 gladiator pairs in the funerary rites of the *pontifex maximus* Publius Licinius Crassus Dives in 183 BCE.[37] In the closing years of the 3rd century BCE, the *munera* also came to be linked with military excursions when soldiers fighting the Carthaginians in Spain volunteered as gladiators in a ceremony commemorating the death of the father of Scipio Africanus the Elder (Livy *Per*. 28; Plass 1995: 30).[38]

The most spectacular and the last of the funerary gladiatorial shows for private individuals was held in 46 BCE, sponsored by Julius Caesar. Because the games were held for Caesar's daughter, who had died in 54 BCE (8 years earlier)[39] this event in particular, is usually taken to indicate the disassociation of the games from its traditional funerary role and the beginnings of gladiatorial sport.

- Changeover to euergetism and politics

Initially, therefore, and until the end of the Republic, gladiatorial contests remained in private hands but gradually expanded from honouring the dead and winning favour from the gods to winning over the masses and allowing the sponsor to earn honour and support. The practice of euergetism or private liberality for public benefit established competitive patronage for shows, and in the mid-Republic this became dominated by individuals wishing to promote themselves socially and politically (Lomas & Cornell 2003: 1-11).[40] Patronage was fundamental to the Roman political system during both the late Republic and the Empire (de Ste. Croix 1954: 33; Lomas & Cornell 2003: 1-11) and munificence coupled with brutality were central to the system of control exercised by the elite over the masses.[41] Juvenal's bitter comments about how easily votes could be bought could as easily refer to the struggle for dominance among the factions of the *optimates* and the *populares* in the late Republic as his own

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[37] Livy supplies details: 41.28 for 174 BCE; 23.30.16 re: 216 BCE; 39.46.2 re: 183 BCE.
[38] Athenaeus (155a) quotes Diylos from the 3rd century BCE, who speaks of four soldiers of the Macedonian chief Cassander fighting each other at the funeral of the king and queen of Boeotia, van Creveld 2013: 56. During the imperial period, Trajan, for example, caused 10,000 men to fight for four months to celebrate his military conquest of Dacia.
[39] During his consulship *in absentia*, his unprecedented games for his daughter, lavish in the extreme, betray his aspirations to become dictator.
[40] Plutarch's comment 'wealth loses all radiance without an audience' (Plut. *Mor*. 528a) is appropriate to these contexts of patronage. There were certainly many other forms of munificence, such as public buildings, Kokkina 2012.
[41] Nevertheless, as Potter 1996: 131 points out, using such power was in the public eye and 'public actions invited public response', there being nothing worse than the uncontrolled mob of the late Empire, as history was to show.

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lifetime.[42] The *populares* in particular were known for trying to win votes from the people's assemblies with exactly those gifts in cash and kind – grants of land, the palliatives of the corn dole and public entertainment, at which free gifts such as meat from the animals killed in the arena were sometimes distributed - Juvenal's *panem et circenses*.[43] Sometimes the emperors would have wooden balls thrown into the crowd which could be exchanged for prizes, to keep the population on the edge of excitement. The food item, silver, gold, clothing, an animal, or even the slave that was named on the ball, was something the recipient could claim (Dio 66.25).[44]

The arena was therefore a valuable tool for politicians who wanted to get ahead in building popularity among the people. The sponsor or *editor* supervised the games he personally had funded and for its duration was the centre of attention.[45] All eyes were on him, and it was his chance to promote himself. In 55 CE, for example Pompey used spoils from his victories in the East in his games (Cic. *Ad Amic.* 7.1) to simultaneously advertise his military successes as well as his largesse. The emperor would later become the sole *editor*, well-illustrated in a letter written by Hadrian to the association of artists of Dionysus around 134 CE (Coleman & Nelis-Clément 2012: 11-12).

The games had thus mutated from a rite into a spectacle in which the political had eclipsed the religious and commemorative elements, as Tertullian confirms:

> If we are considering names – though this class of public entertainment has passed from being a compliment to the dead to being a compliment to the living on entering office (*honoribus mortuorum ad honores viventium*) – I mean quaestorships, magistracies, flaminates and priesthoods - still, since the guilt of idolatry sticks to the dignity of the name, whatever is done in the name of dignity must inevitably share the taint of its origin (Tertullian, *De Spec.* 12, transl. Glover).

Larger and larger crowds were attracted to these ceremonies and large audiences ensured the memory of both the event and the sponsor.[46] It took two centuries for the gladiatorial games and arena animal hunts to develop as the centrepieces of the arena entertainment. Secularisation of the games was completed under Augustus when the state assumed complete responsibility for the various performances. Wiedemann (2002: 169) indicates that under the Empire, the emperor was obliged to share his power in some form with the masses, and he did so by holding public games, although at

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[42] The *optimates* and *populares* were two factions of the political elite. The *optimates* supported senatorial authority and power, whereas the *populares* attempted to gain power by using the tribunes and the people's assemblies.

[43] On this power struggle see Raaflaub 2008: 1-46, particularly for the reliability of ancient sources for this period. *Panem et circenses* (Juv. *Sat* 10.81) has since become associated with the decadence of the Roman people as this was expressed in the context of the author's moralising discourse. In reality, the feeding and entertaining of the urban populace was an important component in overall social cohesion. As Czarnecki 2021 points out, the attractions of free gifts are not so different from the tactics of our popular entertainments today.

[44] Rather reminiscent of modern televised game shows.

[45] Julius Caesar is frequently cited as an example in that he used the games in his early career as an opportunity of winning popularity, despite incurring heavy debts in the process.

[46] As noted earlier in this chapter (p.69), the largest crowd attendance was however not at these gladiatorial spectacles, but at the chariot races.

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this early stage of Empire the power on the part of the masses was more latent. In his *Res gestae* Augustus devotes an entire paragraph to his own munificence, by which he clearly set considerable store:

> Three times in my own name I gave a show of gladiators, and five times in the name of my sons or grandsons; in these shows there fought about ten thousand men. Twice in my own name I furnished for the people an exhibition of athletes gathered from all parts of the world, and a third time in the name of my grandson. Four times I gave games in my own name; as representing other magistrates twenty-three times. For the college of quindecemvirs, as master of that college and with Marcus Agrippa as my colleague, I conducted the Secular Games in the consulship of Gaius Furnius and Marcus Silanus. In my thirteenth consulship I gave, for the first time, the games of Mars, which, since that time, the consuls by decree of the Senate have given in successive years in conjunction with me. In my own name, or that of my sons or grandsons, on twenty-six occasions I gave to the people, in the circus, in the forum, or in the amphitheatre, hunts of African wild beasts, in which about three thousand five hundred beasts were slain (*RGDA* 22, transl. Shipley, my emphases).

Dio (54.2) also informs us that Augustus provided the praetors with the funds for at least one, sometimes two, performances a year (amongst the 61 allocated days), as part of his policy to limit elite opportunities for favours with the Roman populace.

The sponsoring of important games now came to be monopolised by Roman emperors, each hoping to surpass the *spectacula* of their predecessors (Beacham 1999). The imperial extravaganzas were expressly designed to overwhelm, to be unique as well as monumental. The sheer cost of putting on such games certainly advertised the absolute power of the emperor, an overt and ostentatious advertisement of his authority over the Empire and its inhabitants. Martial's *Spectacula* paints the emperor as a master illusionist ruling over a world order (Mülke 2011: 532-534). On his command, hunters would despatch menageries of magically appearing wild animals – ostriches, crocodiles, rhinos, bears and tigers; a condemned criminal with wings would be hurled across the arena to represent a character from a Greek myth; and incredible naval battles took place, in which thousands of prisoners of war died as they were slaughtered or drowned.

- Riots

But although activities in the arena could be controlled to some extent, and the populace could be pacified, patronage and munificence also perforce had to carry the negative consequences of expectation. The riot during the games at Pompeii has been mentioned above,[47] but the fact that it was depicted in someone's home (Fig. 4.7) shows that it left an impression on the inhabitants of the town. During the reign of Tiberius, the people of Pollentia blocked a chief centurion's funeral until his heirs would commit to providing a gladiatorial display. This escalated into violence until Tiberius sent in

[47] See above p. 49.

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two cohorts, which resolved the issue through arrest and imprisonment of town citizens and councillors (Suet. *Tib*. 37.3).

Those elected to office could find themselves on the brink of financial ruin as their societal positions obliged them to stage luxurious games. All over the Empire, public entertainment reached its peak in the 2nd century CE, and Mrozek (1971: 62-68) indicates that the financial problems encountered in the 3rd century CE seriously affected the interdependence of the community and its patrons.

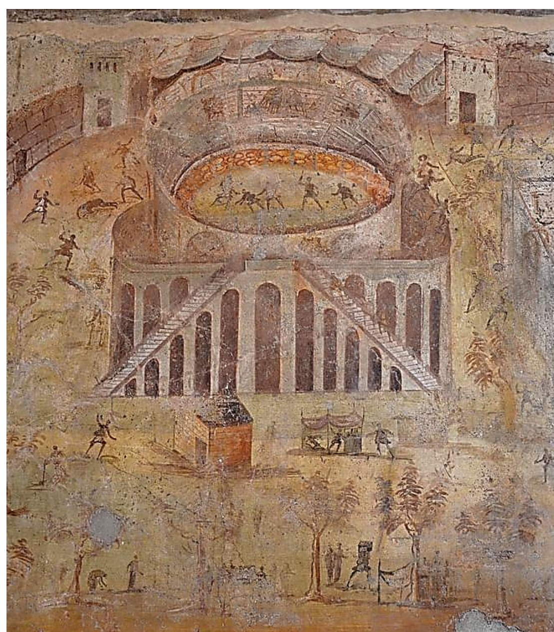

Figure 4.7: Fresco from the house of Actius Anicetus, Pompeii, depicting the riot during the games in Pompeii in 59 CE (Naples National Archaeological Museum).

- Provincial euergetism and spectacula

Patronage and munificence were part of a relationship between the elite and the community that was not just confined to Rome, it spilled over into the provinces where the giving of sumptuous games required imperial assent.

Here, those who sponsored the games could demonstrate their status, taste, self-control and power to the sub-elites, Roman and non-Roman. Amphitheatres in far flung parts of the Roman world were the stamp of Romanisation, assuring soldiers and citizens that they were part of the Roman world. They were a symbol of Roman triumph and control over 'barbarism' (Wiedemann 2002: 46-47). Watching this mass slaughter regularly also reaffirmed to many who they were and imbued in them an almost military ethos that contributed to the maintenance of the Empire. In the provinces, attendance of the games was a socially acceptable way of indicating 'Romanness' and cultural superiority (Hope & Whitehouse 2003: 305).[48] The competition among local elites shown in the underwriting of the games meant that the Roman Empire had a rich culture of festivals which monopolised the greater portion of the calendar. Finally, by the 4th century the Roman calendar allowed for 176 days for staged games per year – 102 days for theatre, 64 days for chariot races and 10 days in December exclusively for gladiatorial contests (Wiedemann 2002: 12). The amphitheatre was thus emblematic of Roman civilisation: to soldiers, miles from home on the outskirts of the Roman Empire, to conquered and

[48] There have been suggestions that the games were less popular in the Greek East, Robert 1940: 23-24, although there is evidence of the gladiatorial games in Athens, Corinth, Rhodes, Antioch, Beirut and other areas in the East, Papapostolou 1989; Hope & Whitehouse 2003: 305; Mann 2009: 272-297; Papanikolaou 2019: 206-207.

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unconquered peoples who chanced to look upon it. It symbolised the activities which took place inside it: the mastery over animals, the execution of justice over criminals, over prisoners of war (Bauman 1996: 18-19). As Wiedemann (2002: 46) concludes, 'the arena was visibly the place where civilisation and barbarism met'.[49]

- Religious component

The religious component continued to be important even though these were no longer considered funeral games and were dissociated from the death of any particular individual. Instead, the *munera* now celebrated the Res Publica and honoured her gods as per the Roman annual calendar (Futrell 1997: 3). This purpose can be detected from the fact that some of the arena assistants dressed up to represent deities (Mercury or perhaps Pluto or Charon, appropriately those who carried away the dead combatants (Tert. *De praescr. Haeret*. 15).[50]

- Other contexts

Evidence of more secular contexts also exists, for example gladiatorial combat as a feature of entertainment at feasts and banquets (Nic.Dam. *FGrH* 90 F78; Strabo 5.4.13).[51] Silius Italicus, towards the end of the 1st century CE, likewise paints this rather more highly coloured version (examples which will have particular relevance to Kubrick's *Spartacus* in the next chapter):

> Then too, it was their [the inhabitants of Capua] ancient custom to enliven (*exhilarare*) their banquets with bloodshed, and to combine with their feasting the horrid sight of armed men fighting (*spectacula dira certantum ferro*); often the combatants fell dead above the very cups of the revellers, and the tables were stained with streams of blood (*Punica* 11.51-54, transl. Duff).

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[49] A state of affairs which continued even into late antiquity, see Puk 2014 for detailed coverage of this period.

[50] There were some superstitions around the death of the gladiator that may hark back to its perceived religious role. The drinking of gladiatorial blood was widely believed to be a cure for epilepsy and is attested by a range of authors including Celsus, Scribonius Largus (who suggests that people eat the gladiator's liver too), and even Pliny. Such blood had magical properties: cure epilepsy, enflame fertility or even douse it, hence the stories around the bride whose hair had been parted by a spear dipped in a defeated gladiator's blood was destined to enjoy a fertile married life.

[51] A 19th century artist Francesco Netti's interpretation of this can be seen at https://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/gladiators/meal.html In this interpretation, scattered sand can be seen on the wooden floor. The victorious gladiator is surrounded by a bevy of admiring ladies, while the majority of the dinner spectators lie about in apparent inebriation.

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THE WORLD OF GLADIATORIAL GAMES

WHO WAS THE GLADIATOR?

Gladiators came from a very wide market: slaves, criminals (*damnati ad ludos*),[52] but also freedmen, free men (*auctorati*) who had chosen freely to take part or who had sold themselves into gladiatorial service – all could make a career in the arena (van den Hoek 2013).[53] Generally they were foreigners, and often prisoners captured during the many Roman wars. But even prosperous equestrians and senators were reported to have competed in the arena in spite of the social stigma and/or permanent political powerlessness.

- Virtus

Everything associated with the amphitheatres indicated to the people what the political leaders felt was important for Rome's continued existence, and gladiatorial combat was the perfect propaganda instrument to inculcate ideas which they considered essential to their continued power (Hopkins 1983: 68-69). Gladiatorial skirmishes displayed the values important in a highly militarised society, and rewarded courage while it punished cowardice. In cases where gladiators fought to the death, the crowd was eager to see the *virtus* shown when faced with death – as a result those gladiators who had lost nobly would often be permitted to live or even be freed, whilst those who had displayed no courage were executed on the spot (Zoll 2002: 163). Wistrand (1992: 56) maintains that in antiquity gladiators were held to display courage and strength (*fortitudo*), the rigorousness of their training (*disciplina*), and many other admirable qualities such as endurance, or desire for glory and ambition. This in turn was then used to explain their popularity with the masses, and scholars generally accepted *virtus* as an acceptable clarification of why such gladiatorial violence gave the Romans such pleasure. The *munus* therefore demonstrated important Roman values and the necessity to die a virtuous death. The gladiator became a symbol of *virtus* because, in being willing to fight to the death, his heroic act ennobled himself, those who controlled the games, and the audience. The gladiatorial shows were underpinned by their war culture, which also lauded discipline and noble death. In the arena civilisation showed itself superior to the wild and untamed, and triumphed over the outlaw, the barbarian, and above all the enemy. Seneca uses the image of the gladiator to make his point on Stoic attitudes to death:

> As Cicero says, we feel hostility to gladiators if they are eager to save their life no matter how; if they display contempt for it, we favour them. The same thing, you may know,

[52] The precise distinction between the *damnatio ad ludum* and the *damnatio ad gladium* is not entirely clear from our legal sources. Ulpian's comment is quoted in Potter 2010 n.10, 'that a rescript of Hadrian stating that rustlers in areas where the crime was common, or in cases where the defendant was particularly notorious should be sentenced *ad gladium* must be a reference to *damnatio ludi* (*Coll. Leg. Mos. et Rom*. 11.7.3–4).

[53] These were often persons who were social outcasts, manumitted slaves, discharged soldiers, or former gladiators who had been freed on retirement but who chose to return for a period of service.

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> applies to us; for often the cause of death is the fear of dying. Mistress Fortune, who uses us for her sport, says: 'Why should I save you, you base and cowardly creature? You will be hacked and pierced with all the more wounds, because you do not know how to offer your throat. But you, who receive the steel courageously and do not withdraw your neck or put out your hands to stop it, shall both live longer and die more easily.' He who fears death will never do anything worthy of a man who is alive (*Tranq*. 11.1-6, transl. Basore).

There is a certain irony in this, as has been pointed out by Auguet (1972: 196-197), since gladiators, the possessors of these virtues, were in fact *infamis*, slaves, criminals or war prisoners.[54] Cicero actually uses this, with some hyperbole, to extend this gladiatorial model of *virtus* into Roman life, maintaining that if men of such dubious moral fibre as gladiators could exhibit *virtus* when facing death then there was no knowing what a freeborn law-abiding Roman citizen could do:

> Look at gladiators, who are either ruined men or barbarians (*perditi homines aut barbari*), what blows they endure! See, how men, who have been well trained, prefer to receive a blow rather than basely (*turpiter*) avoid it! How frequently it is made evident that there is nothing they put higher than giving satisfaction to their owner or to the people! Even when weakened with wounds they send word to their owners to ascertain their pleasure: if they have given satisfaction to them they are content to fall. What gladiator of ordinary merit (*mediocris gladiator*) has ever uttered a groan or changed countenance? Who of them has disgraced himself, I will not say upon his feet, but who has disgraced himself in his fall? Who after falling has drawn in his neck when ordered to suffer the fatal stroke? (*Tusc*. 2.17.4, transl. King).

This is also reinforced by Seneca (*Ep*. 30.8), who from a Stoic perspective advanced the doctrine that *virtus* was more important than life, whilst Pliny (*Pan.* 33.1) felt that this was an example to be set to the audience, when he describes how Trajan's spectacles: 'inspire them to face honourable wounds and look with scorn on death', or as Libanius (*Orat.* 1.5) admits, simply admiring the bravery of the gladiators who had fought at his uncle's games.

Through his valour the gladiator in the arena was the personification of personal redemption and self-vindication at the 'moment of truth', that moment of focused and an increased awareness that went further than anything that could be experienced outside the arena. At one moment he was the victim, under the bleakest constraint; in the next a saviour for both himself and the audience.[55]

Needless to say the ability to face death with courage was widely valued amongst the soldiery, and Rome always had an increasing number of active soldiers and also veterans. The standard equipment put the gladiators' bodies on display in two particularly telling ways. Firstly, the majority had their

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[54] Auguet 1972: 196-197 terms this a blurring or a metamorphosis of their social identity.This aspect will be discussed in more detail in the Social Status section below on P.95.

[55] A losing gladiator was thought to have gained redemption from the *infamia* that surrounded the gladiator through his profession whilst alive when he stoically accepted the *editor's* decision of death and surrendered to the sword of his opponent and to death, Wiedemann 2002: 92-3; 35. *Infamia* was a legally inflicted state of ill-repute that had real world consequences and could be incurred in a variety of ways or attached to a profession, Castillo Sanz 2012: 157-158.

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heads covered or concealed. Unlike the filmic representations there were no opportunities for close-ups to personalize the combat or individual displays of expressions of anguish or triumph. Secondly, a variety of armour was used on gladiator's heads, arms and legs, while their chests were left exposed, symbolic of the arena's ethos and their preparedness to die. Most fought with a predominantly bare torso not aimed at baring flesh for the benefit of the spectators but as the embodiment of the value of bravery or *virtus* of the gladiator. Seneca saw this display of courage in the face of death as both virtuous and virtue-inspiring and appealing to a Stoic thinker. He considered the arena illustrative for men to comprehend their irrational fear, since the fear of dying, in his thinking, was worse than actual death itself (Cagniart 2000: 614):

> But the natural evils which I have mentioned, want and sickness, steal upon us silently with no shock of terror to the eye or to the ear. The other kind of evil comes, so to speak, in the form of a huge parade. Surrounding it is a retinue of swords and fire and chains and a mob of beasts to be let loose upon the disembowelled entrails of men (Sen. *Ep.* 14.4-5).[56]

For Seneca the *virtus* of a gladiator in the arena was an example of how the wise man should act in the face of adversity – the opportunity was there for him to test himself: 'No man seems to me more unhappy than one who has never met his adversity' (*Prov*. 2.3).[57] Courage and the scorning of adversity were to be adopted in the same fashion as the gladiator disdains death. Facing death was man's ultimate test and it was in the arena that Seneca's readers could best see what he meant.

A gladiator was considered debased, to have *infamia*, and his *amor mortis*, his fervent collaboration in his own death, provided that moment of redemption for both himself and the audience. Watching the 'brave gladiator fight and die was a positive *askesis* for the audience' but watching him 'cringe or despair was a debilitating and shameful experience' (Barton 1989: 24). Without this collaboration between the actors and the audience the viewer would have been nothing more than a participant of what was an otherwise disreputable spectacle, distasteful and unpleasant for all concerned. This translated the games into nothing more than naked homicides (*mera homicidia*) rather than providing opportunity for glory.

- Activities in the arena

Contests generally involved the pitting of a single fighter against another in a highly stylised struggle, sometimes to the death.[58] Those who died were those considered subhuman and expendable such as primarily slaves, criminals, or sometimes, prisoners of war.

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[56] The same image can be found in *Ep*. 109.18, and *NQ* 4A *Praef* 5.
[57] Here Seneca is quoting his friend, the philosopher Demetrius.
[58] According to Barton 1993: 13, gladiators in the 1st century had perhaps a one in ten chance of being killed in the arena with an increased chance of death from then on. However, the odds on the risk of dying in the arena were not equally

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Initially, captured soldiers had to fight with their own weapons and in the particular style of combat to which they were accustomed from their own culture. It was from these prisoners of war that the gladiators developed their exotic appearances, distinguishable by their weaponry as defeated enemies as opposed to the weapons of their Roman conquerors.

As previously mentioned, the Samnites were held to be the model for Rome's professional gladiators, with their military equipment being the first used and then adopted in the arena. As a Samnite the combatant wore an elaborate helmet (*galea*), a wide leather belt (*balteus*) reinforced with bands of metal, and probably a greave (*ocrea*) on the left leg. He carried a large oblong shield (*scutum*) and a sword (*gladius*). The *gladius*, says Isidorus of Seville (*Etym*. 23.6), acquired its name because it 'divides the throat' (*gulam dividere*). However, after 290 BCE the Samnites became allies of Rome and their name disappeared from the arena.

Figure 4.8: Galea or Samnite helmet**.**

The Samnite was replaced by the *secutor* or 'pursuer' (the group in which Commodus competed), who was paired with the nimbler *retarius*, as illustrated in Figs. 4.9 and 4.10. The *retarius* carried a trident and a net with which he ensnared his opponent, and for protection wore only a shoulder piece (*galerus*) on his left side. Alternately, they also sometimes were matched against the more heavily armed *murmillo.*

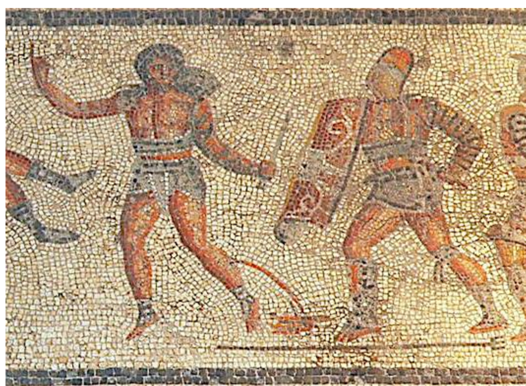

Figure 4.9: A *retiarius* stabs at a *secutor* with his trident. Mosaic from Zliten, c. 2nd –3rd century CE.

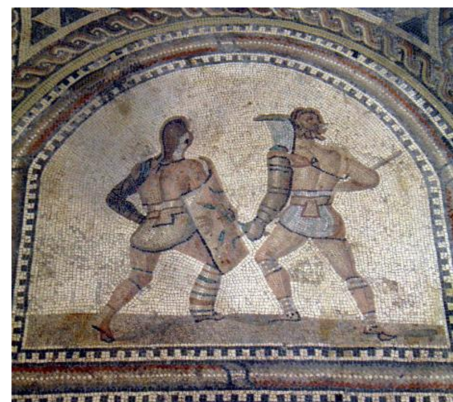

Figure 4.10: Mosaic depicting a battle between a retiarius and secutor.

distributed; condemned criminals had very little chance of survival although for prisoners of war, slaves and volunteers this could vary being dependent upon their skill, courage and rank and on the liberality of the producer of the games.

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Another typical pairing was the *murmillo* and the *hoplomachus.* This particular grouping carried a small round shield, and fought with a lance and short straight sword. Because of the smaller shields, both the *murmillo* and the *hoplomachus* wore long greaves. Leather straps (*fasciae*) were frequently wrapped around the arms and legs for further protection.

Two other gladiatorial categories also took their name from defeated tribes, the *Galli* (Gauls) and *Thraeces* (Thracians). It was common for the *murmillo* with his fish-like crested helmet to compete against the *thraex* or Thracian who was armed with a scimitar (*sica*) and a small square shield (Figs. 4.11 and 12).

Figure 4. 11: Mosaic of a Thracian gladiator, Gladiator Mosaic in Bad Kreuznach.

Figure 4.12: Thraex helmet. This find is in excellent condition, with its griffin shaped crest.

There were also several 'exotic' types:[59] the *essedarius*, who fought from war chariots in the fashion of the British Celts and who were probably introduced by Julius Caesar after his invasion of that island; the *equites* (Fig. 4.13), 'who entered the arena on horseback, but are inevitably shown fighting dismounted' (Nossov 2009: 170-1). Then there were the *laquearii*, who, says Isidorus (*Etym.* XVIII.56), used a noose or lasso to bring down their opponents; the *velites* or skirmishers who hurled missiles, an undiscriminating form of fighting that was 'more pleasing to the spectators than the others'; the *sagittarius*, who used bows and arrows; the *dimachaerus* (Fig. 4.14), who wielded a sword in each hand; the ominously named *scissor* (carver) and *provocator* (challenger), and others about which even less is known. One of the most 'bizarre' was the *andabata*, whose 'helmet effectively acted as a blindfold as he groped in the dark' (Nossov 2009: 170-1).[60]

[59] See Appendices 2 and 3 for a list of the types of gladiators and the typical gladiator pairings.
[60] For detailed descriptions of gladiators and their weaponry in mosaics and reliefs, see Flecker 2015.

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Figure 4.13: The two *equites* can be identified by their sleeveless tunics.

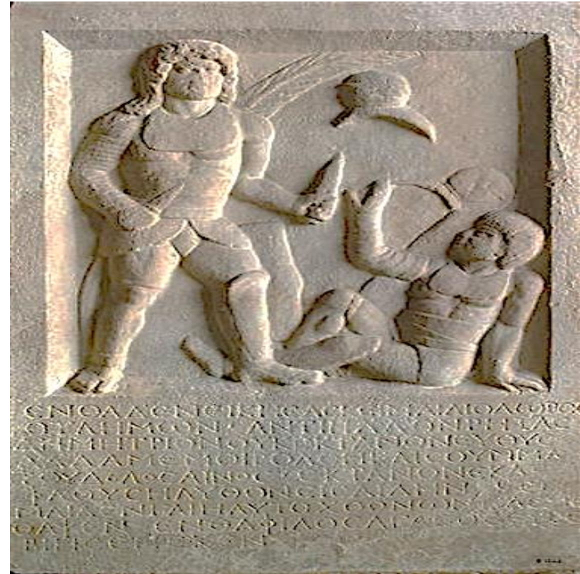

Figure 4.14: The epitaph of the *dimachaerus* gladiator Diodorus who stands victorious over his opponent.

As in our modern boxing matches and bullfights, the principle of 'the equal opponent' was central to the Roman concept of glory. An unmatched fight degraded both the contestants, irrespective of rank and abilities. Professional gladiators seem to have been ranked according to a *palus* grouping; mention is made of *primus palus* gladiators or *secundus palus* gladiators, for example. Not only would rankings help establish costs for the *lanista* and *munerarius*, but perhaps also match-ups between gladiators. A hierarchy was created according to success and experience so that differing classes of gladiators would therefore be suitably paired with others of comparable skill, the advantages of one offsetting the strengths of the other. Whilst the gladiators were evenly matched this was therefore not identical; *secutores* and *murmillones* whilst protected, were slowed down by their cumbersome armour, and *retiarii* were more mobile as they were lightly armed. It was this deliberate asymmetry that was considered so interesting. Each class had their own individual weapons, strategies, and skills, which could only be demonstrated by comparison. Seneca remarked:

> A gladiator judges it disgraceful to be matched against an inferior and he knows that he is conquered without glory who is conquered without danger (*Prov.* 3.4, transl. Basore).

Resultantly, similarly armed gladiators were rarely pitted against each other. The most popular contests, appear to have been those between the *thraex* or *retiarius* and a more heavily armed adversary, or what the public considered *parmularii* or *scutarii* (small-shield and big-shield men).

It is possible that pairing was carried out at the last moment through the casting of lots, possibly in front of the audience, as there is a notable lack of *edicta muneris* that specifically advertise paired gladiators. Nossov (2009: 135) considers that this means that 'the sorting must have been held separately for each rank of gladiators, as every pair was to consist of more or less equally trained combatants, to prevent the disappointment of a swiftly ended fight … a novice would hardly be seen

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fighting against a veteran of the arena'. But occasionally this did happen as when the newcomer Marcus Attilius fought against the seasoned Hilarus and unexpectedly won (*CIL* IV 10236-10238), creating his own legend.[61]

Artemidorus in his extant five-volume Greek work, the *Oneirocritica* or *Oneirokritikon* identifies a specific type of gladiatorial combat, the ἀπότομος πυγμή in one of his dream analyses. Carter (2015: 40) indicates that the adjective ἀπότομος appears in a number of honorary inscriptions relating to gladiature from the Hellenic world – it seems to apply to a distinctive type of spectacle, but this is not entirely clear.[62] Zingerle (1930) thought that the ἀπότομος combat may have been in some way an especially cruel or savage form of gladiatorial combat, and that the relatively infrequent *sine missione* combat was implied.[63] The Gortyn inscription lines 10–12 reads:

> (He provided) the four days of gladiatorial combats, during which on each day there were four ἀπότομα pairs and the remaining pairs were with sharp weapons (τὰ δὲ ὑπόλοιπα ζεύγη τῷ ὀξεῖ σιδή[ρ]ῳ)…

The combats were overseen by a supervising official or referee, the *summa rudis*, who is often pictured in mosaics, sometimes with an assistant as well (Figures 4.15 and 4.16). He held a rod or stick and stopped the combat when one of the fighters submitted. Then the sponsor of the games would judge whether the loser would either be killed or be granted *missio* or remission. Only fights billed as *sine missione* (which were fights to the death) precluded the possibility of surrender (Coulston 2009: 201-202). This in itself is a further indication that most gladiatorial fights did in fact not end in death. Typically a fight lasted until one of the gladiators was too exhausted to continue fighting, or if he received an injury or something happened that stopped him from fighting. As a sign of surrender or defeat he would hold up two fingers. Most combats were therefore fought *ad digitum*.[64]

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[61] There is always the exception to the rule. 'A novice could occasionally prove so gifted that he dominated an acknowledged hero of the amphitheatre in the first combat. A surviving inscription in Pompeii informs us that a novice *myrmillo* Marcus Attilius defeated the veteran *thraex* Hilarus, who had been victorious 14 times. The latter was granted his life and he left the arena on foot. In his next combat, Marcus Attilius defeated the *thraex* Lucius Recius Felix, who had been engaged in 12 combats and each time received the victor's wreath. The defeated Lucius also left the arena alive. These victories over veterans cannot be explained by pure luck. Marcus Attilius was undoubtedly a very gifted fighter and had received excellent training', Nossov 2009: 135.

[62] The actual definition of ἀπότομος in a gladiatorial context has proven problematic as it stems from partial inscriptions where the sense is not self-evident. The *LSJ*, referring to inscriptions nos. 97, 139, 152, 192, and 231 (as numbered by Robert 1940), states that ἀπότομος means 'a fight to a finish'. Most translations of this passage in Artemidorus render the phrase ('ἀπότομον πυγμήν') in a similar way. Harris-McCoy 2012 translates it as 'fights to the death', while the older English translation of White 1975 has the similar 'contests to the finish'. Other modern translations offer analogous interpretations: Del Corno 1974: that the dreamer fought 'duelli all'ultimo sangue'; Festugière 1975): that he fought combats 'jusqu'à la mort'; Brackertz 1979 says that he fought 'auf Leben und Tod' (cf. Mann 2011: 117 n.19); and Mavroudi 2002: they fought μέχρι θανάτου. Krauss' 19th century German translation (1881, edited by Kaiser in 1965) keeps more closely to the bloody theme of the dream: 'Er kämpfte viele Jahre in den besonders blutigen Gefechten'.

[63] See discussion below on *sine missione* fights.

[64] *Ad digitum*, before the finger is up, meaning to fight until one side admits defeat, Nossov 2009: 172.

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The host of the game, the *editor*[65] (initially a member of the Republican elite and later the emperor or another member of the imperial family), could then spare the gladiator or order his opponent to kill him. The *editor* was usually influenced by crowd sentiment but, in theory, would base his decision on the quality of the show and how the losing gladiator had acquitted himself. Arena etiquette required that fighting cease and the winning gladiator look directly at the *editor* while waiting for the signal. Death, if it was decreed, was carried out ritualistically; the defeated gladiator would stay sitting on his heel, clasp the left knee of the other, bare his throat to the victor's weapon and accept his death.

Figure 4.15: The *summa rudis*, or head referee, overseeing combat.

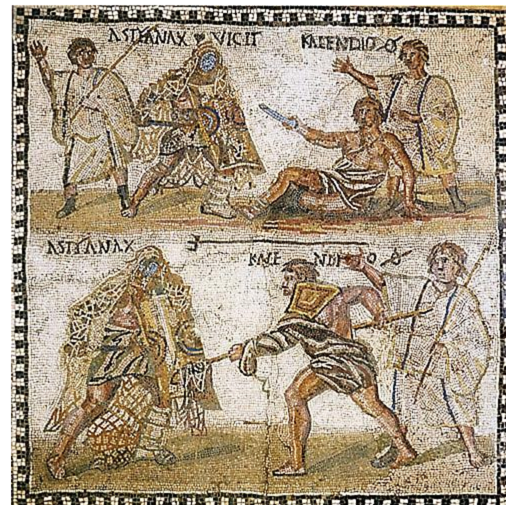

Figure 4.16: Mosaic from Spain showing a *retiarius* named Kalendio fighting a *secutor* named Astyanax, a *summa rudis* to left and right of each pair, 3rd century CE. The Ø sign by Kalendio's name indicates he was killed.

The image of a gladiator submitting *ad digitum* is quite common in popular culture but it is popular culture that created the impression that all gladiators fought to the death.[66] This impression is probably the result of confusing gladiators with condemned criminals and the latter *did* die in the arena (Larson 2014). Audiences expected all gladiators to show bravery in direct contrast to the humiliation and fear that should be shown by criminals. Imperial *munera* held under Nero are noted for the gladiators' frequently high social status, where the emperor ordered a rule of no death (surprisingly for one who was interested in entertainment and whose reputation for the bizarre was second to none, Suet. *Nero* 12.1). Even the *damnati* were not executed which corresponds with Nero's later policy of not

[65] Pliny the Younger writes to Maximus that the *editor's* reward for sparing a man was gaining a reputation for munificence and empathy through the gratitude and goodwill of his fellow citizens (*Ep.* 6.34)

[66] Although there are some dissenting opinions on this in popular culture too, Czarnecki 2021: 'Fearless warriors battling each other to the death while providing entertainment to a blood-thirsty audience: that's how most people envision the Roman gladiators. However, this image is shaped more by film than historical reality'.

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executing prisoners of war because he needed them to work on building projects such as the Golden House or a canal in southern Italy (Suet. *Ner.* 31.3; Dunkle 2008: 186).

We do not really know what percentage of the losers would be killed after submitting, but generally if they had fought well and been entertaining, the crowd would call for *missio* and the sponsor would give the crowd what they wanted. A growing body of scholarship[67] today considers that gladiatorial combat was essentially a 'sport' in which the aim was not inevitably to kill. Professional gladiators underwent training so that they could conquer an opponent with their skills, not necessarily killing them. Thus, despite the views from some early scholars such as Hereford (1792), gladiators did not inevitably fight to the death.[68] Many studies have attempted to compile statistics of how often gladiators died and provided estimations of how likely death in the arena actually was. This includes analyses of how influential the *pollice verso* of the spectators were, or the decisions of the *editor* or sponsor.[69]

The hand gestures for 'kill him' or 'spare him' are the subject of some scholarly debate (Corbeill 1997: 2-4). Our modern interpretation gives the thumbs-up a positive connotation, and modern representations associate this with sparing the gladiator's life, as in Gerôme's *Pollice Verso* painting illustrated in Fig. 3.2. However, when a gladiator was thought to have merited being allowed to live, the gesture was either pointing with two fingers, or a raised arm with closed fist, the thumb pressed down (Corbeill 1997: 3), as illustrated in Fig. 4.17.[70]

Figure 4.17: Hand gestures for missio.

The phrase of the 'turned thumb' or *pollice verso* in the ancient literature has confused the issue since from these descriptions or terminology no-one knows exactly what is meant, in visual terms. It is referred to for example by Juvenal, who states:

[67] For example, Kyle 1999; Junkelmann 2000a.
[68] Hereford maintains that the ancient Romans were entirely familiar with wholescale slaughter, as much in warfare as in their entertainment, 1792: 83-84.
[69] Wiedemann 2002: 105, for example explores to what extent the spectators acted as judges granting life rather than death to those who were essentially dead in the social sense.
[70] Corbeill 1997 has several other physical illustrations and see also the sketches of gestures in Aldrete's 1999 book.

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> Today they hold shows of their own, and win applause by slaying whomsoever the mob with a turn of the thumb (*verso pollice*) bids them slay (*Sat*. 3.36, transl. Radice).[71]

Prudentius (*c. Symm*. 2.1097-1099) uses the same term, *converso pollice*. Martial on the other hand tells us that the crowd waved their handkerchiefs as an appeal for clemency (*Spect*. 12) or by calling out (*Spect*. 10). But it is Juvenal's version which has caught the popular imagination, that the spectators indicated life or death for a defeated opponent through a simple hand gesture – what is now thought of as 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down' in our current popular culture dependent society.[72]

Stepney (2013: 119) classifies the *pollice verso* as a perversion of the right to exercise political power.[73] In the social distance that existed between the spectators and protagonists, where the spectators were able to assume the ultimate distinction in social relations through their power of life over death.

Nevertheless, it is clear that death was not the inevitable result of gladiatorial combat, as argued by Hopkins and Beard (2005: 93). They base their argument on the fact that gladiators were not an inexpensive commodity, and games in the amphitheatres were not on show 360 days out of 365. If death was approved, the *editor* was required to pay restitution to the owner of that gladiator and, as with top athletes today, the value of a successful gladiator could be high. Coleman's 2008 article on the town of Aphrodisias argues that no members of the local elite wanted to be nominated for the priesthood because of the expenses of the liturgies of sponsoring gladiatorial shows.[74] A gladiator's market price was directly related to the scale of the gladiatorial games. During the 2nd century, for instance, a 'first-class gladiator for a show that cost 30,000 to 60,000 sesterces would come to no more than 5,000 sesterces, but his price could rise to 15,000 sesterces for a show that cost 200,000 sesterces or more' (Gregori 2001: 19). Even the least expensive gladiator (a *gregarium*), who would be a mass battle participant could cost between 1,000-3,000 sesterces (Junkelmann 2000a: 178).[75] The emperor Hadrian thus rebuked the crowd who were clamouring for a particular gladiator's freedom, saying that it was not for them to 'frivolously squander another man's wealth' (Junkelmann 2000a: 69).

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[71] As confirmed by Prudentius about a Vestal Virgin watching the games (*C. Symm*. II).

[72] The Romans were unique in seeing the thumb as its own digit on the hand. They also believed that the thumb held the greater power or 'controlled' (*polleat*) the rest of the fingers (Macrob. *Sat.* 7.13.14). The Latin word for thumb, *pollex*, is also said to be derived from the word for power, *pollet,* Corbeil 1997: 3.

[73] The historical interpretation of the 18th century differentiated between the civilised and the uncivilised on the basis of class. The crowd, because of their lust for violence and because they lacked the ability to recognise and exercise their own power, was seen by scholars of this period as an uncivilised mob. This type of discourse, while it linked the repulsion for violence with civilisation, also implied that civilisation itself could be destroyed by violence and created a potentially antagonistic relationship between the 'civilised' and the 'uncivilised', Stepney 2013: 119.

[74] There was no charge for seats, which meant that sponsors could not recoup what they had spent, Dunkle 2014: 382.

[75] To see this in its context, 500 sesterces would feed a peasant family for a year.

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The *rudis* or wooden sword could be given to a gladiator as a symbol that he had earned his freedom. However, if the editor bestowed it, he had to reimburse the owner (Zoll 2002: 165). Wistrand (1992: 78) observes that the striving for *virtus* in the arena was rooted in the idea that a man could rise above his station in life, perhaps buying his freedom. But if that gladiator were a free man, a member of the elite, descending to fight as a gladiator along with slaves and criminals would have had the opposite effect.

The *sacramentum gladiatorium* was an oath taken by all freeborn men or *auctorati* entering the arena (Lemosse 1983: 240; Hopkins 1983: 24; Kitts 2018: 278). In this oath they swore absolute submission to the *lanista* and would suffer being 'burned, bound, beaten and slain by the sword' (*uri, vibcuru, verberari, ferroque necari patior*) (Sen. *Ep*. 71.23; also Petron. *Sat.* 117; Hor. *Sat.* 2.7.58-59). No commitment could be more extreme and this oath was considered of even greater severity than the vow taken by soldiers. This oath, however, was not reciprocal as it did not ask the gods for anything in return for a gladiator's life.[76] This compulsory vow became contractual and the breaking of it was deemed dishonourable. The taking of this oath captured the difference between what had been an involuntary act on the part of the potential gladiator to an act that was voluntary. Livy (28.21.2) sums up this business deal between *lanista* and *auctoratus* as *liberorum qui venalem sanguinem habent,* 'the freeborn men put their blood up for sale'. At the end of this contractual undertaking the *auctorati* had to participate in an arena initiation rite where they 'were whipped with rods, perhaps while running a gauntlet of veteran gladiators' (Sen. *Apoc*. 9.3: Dunkle 2008: 38).

CELEBRITY STATUS

- Fame and glamour

Gladiators returned for many fights, such as Publius Ostorius (CIL IV 2508) who fought 51 times in Pompeii (Cooley & Cooley 2014: 78; Toner 2014: 56). The prestige of a Roman gladiator increased exponentially with the number of opponents he defeated, and gladiators could become famous, preferably not by the 'noble death' to which Auguet (Auguet 1972: 98) refers, nor by becoming the favourite of the emperor, as in the case of the ill-fated Spicilus on whom Nero lavished money and even estates, if Suetonius is to be believed (Nero 30.5; 47.5).77 Some had 'stage names', as indicated in Fig 4.18. The parallel to our modern celebrity cults hardly needs to be drawn.

76 Other forms of the *sacramentum gladiatorum* or the oath can be found in Hor. *Sat*. 2.7.58-59. The oath has also been reconstructed from that sworn by some of the characters parodying 'real' gladiators in Petronius' Satyricon (117), i.e. *In verba Eumolpi sacramentum iuravimus: uri, vinciri, verberari, ferroque necari . . . tamquam legitimi gladiatores domino corpora animasque religiosissime addicimus*.

[77] According to Suetonius Spiculus was murdered by the mob after the death of Nero. His name also appears on a glass cup together with that of his opponent and in a graffito from Pompeii, *CIL* IV 1474.

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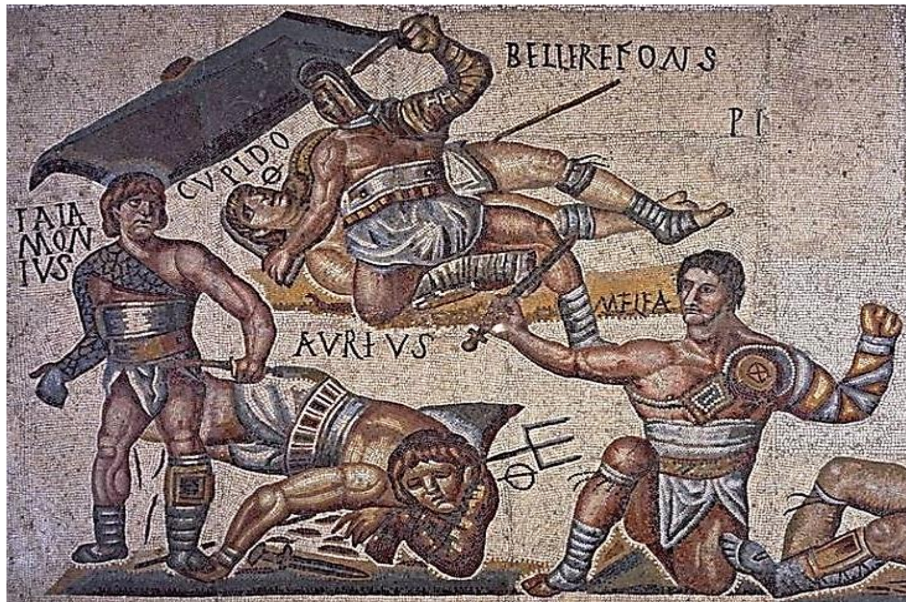

Figure 4.18 Section of the Gladiator Mosaic, displayed at the Galleria Borghese.
It dates from approximately 320 CE and depicts gladiators with their stage names.
The Greek θ besides some gladiators, for θάνατος, indicates that they are dead.

An inscription from Sicily attests to the presumed allure of such fame:

> FLAMMA S[E]C(UTOR) VIX(IT) AN(NIS) XXX,
> PUGNA [VI]T XXXIIII, VICIT XXI,
> STANS 〈:EXIT〉 VIIII , MIS(SUS) IIII, NAT(IONE) S[Y]RUS;
> HUI 〈C〉 DELICATUS, COARMIO MERENTI FECIT.
>
> Flamma, *secutor*, lived 30 years, fought 34 times, won 21 times, drew 9 times, won reprieve 4 times, a Syrian by nationality. Delicatus made this for his deserving fellow-fighter. (*CIL* X 07297 / *ILS* 5113)

This gladiator fought in an unusually high number of combats, but what is of interest here is that he refused the offer of freedom four times. Gladiators who had earned their freedom were popular with the crowds, since their experience meant that they could give a worthwhile performance.

- Fans

Writers of satire and Christian rhetoric emphasise the gladiators' déclassé status in Roman society and tend to portray the gladiator as an object of sexual desire (Ewigleben 2000: 125-135; Rens & De

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Cupere 2015: 124). Juvenal and Tertullian's bitter jibes[78] at female admirers may not have been entirely unfounded,[79] but modern paintings and films have seized on this trope, presenting the gladiator as a muscular paragon of martial virtue with a bevy of female admirers (Hobden & Potter 2020: 29-54).[80] Women of the ancient world were often also considered to have viewed the gladiator as a sexual icon, a fascination comparable to sex with gangsters in the movies in that it is never fully separated from the violence that provides their celebrity status despite their rather louche and rough attraction.[81] This is supported to some extent by for example the boasting Pompeiian graffiti concerning the gladiators Celadus[82] and Crescens. Wiedemann (2002: 26-27) mentions a ruling, most likely brought in under Domitian, restricting women's seats to the top rows on the final tier. The practice, however, may have come into existence as early as the time of Augustus.[83] Although the literary evidence is luridly sensational, there is epigraphic evidence indicating male concerns over this perceived sexual attraction to the gladiators by women and concern shown with restrictions for female viewers (Wiedemann 2002: 26).[84] In one instance, although the source is of dubious veracity, the wife of Marcus Aurelius, Faustina, allegedly indicated her approval of a certain gladiator to her husband, where upon he promptly had the gladiator killed and made her bathe in his blood (apparently an action that was used to cast doubt on Commodus' parentage as it was thought to have ultimately resulted in his conception) (SHA*: Marc.* 19.2).

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[78] Such as the satirist's (6.8.2-113) scurrilous remarks about Eppia's fall from grace, a senator's wife who ran away with a scarred gladiator: 'What do these women love? The sword …' (*Sat.* 6.15), and likewise Tertullian, 'men give them their souls, women their bodies too …' (*De Spect*. 22).

[79] Rumours (see Stewart 2006) have alleged that the remains of a bejewelled woman found in the gladiators' quarters in Pompeii were evidence that she was visiting a gladiator lover, but since the quarters also contained the remains of 18 others of whom some were children, it is more probable that they were simply sheltering there during the volcanic eruption.

[80] This is not a new trope; 'John Chrysostom does just that when he uses several agonistic images to describe the death of Jesus, including one that explicitly links the crucifixion and the gladiator tradition' (Whitaker 2017: 442). 'For there was a gladiator match (μονομαχεῖον), as it were. Death wounded Christ but Christ, though struck, afterward slew death. The one seeming to be immortal was done in by a dead body. And what is more the world was watching' (*PG* 62.341). The gladiator image is only one of several 'agonistic epithets' Chrysostom uses for Paul himself; these epithets include soldier and noble general. Chrysostom ultimately likens the preparation of gladiator and athlete to the preacher's need to be ready to face death and slaughter (*Laud. Paul.* 286).

[81] Notice also the frequent titillating aspect to a gladiator's 'stage-name' e.g., Narcissus. On gladiators as icons, see Elliott 2017: 27-55.

[82] Celadus described himself as 'attractive and glorious', as a 'man who could take women's breath away' (*CIL* IV 4324; 4345). Crescens, a *retiarius*, is another slave who described himself as 'attractive to women', who could 'seduce them during the day or the night' (*CIL* IV 4353). Celadus' and Crescens' inscriptions are very interesting because they attempt to promote a seducer self-image as positive. In their scratches, seduction is directly related to their positions as gladiators; in other words, winning in the Roman arena and being a good lover are interchangeable, Garraffoni & Funari 2009.

[83] See Fig. 4.22 below for an interpretation of the arrangement of arena seating.

[84] See also Hope 2000: 104-113 on funerary epitaphs for gladiators set up by women, although most likely these were family members.

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- Free men and women in the arena

In his catalogue of dreams already referred to earlier, Artemidorus writes of a man's dream of becoming a gladiator:

> He registered himself among the gladiators and for many years fought *apotomos* combat (ἀπότομον πυγμήν). For eating human blood signified his savage and profane livelihood (τροφή) derived from human blood, and the voice of his mother prophesized the dishonourable nature of his life. And his being lifted up in the large vessel signified that there would always and constantly be danger for him. For the items that are placed in there are entirely consumed. And perhaps he might have died among the gladiators, had he not been set down and returned to his home. For after a long while some people urged him to abandon the gladiators (*Oneir*. 5.58), transl. White & Lewis).

Artemidorus is suggesting here that becoming a gladiator could possibly have been seen as some sort of livelihood or career (τροφή). He indicates that the young man registered as a gladiator voluntarily and that his career lasted 'for many years' / 'a long time' (πολλοῖς ἔτεσιν / ὀψέ), after which he retired at a time of his own choosing. This was therefore 'not simply a dangerous occupation, but for some people even a desirable profession' (Carter 2015: 39).

It is unclear what attracted free men and later women[85] to perform in the arena and become *auctorati*. The stigma of *infamia* was a strong enough force in society to prevent members of the elite from fighting in the arena. A variety of theories have been proffered as to what caused individuals to overcome this potential stigma (Castillo Sanz 2012: 155). Dunkle (2008: 35) talks of 'enthusiastic young men of lower classes who had little to lose' anyway, seeking fame and fortune in the arena. Other possible reasons included the seeking of glory, wishing to participate in combat and obviously it had its appeal for those with violent tendencies who enjoyed killing or sadism (Ville 1981: 227). Avoiding the lengthy proscription of military service could have been another reason under the Republic while Barton (1993: 430-3) offers a psychological explanation of a 'desperate response to the devastation of the civil wars of the late Republic and early Empire'. One of the most common solutions for the insolvent was to become a gladiator.[86]

Roman citizens who volunteered to fight in the arena and formally renounced of their political rights were generally viewed with disapprobation by our literary sources. Seneca in fact compares such an act to one of self-castration (*QNat*. 7.31). Rather than retaining some of their original status, they

[85] The inclusion of female gladiators will be discussed more fully in the section Exotic elements in gladiatorial spectacle later in this Chapter

[86] Horace (*Epist*. 1.18.36) considers that the someone declared insolvent had three options open to them: they either became a gladiator, a professional gardener or a carriage driver.

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joined the other *infames* of society[87] and were thought of as no better than those from other shameful professions.[88]

Auctorati were respected for their high levels of morale and the unfaltering quality of their performances, and they seem to have been popular. One inscription found on the island of Thasos specifies that the ratio of *auctorati* versus slaves was ten to two, and we get similar information from another inscription (this time from Aegae, Nemrut Kalesi in Asia Minor) which indicates more volunteers, this time with the ratio of five to three (Grant 1967: 32). The fact that free men became gladiators or prospective *venationes* is also attested in a funerary stele discovered in Tomis, mentioning Skirtos Dakesis, a *retiarius* who had six victories in the arena – but the most important information is that he was a free man (Robert 1971: 105; Conrad 2004: 166; Streinu 2016: 267).

It seems that spectators themselves preferred fights between the *auctorati* to those between slaves or condemned criminals, hence Echion's comments, at the feast of Trimalchio, who enthusiastically reports of upcoming games with new fights 'and … not a slave in the batch' (*Sat*. 45). It is possible that free fighters showed more enthusiasm, were better trained than slaves, certainly the fights of the condemned criminal were looked down on. Ville (1981: 262) suggests that this greater regard could also be attributed to status of the combatants, but this seems less likely in view of ancient sentiments expressed on *auctorati*.

There are also references in a number of ancient authors to the enthusiasm of emperors for taking part in such public entertainments. As indicated in Chapter 1, such references were often employed by the ancient sources as a sign that an emperor had crossed the line of acceptable behaviour. Commodus is alleged to have eagerly performed as a gladiator in the arena, claiming a thousand victories, fighting with unlucky opponents and naturally, not being killed in the process. Dio (73.18.3) who apparently actually witnessed the antics of Commodus in the arena was less than effusive about him. As Dio was a contemporary of these events and well placed to witness such matters, being a public servant for much of his life and a member of an influential senatorial family, his observations should on balance be accepted, particularly since a bust of Commodus as Heracles (Fig.6.2 below) tend to bear out these eccentricities.

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[87] Most performers, gladiators, charioteers and *scaenici* suffered from the Roman legal stigma as *infames personae* and later the Christian church denied them baptism unless they abandoned their disreputable professions. On Christian rulings regarding performers, see Lepelley 1989: 235-262 who discusses a letter to the decurions of a city on the matter of a newly baptised young actor.

[88] Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.76) implies (in a reference to Drusus, who enjoyed drawing blood 'however vile' (*vilis sanguis*) that the blood shed by gladiators was of little value (contra its alleged supernatural properties referred to above in this Chapter n. 49).

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SOCIAL STATUS

Gladiators belonged to the lowest social class, being one of those 'shameful professions' that afforded relatively short-term pleasure, providing sex, violence and laughter, and which Edwards terms 'a licentious affront to Roman *gravitas*' (1992: 67). Lucilius, as early as the 2nd century BCE, calls the gladiator Aeserninus 'a low, vile man worthy of that life and estate' (4.172-75), a sentiment that was to continue over the centuries, as confirmed by Calpurnius Flaccus writing in the 2nd century CE, 'There is no meaner condition among people that that of the gladiator' (*Decl*. 52).

Although undoubtedly a truism, it appears that gladiators functioned one and the same time as one of the most despised yet one of the most prised people in Roman society, having both 'marginality' and 'celebrity status' (Junkelmann 2000a: 11). Gladiators were paradoxical figures who occupied a liminal space, marginal figures simultaneously loathed and idolised, and one who exercised a high degree of fascination with Roman society as it does with the modern viewing public. Junkelmann (2000a: 11) refers to them as being present in the Roman mind as being 'hero and criminal' at the same time and 'a darling of the public and a pariah'. For Roman citizen men, they were tarnished by their paradoxical mix of disgrace and displays of honour, yet many such as Nero were allegedly avid admirers of their skill. In general, however, the gladiator exerted a 'paradigmatic and normative force' on the figures to which he was *infamis* since, in relation to the legitimacy of the Roman man, the *paterfamilias* and authority figure, he was an illegitimate subject (Gunderson 1996: 118). For example, Pliny the Younger, when writing in praise of Emperor Trajan's gladiatorial exhibition, says that he organised:

> Nothing lax or dissolute to weaken and destroy the manly spirit (*animos virorum*) of his subjects, but one to inspire them to face honourable wounds and look scorn on death (*ad pulchra vulnera contemptumque mortis accenderet*), by exhibiting love of glory and desire for victory even in the persons of criminals and slaves (*cum in servorum etiam noxiorumque corporibus amor laudis et cupido victoriae cerneretur*) (*Pan*. 33.1, transl. Radice).

Tertullian, a particularly strident critic in the 2nd century CE, marvelled at the Romans' strange capability of both exalting and simultaneously degrading certain characters:

> Take even those who give and who administer the spectacles; look at their attitude to the charioteers, players, athletes, gladiators, most loving of men, to whom men surrender their souls and women their bodies as well, for whose sake they commit the sins they blame; on one and the same account they glorify them and they degrade and diminish them (*qua magnifaciunt, deponunt et deminuunt*); yes, further, they openly condemn them to disgrace and civil degradation (*damnant ignominia et capitis minutione*); they keep them religiously excluded from council chamber, rostrum, senate, knighthood, and every other kind of office and a good many distinctions. The perversity of it! They love whom they lower; they despise whom they approve; the art they glorify, the artist they disgrace. What sort of judgement is this – that a man should be blackened for what he shines in? Yes, and what a confession that things are evil, when their authors at the top of their popularity are in disgrace! (*De Spect.* 22, transl. Glover).

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Despite the fact that volunteers or free men could also become gladiators, the profession retained a low social position, which was enforced with a number of legal sanctions. Augustus prohibited any gladiator who had been freed from becoming a Roman citizen; they were legally classified as deceitful and were not able to witness a legal document or hold civic office nor could they serve on juries or become soldiers (Blanshard & Shahabudin 2011: 90). There are limited references in the law codes to ex-gladiators who could sometimes return to civil life and rather than seeing gladiatorial games as occasions during which somebody was inevitably going to die, one might regard them as opportunities to socially (and physically) regain a life gone wrong.

- Executions

Public torture and execution were a part of history and until relatively recently, supported by religious and state authorities (Nossov 2009: 168) and were usually well attended events.

As a formalised ritual, executions were a display of the state's supreme power (Meijer 2007: 6) and, as in the case of other cultures and times, it was generally held that the sights of such punishments would act as a deterrent to any future criminals.[89]

Roman executions too were part of what Cawthorne (2006: 4) refers to as the 'theatre of death'. While power is expressed through the infliction of pain on the body of the Other, at the same time exemplary punishment requires spectators, and spectators give the spectacle a moral sense for the social order (Foucault 1977: 30-1).[90] Exposure to the public gaze in the arena increased humiliation, reconfirming that these were people who had relinquished all entitlement to being treated with respect as social equals.[91] The audience was able to witness the disempowerment of their tormentors and at the same time be participants in their degradation (Coleman 1999: 235). The fate of Vitellius as recounted by Suetonius vividly illustrates humiliation by exposure to the public gaze:

> But they bound his arms behind his back, put a noose about his neck, and dragged him with rent garments and half-naked to the Forum. All along the Sacred Way he was greeted with mockery and abuse, his head held back by the hair, as is common with criminals, and even the point of a sword placed under his chin, so that he could not look down but must let his face be seen. Some pelted him with dung and filth, others called him incendiary and glutton, and some of the mob even taunted him with his bodily defects (*Vit.* 17.1-2, transl. Rolfe).

[89] See also Carucci's chapter, 2019: 212-234 on the spectacle of justice as a social deterrent.

[90] Coleman 1990 (cf 1993) has shown how the Roman principate confirms Foucault's account of the symbolic value of the body in pre-industrial state repression. The explicitness, inventiveness, memorability and expense of Roman ceremonies of degradation illustrate Foucault perfectly.

[91] Miller 1995: 165 speaks about the fact that 'humiliation' in the domain of brutal and systematic cruelty stresses that part of the torturer's self-justification depends on the premise that the humanity of his victims is pretence. Dunkle 2008: 23 connects the Osco-Samnite origin hypothesis discussed earlier in this Chapter with this humiliation.

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In ancient Rome there were many forms of public executions, calculated to inflict maximum humiliation and pain.[92] Most were preceded by public floggings, or perhaps being paraded in a triumph (Kyle 1999: 60; 96).[93] Crucifixion was a common way of dealing with criminals, and was a routine punishment for slaves, hence known as the *servile supplicium* or slave's punishment.[94]

A few Roman writers saw crucifixion as the worst form of punishment, even as cruel, but accepted it as part of life (Cic., *Fin*. 5.84; Jos. *BJ* 4.318; Sen. *Ep*. 14. 3–6). This is mentioned a few times in Roman comedy, a genre with prominent slave characters (Plaut. *Pers*. 856; *Bacch*. 687; *Amph*. Fragm. i; *Mil*. 566 and Ter. *An*. 623).[95]

Crucifixions were soon found to be too troublesome and time-consuming and executions in the arena were thought to be faster. This form of 'punishment as popular entertainment' was first put into practice by Augustus. The first person to be 'thrown to the animals' happened in the Forum Romanum and, according to Strabo (6.2.6), was a bandit, as mentioned in Chapter 1 p.5. Such a show enabled Augustus, benefactor of the *pax Romana* (*RGDA* 13), to establish a novel instrument of governance through a gruesome display of communal revenge against one considered a social outcast. Although our ancient authors, as members of the elite might demur and prefer skilled gladiatorial contests (Cic., *Op. Gen. Or.* 6; Sen., *Ep. ad Lucilium* 7.4), the Roman masses wanted to see a criminal suffer; to see them experience fear and degradation and beg for a fast and merciful death. Arena executions that were cruel and publicly staged, were nevertheless symbolically justified, thereby strengthening and perpetuating the power of the elite class and further demonstrating their absolute power over even life and death.

Public displays of punishment and execution could happen anywhere in the Roman world but they were customarily in urban spaces where crowds could gather, such as the Appian Way lined with crucified slaves after the rebellion of Spartacus.[96] Therefore it was not surprising to find that the

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[92] Publicising the nature of the crime as a tactic of humiliation was employed for low-level miscreants whose crime did not warrant a death penalty, Coleman 1999: 235.

[93] Josephus (*AJ* 20.136) provides an example in the emperor Claudius' decision on the fate of a tribune, Celer, who was involved in a dispute with the Samartians and the Jews. The tribune was paraded/dragged around the city so that the people might witness his humiliation, Coleman 1999: 239. The triumphs of victorious generals paraded their various captives including the conquered leader, and often their families, along the streets of Rome. The triumph served as political spectacle of the highest order where the city admired itself in the army and the general offered himself up for admiration. Hence humiliation of the public enemy was very much part of the process to the extent that some went to great lengths to avoid such humiliation, for example, Cleopatra who allegedly killed herself with the bite of a snake; Mithridates and his two young daughters who preferred suicide over being paraded as captives and the suicide of L. Scipio, Petreius and the younger Cato rather than be humiliated by Caesar. The visual splendour and parade of spoils and captives create memorable impressions of Roman authority.

[94] Crucifixion was practised by a number of ancient peoples, including the Persians and the Greeks, examples in Cawthorne 2006: 10-12.

[95] See also the article by Cook 2008 for information on crucifixion in graffiti and inscriptions.

[96] They formed themselves into four groups and kept up their resistance until there were only 6,000 survivors, who were taken prisoner and crucified all the way along the road from Rome to Capua (App. *B Civ*. 1.120).

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amphitheatre was used to display public executions in its various forms and other harsh punishments.[97]

Public opinion with respect to the degree of violence enacted on the perpetrator is affected by the degree to which such action is regarded as legitimate or justified. Punishment of criminals in the context of the games often took the form best suited to the crime. Discourses on the perception and treatment of criminals by the state and its various criminal justice systems then filters through about the seriousness of crime, effectiveness, and justice of treatment. The reason for such executions was not only to act as a crime deterrent but to reinforce that notion that the Roman state would always overcome the forces of criminality and lawlessness.[98] The arena offered a physical space where the various dangers to civilisation were annihilated, not just symbolically but in the most literal sense (Wiedemann 1992: 90).

Rome, like other societies, defined their identity on the demarcation of certain boundaries and, by extension, through exclusion and marginalisation. Such marginalisation was often achieved through stereotyping and stigmatisation. This can be seen through the many descriptions of brigand, pirates and bandits from the authors of antiquity finding their way into the works of historians, playwrights, orators and novelists of later ages.[99] By defining the Other, this caused the integrated groups to become more cohesive, which ultimately stabilised the existing power structures, even though these may have shifted in the late Republic. This in its turn served to validate 'Rome's own imperialistic claims' and feelings of 'cultural superiority' (Reiss 2011: 707-8), although the distinction, between Roman and non-Roman, was gradually relaxed until, with Caracalla's edict in 212 CE, it virtually disappeared. Other prejudices based on class and gender, however, remained.

Executions in the arena thus became increasingly common under the Empire and could encompass anything from groups condemned to be torn apart by wild animals, *damnatio ad bestias,* being herded,

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[97] Hadrian (SHA *Hadr.* 18.9) gave orders for bankrupt persons to be flogged in the amphitheatre and then acquitted, thus combining corporal punishment and humiliation intensified through the combination of physical degradation carried out in full view before a massed audience. Whilst Titus' *delatores* did not receive any physical chastisement but were still put on public display as is evidenced through the use of the verb *traducere* by both Martial and Suetonius and probably restrained in a very uncomfortable manner. Similarly, in a parade held by Trajan and reported by Pliny (*Pan.* 34.3) 'yet nothing was so popular (*gratius*), nothing so fitting for our times (*saeculo dignius*) as the opportunity we enjoyed of looking down at the informers at our feet (*desuper intueri delatorum*), their heads forced back and faces upturned (*supina ora retortasque cervices*) to meet our gaze'.

[98] *damnatio ad bestias* was not exclusive and did not originate in the arena as similar activities have been attested to since the 2nd century BCE when deserters from the Roman army were thrown to wild beasts in 167 BCE after the Battle of Pydna and Scipio Aemilianus also threw deserters to beasts in 146 BCE (Val. Max. 2.17.14)

[99] Note for example Cicero's pejorative grouping together of 'a gladiator, a bandit or a Catiline' (*Phil.* 14.14). It is interesting to see how often authors like Cicero with rhetorical skill couple gladiators together with gangsters and criminals, playing on fears of slave revolts by vague references to their large numbers (e.g. *Vat.* 9.80-85; 17; 10.41; Sest. 4). The term *latro*, for example, had a broad semantic range and when manipulated and employed served to group a wide number and diverse 'outsiders' together irrespective of distinctions for their marginalisation that affected both the rich and poor alike. See also Ando 2020 on such stigmatisation.

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sometimes naked, into the arena, to prisoners being forced to defend themselves against professional gladiators. The re-enacted scenes from mythology were also popular: the convicted was dressed up as such as Actaeon, the hunter who inadvertently witnessed the goddess Diana bathing, whereupon she transformed him into a stag and his own dogs tore him apart.

- Exotic elements in gladiatorial spectacle

Although women were generally held to be incapable of displaying the quality of *virtus* or manly courage there appear to be some indications that there were female gladiators in Rome (Ewigleben 2000; Murray 2003).[100] This is likely to be reflective of the taste for evolving novelty in the arena and has for similar reasons gained considerable traction today in the sphere of the modern fantasy movie.

Our literary sources for this, however, are all highly tendentious. Juvenal (1.22-1.23) writes of 'women, breasts Amazon-naked' facing 'wild boars at the games' (also his disapprobation at 6.246-267) and Suetonius talks about women who took part in combats by torch-light. Martial's *Spectacula* 6 also mentions women in the arena, and in Peronius' *Satyricon* (45.7), one of the guests, complaining about an inadequate gladiatorial show, hopes for a better show with 'a girl who fights from a chariot'.[101]

Tacitus and Dio are somewhat less tendentious sources (Ann. 15.32; 62.17.3) and more censorious on the basis of class than on that of gender.

Figure 4.19: Possible victorious female gladiator.

Statius, Suetonius, and Dio mention female gladiators performing at least twice in the reign of Domitian (Stat. *Silv*. 1.6.51-6, at a Saturnalia; Suet. *Dom*. 4.1; and Dio 67.8.4, at a triumph of Domitian), but it is worth noting that Nero and Domitian, both wholeheartedly vilified by the historiographers, are the ones favoured with these transgressions against social norms, which also

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[100] The thought of female gladiators has also inspired several modern culture representations; there is a female cameo of a chariot-fighter in *Gladiator* and also in *The Arena* directed by Joe D'Amato and Steve Carver in 1974 and starring Pam Grier. Discovery Channel ran a special entitled *Gladiatrix* in 2002. But it would appear that modern culture has more interest in this subject than any classical scholarship possibly due to the lack of proof which consists of six literary references and one piece of statuary.

[101] Petronius, *Satyricon* 45.7, Juvenal 1.22-23, Suetonius, *Vita Domitiani* 4.1. It is necessary to mention Statius who, in *Silvae* 1.6.51-56, refers to 'women untrained to the sword' who dare to perform male combats. These women too are identified as gladiators. Women's unpreparedness to fight is a reflection on their feminine nature; they are reckless to undertake such a masculine duty. Nevertheless, the poet compares female gladiators to Themodon's bands, bringing to mind Tanais and Phasis, a comparison which consequently makes women gladiators feisty and formidable.

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rather diminishes their value as evidence. Nevertheless, it is possible that Juvenal, while published no earlier than 115 CE, took the idea from these incidences during Domitian's reign as his inspiration for an elite woman training in a *ludus* (6.246-67).

Figure 4.20: ΑΜΑΖΩΝ and ΑΧΙΛΛΙΑ, female gladiators.

There is some limited archaeological evidence which supports the existence of female gladiators. A *stele* from Halicarnassus[102] depicts two female gladiators, appropriately labelled as ΑΜΑΖΩΝ and ΑΧΙΛΛΙΑ[103] (Zoll 2002: 36; Carlsen 2014: 442) (Fig. 4.20) and some evidence has been identified as 'possibly' female (Fig. 4.19).[104] However the two *mulieres* in Fig.4.20 fight without the usual gladiatorial helmets: they are a novelty, not formal combatants, a 'special treat' because they were so rare. Suetonius (*Dom*. 4) is our only support for women specifically fighting with other women since he uses the words *pugnae feminarum* instead of *virorum* (Vesley 1998: 90). The text above the two

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[102] Currently displayed in the British Museum.

[103] Hitschfeld & Marshall (1893-1916) believe that the relief from Halicarnassus depicts two men and not women, the name ΑΧΙΛΛΙΑ deriving from nominative Ἀχιλλίας (suggesting that the final ς was altogether omitted due to the lack of space on the relief). Manas 2011: 2748, n. 41 disproves this theory by referring to male gladiators named Ἀχιλλεύς, which would give the name of Ἀχιλλία a feminine gender. However, he argues in favour of a suggestion that a man gladiator fought as an Amazon, using the name Ἀχιλλία as a stage nickname, supporting the view that the relief belongs to men. As possible evidence Manas provides a modern counterpart, which, although correct, does not conclude the problem of male gladiators who fought as women. As far as the written sources are concerned, there is no mention of male gladiators ever performing female roles on the arena. The more explicit evidence, such as the mosaics with gladiatorial combats and *venationes*, gives no indication of men performing as women, i.e. as the Amazons. The problem with Achillia's name does not seem to originate from a simple omission. If the relief was made as a commemoration of a particularly significant event and was supposed to be kept in a public space (i.e. *ludus* where two female gladiators did their trainings, Coleman 2000: 495-496), it seems very unlikely that gladiator's name was carelessly misspelled by an incompetent stonemason who miscalculated space for the carvings of names. The carving of the female name was purposely done. If it was supposed to be a male name, the final ς would have been still added to the slab, despite the limited space, Miączewska 2012: 18.

[104] Coleman 2000 discusses the inscribed Turkish relief and presents evidence for terminology describing a fight to a draw whilst Brunet 2004 explodes the myth that women fought dwarfs in the area as a misreading of the ancient sources.

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female figures tells us that both Amazon and Achillia have received *missio* – the grant of dual *missio* indicates that their contest was undecided (Coleman 2000: 488).

We also have several edicts which curtailed women's participation in the arena,[105] and in 200 CE Dio (67.8.1; 76.16.1) tells us that women fought so furiously that Septimius Severus issued a decree which banned women from engaging in such single combat (Gardner 1986: 248; Vesley 1998: 90). This is certainly suggestive that women were participating in gladiatorial combat in some form or another, and even in other violent arena entertainment – the emperor Titus in 80 CE dedicated the Colosseum with a hundred days of games which included the special novelty of trained female hunters who killed some of the 9 000 animals purported to have been slaughtered on that occasion, Martial and Dio both confirm the presence of female beast-hunters at the games that inaugurated the Flavian amphitheatre under Titus (Mart. *De Spect.* 7 [6] and 8 [6b]; Dio 66.25.1). Dio in fact praises Titus for not allowing women of noble birth to take part in the combats.

So the earliest appearance of female gladiators is not known, though it is reasonable to assume that their appearances came with the increasing popularity and size of the games during the late Republican and Augustan eras (McCullough 2008: 197-198), although a passage from Nicolaus of Damascus (*Athletica* 4.153) states that women were involved in combats as early as the Etruscan period.

For the Roman spectators, the Amazons were representative of the Other and their subjugation was symbolic of civilisation overcoming barbarism (Manas 2011: 2737). Undoubtedly, such staged combats against the Amazons were highly attractive and they became a popular theme at the spectacles. However, Manas' argument suggests that since the barbarian Amazons were women, for an ordinary spectator their barbarity would be directly associated with their femininity and that female matriarchy was 'the materialisation of one of the worst fears of Roman patriarchal society, that women usurped the roles of men (and still worse, that they performed them successfully)' (2011: 2737). Consequently, the Romans had to subdue not only the Amazons' barbarous inclinations, but also keep their women subjugated. In Manas' view, the involvement of female gladiators in the games was introducing an ideological battle between the pre-defined male and female roles in the society. Although in the arena specifically it cannot really be argued that female objectification happened more than male objectification and commodification,[106] in its latest modern receptions, particularly in the recent Startz *Spartacus,* the opposite occurs, and women are particularly objectified.

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[105] Such as a *senatus consultum* of 19 CE, the Tabula Larinas, prohibiting recruitment of senators and equites' 'daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters under the age of 20' (Vesley 1998: 91).

[106] On this aspect see the contributions to the book *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power, and the Body*, edited by David Frederick, 1999.

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GLADIATORIAL SCHOOLS

As gladiatorial combat rose in popularity so too did the size of the industry that supported it. The fascination the games held resulted in fierce competition between school owners and trainers (Barton 1995: 23) and it is from this fact that appreciation must be given to the fact that a successfully trained gladiator was an investment commodity and not one to be disposed of readily (Rens & De Cupere 2015: 124), a fact dealt with somewhat arbitrarily in film.

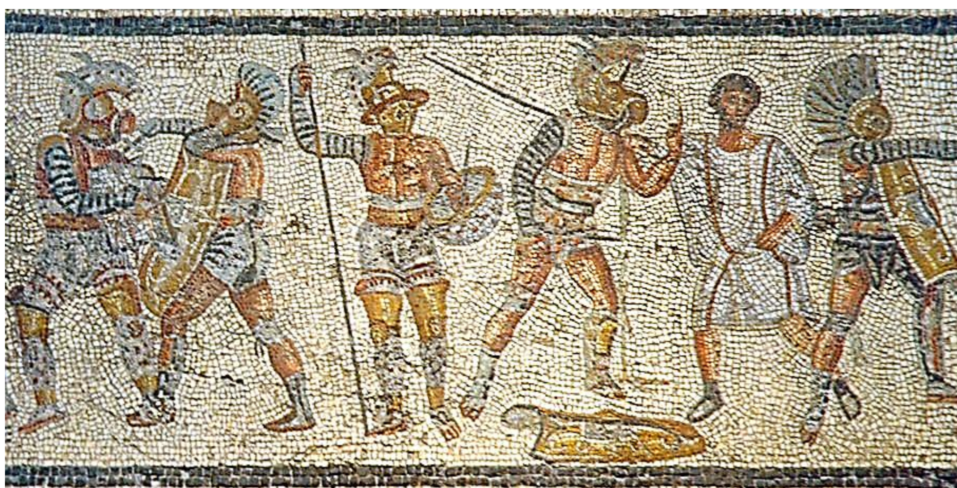

Figure 4.21: Part of the Zliten mosaic from Leptis Magna, ca. 2nd century CE.

There were many *collegia iuvenum* where young men of the elite class honed their skills in swordplay and fighting skills with an eye on appearing in the arena (Vesley 1998: 87), and it seems that girls could train in these areas, too.[107] But most potential gladiators were usually purchased at the slave market, as Cicero tells us when he casts a slur on fighters being bought elsewhere:

> But when he did not even choose picked men from the slave-market, but bought men from the farm-prisons, and provided them with the names of gladiators, cast lots which should be Samnites and which Challengers, does he not fear the probable consequences of such licence and defiance of the laws? (*Ses*. 131-134, transl. Gardner).

The Colosseum itself was serviced by a number of support structures including four *ludi* (Dyson 2010).[108] Here gladiators were trained for the events and learnt and practised the rituals of sparring, fighting, and how they would be expected to face possible death. Controlled by a manager (*lanista*),

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[107] Vesley 1998 has a convincing argument based on epigraphical evidence (*CIL* XIV 4014 Ficulea; *CIL* VIII 1885 Theveste; *CIL* IX 4696 Reate) that women could receive such training.

[108] The *Ludus Magnus* was discovered and partly excavated in the 1930s and was found to include a small amphitheatre and barracks for gladiators (Dyson 2010). The *Ludus Matutinus* appears to have been intended for *venatores* training and the *Ludus Dacicius* and *Ludus Gallicus* housed slave gladiators of differing ethnic origins.

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a group of gladiators (*familia*) would be available for hire and sometimes for sale. Some were privately owned by officials[109] and even the wealthy who would use them for protection, particularly in times of civil unrest. The training of gladiators was serious business. Lessons in the Roman construction of manliness, bravery and self-control were retaught and relearned (Toner 1995: 39):

> Who after falling has drawn in his neck when ordered to suffer the fatal stroke? Such is the force of training, practice and habit (Cic. *Tusc*. 2.17.4, transl. King).

And likewise Cyprian:

> Man is slaughtered that man may be gratified, and the skill to kill, is an employment, an art.... Training is undergone to acquire the power to murder, and the achievement of murder is its glory. (Cypr. *Don.* 7, transl. Wallis, adapted).

Many fighting skills were acquired at gladiatorial schools.[110] One particular school, owned by C. Aurelius Scaurus supplied swordplay instructors to the Roman army in 105 BCE (*Val. Max*. 2.3.2). Since the prospective gladiator had to undertake the *sacramentum gladiatorium* (the oath in which he swore to suffer being burnt, beaten, tied up and killed by the sword), endurance was part of his training. The rigorous regime of training and diet also included a sacred meal (*cena libera*) on the night before the games as well as a *pompa* or festive parade directly before the games All these elements were part and parcel of a gladiator's life (Barton 1989: 5; Curry 2008: 28-30).

After the notorious Spartacus rebellion, harsher controls were instituted at the *ludi*. In Pompeii, for example the section reserved for prisoners at the gladiatorial barracks had so low a ceiling that prisoners could only remain seated or lie down. It is quite likely that the harsh conditions under which gladiators lived and trained fostered a sort of *esprit de corps*, where senior and more experienced gladiators would have a role in training the newcomers and friendships were formed. Gladiators therefore did not necessarily want to kill those with whom they had trained on a daily basis. Not all gladiatorial mosaics feature death and bloodshed, as Fig. 4.21 shows.

THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF SPECTACLE

- Marketing

The idea that the general population naturally flocked to witness such events fuelled by their desire for slaughter and mayhem is a current concept. There is plenty of evidence to show that advertisements (*edicta muneris*) were used to attract the public's attention to events. This usually took the form of writing painted on the walls of buildings, the city gates and has even been found on

[109] Julius Caesar purchased a *lanista* in Capua in anticipation of his aedileship in 65 BCE intending that the offer of a grand *munus* would assist his election to higher office.
[110] For reconstructions of gladiatorial contests, see Shadrake 2005; Junkelmann 2000a.

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gravestones. Slaves would carry posters around the city and the public criers used the town squares to announce them. As with present day advertising of events, pertinent information was included on the *edicta muneris*: the occasion which the games were honouring, the name of the *editor*, how many pairs of gladiators were to perform with the name of their *familia,* and any other items featuring on the programme, such as a venatio or damnatio, or athletic constests. Attention was also paid to promoting other attractions for the spectators' comfort, like awnings providing shade, the distribution of gifts or the spraying of aroma,[111] and lastly, the time and place of the games (Nossov 2009: 133).[112] Examples of more than 80 *edicta muneris* have survived on the walls of Pompeii, such as the following:

> THE GLADIATORIAL *FAMILIA* OF THE AEDILE AULIUS SUETTIUS CERTUS WILL FIGHT AT POMPEII ON MAY 31. THERE WILL BE A *VENATIO*, AND ALSO AWNINGS.
> (*CIL* IV 1189)

One unusually lengthy advertisement states:

> AULUS CLODIUS FLACCUS, SON OF AULUS, TRIBE MENENIA, DUOVIR THREE TIMES (ONCE AS QUINQUENNIAL), MILITARY TRIBUNE ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE. HE PRESENTED AT THE *LUDI AP[P]OLLINARES* DURING HIS FIRST DUOVIRATE IN THE FORUM A PROCESSION, BULLS, BULLFIGHTERS AND THEIR HELPERS, THREE PAIRS OF PLATFORM FIGHTING GLADIATORS, BOXERS IN GROUPS, AND GAMES WITH MUSIC AND PANTOMIMES AND PYLADES, AND GAVE 10,000 SESTERCES TO THE PUBLIC DURING HIS DUUMVIRATE. IN HIS SECOND (QUINQUENNIAL) TERM, AT THE *LUDI APPOLLINARES* IN THE FORUM HE PRESENTED A PROCESSION, BULLFIGHTERS AND THEIR HELPERS, AND GROUP BOXERS; ON THE NEXT DAY HE EXHIBITED ON HIS OWN AT THE SPECTACLES 30 PAIRS OF ATHLETES, 5 PAIRS OF GLADIATORS, AND WITH HIS COLLEAGUE HE PRESENTED 25 PAIRS OF GLADIATORS AND THE *VENATIONES*, BULLFIGHTING, BULL-BAITING, WILD BOARS, BEARS, AND OTHER WILD ANIMALS IN VARIOUS HUNTS. IN HIS THIRD TERM ALONG WITH HIS COLLEAGUE HE PRESENTED GAMES [OR DRAMAS] FROM A FOREMOST GROUP WITH ADDED MUSIC. (*CIL* X 1074d).[113]

- Amphitheatres and the Colosseum

Gladiatorial combat had initially taken place in informal areas such as the forum, but soon wooden structures were erected to house the spectacles, with the first amphitheatre built of stone in Rome donated by Pompey Magnus in 55 BCE (Dodge 1999: 212-215; Carter & Edmondson 2015: 537).[114] Another dedicated theatre for such spectacles was finished in time for the 29 BCE triple triumph of

[111] 'The spraying of aroma (sparsio) and a flower 'rain', offered also in circuses and theatres, were no less attractive to the public. In the stuffy atmosphere caused by a great concentration of masses of people, they brought freshness and a bit of comfort', Nossov 2009: 134.

[112] On the relationship between the annual calendar, programmed events, and the general logistics around arranging the spectacles in the provinces, see Van Nijf 2012: 47-88.

[113] Examples from the collection of McElduff n.d.

[114] Although Vitruvius informs us that in his time it was unusual for gladiatorial fights to take place in the fora of Italian towns (*De arch.* 5.1.1-2). On amphitheatres in the Roman provinces, see Dodge 2009 and 2014a. On spectacles in the provinces, Kelly 2011.

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Augustus (Coleman 2003: 61-62). Pompey's theatre was destroyed by the fire of 64 CE, and after the fire Nero used the land in the middle of Rome to build his *Domus Aurea.* But when Vespasian became emperor, he re-commissioned the palace, filled in the lake and gave this land back to the people by building the Flavian amphitheatre on it, known today as the Colosseum,[115] a celebration of military power and blood sports. The Colosseum was officially opened under his son Titus in 80 CE. It was the perfect symbol for Flavian power and represented a particular style of interaction between the emperor and the Roman people.[116]

The Colosseum then came to be one of the most important places in which the emperor came to face to face with the people.[117] Seeing the emperor, the vestal virgins and the senators was often the sole means provided for interaction with the populace, while those Romans who attended the Colosseum thought of themselves as participants not just spectators.[118]

The physical amphitheatres throughout the Mediterranean became the symbol for the Roman presence as once the gymnasium was seen as a unique Greek city construction.[119] Over the centuries, the *Amphitheatrum Flavium,* in particular, has become a lasting symbol for the imperial might of the Roman Empire. Even today, the Colosseum is still regarded as Roman power on display, a conspicuous symbol of Roman entertainment, a marker of modern perceptions of Roman character and an example of the spectator's importance in comparison to that of the competitor and performer.

- Seating and social hierarchy

The amphitheatre and the arena thus played an integral social role and maintained Roman hierarchical relations and social standing.[120] The spectators entered, sat and exited according to a strict hierarchy, separated by sex and status.[121] According to Livy (34.54.4-8), prior to the consulship of Scipio

[115] This name is a medieval sobriquet that has stuck but is considered to have arisen from the colossal statue of Nero that stood nearby. Hence Vespasian's intent to dislodge Nero from Rome's 'sites of memory' can be deemed a failure as it makes the 'Colosseum' more of a memorial to him than the dynasty that replaced him.
Several films such as DeMille's *Sign of the Cross* and LeRoys' *Quo Vadis* incorrectly but quite happily portray Nero presiding over the massacre of Christians within the arena itself. Even Asterix and Obelix are shown irreverently greeting Julius Caesar from within the Colosseum.

[116] It was only by this time that the 'monarchy' of Rome felt so completely entrenched to risk and perhaps enjoy confronting their citizen-subjects collectively (Hopkins & Beard 2005: 40).

[117] It is possible to speculate that the Roman populace naively considered that this was the one opportunity where there was equality, where they could collectively influence the emperor through the chanting and cheering.

[118] Some of the contemporary images produced in late antiquity depict crowds that are rather well behaved, supporting an ideology of elite munificence paralleling contemporary panegyrics. These images were often commissioned by the producers of the games (Lim 1999: 355)

[119] On the amphitheatres as buildings and their construction, see Vitr. 5.9.1; Tertullian, *De Spect.* 1.10; Pliny the Elder, *HN* 31.114-115; Plut. *Pomp*. 52 and *Caes*. 66.1; Dio 39.38.1;

[120] Seating was also provided before the existence of amphitheatres, when spectators watched events in the Forum (Jory 1986: 537-539).

[121] In the 1st century CE Rome had a finely nuanced social hierarchy and therefore the area with its finely graded map of social hierarchy can be compared to the Panopticon (Gunderson 1996: 115).

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Africanus at the close of the 2nd century BCE, seating was randomly taken up as spectators arrived, irrespective of social status. The *ludi Romani* held in 194 BCE saw the first separation of senators, who were now seated in the *orchestra*, and the remaining seats were now allocated according to the *discrimina ordinum*, the hierarchy of ranks according to property classifications as well as age and gender. Each of these groups wore attire that marked their rank.[122] In 123 BCE more subcategories of segregation were introduced by C. Gracchus, allowing for example equites to sit among the fourteen rows behind the *orchestra*.[123]

The entire composition of the amphitheatre reflected the order of society, with the honourable citizens seated above, and the social outcasts in the arena down below.[124] The spectators could then look down on those excluded and condemned to death both figuratively and literally. Roman hierarchy was on show at the games, from the *lex Julia theatralis*[125] (introduced by Augustus c. 5 CE in an attempt to restructure Roman society after the preceeding chaos), which formalised earlier custom by essentially regulating and ordering the whole body of spectators according to distinctions of the Roman socio-political hierarchy (Suet. *Aug*. 44). Choice front-row seats were reserved for the elites with such dignitaries as priests, augurs, and Vestal Virgins sitting opposite each other in ordered ranks. This formula of *discrimen ordinum* extended to the provinces and other cities outside Rome.[126] The discreditation of the image of the disordered 'barbaric' masses from scholarly research today is certainly supported by this image of the spectators ordered and managed in a rigid system. Arena seating can then be considered as an 'ideological map of the social structure of the Roman state, a map first laid out in general by the Republican *nobile*s and favourably biased in its representation of themselves' (Gunderson 1996: 125; Parker 1999: 163-165), a map later refined in further and extreme detail by Augustus.[127]

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[122] Should a person become a senator in Rome (as Lucius Vorenus does in the series *Rome*, Ep. 12), this would be reflected through a change in seating at the games and exhibition of his new clothes. Status at the amphitheatre is also illustrated in other ways: Coleman (2011: 337) cites an example from Ephesus in 103/4CE where C. Vibius Salutaris, a prominent citizen, arranged to have images of the current emperor and his consort (Trajan and Plotina) displayed next to those of various deities, 'as well as personifications of the constituent elements of Roman and Ephesian society'.

[123] The *lex Roscia theatralis* converted this to a formal law in 67 BCE, Nicolet 1980: 365.

[124] Gunderson 1996: 116 explores how the arena provides a space where spectacle can be looked on inwardly, but how its organisation and infrastructure reflected the existing relationships between the 'observer and the observed', proposing that there is therefore no real 'outside' to the arena.

[125] This remains a law of uncertain date.

[126] This is confirmed through studies of the epigraphic evidence from surviving stone seat structures as discussed by both Kolendo 1981: 301-15 and Roueché 1993: 119-128 where, at Aphrodisias in Asia Minor certain places were reserved and marked as such for specific civic groups, trade associations (*syntechnia*) and associations of young men (*neoi, iuvenes*). This structuring according to the social order not only reflected the social hierarchies, but also produced them, making the social bonds of Roman society 'emotionally authentic', Kolendo 1981: 315.

[127] As the Empire expanded, and senators had curious foreign names, when 'the plebs no longer knew their *boni*, and when the *boni* no longer had ancient Roman lineages, the spectacle of seating privilege became an increasingly important mechanism for both constituting and justifying nobility in the eyes of the *nobiles* as well as the *plebs'*, Gunderson 1996: 126.

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Amphitheatres were built for mass entertainment and even smaller, local amphitheatres such as Fig. 4.23 could seat at least 1000 people (Weiss 2014: 98; Streinu 2016: 267). A diversity of structures was built during the Roman period, especially in the early Principate. Although wooden amphitheatres were not abandoned, recent studies have indicated that during the 1st century CE there was a huge increase in gladiatorial presentations and wild-beast hunts and to support all of these shows many brickwork amphitheatres were constructed throughout the Roman Empire (Edmondson 1996).

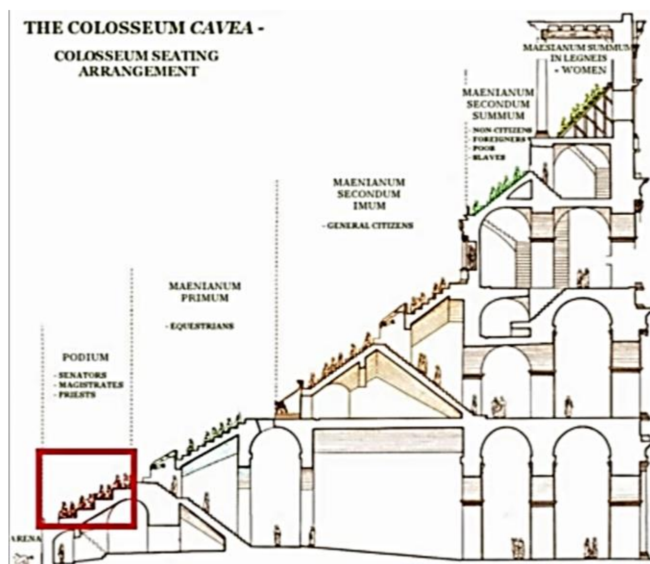

Figure 4.22: Colosseum seating plan

Audience perceptions were also shaped by the physical site.[128] The architecture of this building was very different to the semi-circular seating of the Greek theatre where attention was focused upon the stage. In the amphitheatre, as in the circus, performers were exposed to a view from all around and spectators faced each other (Bergman 1999: 23). The amphitheatre was an enclosed world in which emperor, elites and subjects were all watching and being watched.

The emperor was expected to be there in attendance and to take as much obvious enjoyment in the proceedings as the audience did: Julius Caesar had been faulted for reading his correspondence while the combat was occurring (Hopkins 1983: 19).[129] As a microcosm of Roman society, it was a vital part of Roman political life to be there, to see and be seen by others where a politician and later a ruler could parade his power.

The amphitheatre[130] was created for the specific circumstances of gladiatorial fights. As can be seen in the images of the Colosseum in Figs 4.24 to 4.26 the shape has a fluid and dynamic quality, attributable to its curved shape. The action moved around its oval shape which helped to lengthen the action, creating maximum entertainment value. The architecture of the amphitheatre was a powerful instrument for commanding mass attention, facilitating the maximum impact of sound and image. Seneca refers to the arts which 'aim towards pleasure (*voluptatem*) of the eyes and ears' (*Ep.* 88.22),

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[128] On the role of topography and architecture in the public spectacles of the late republic, see Aldrete 2003.
[129] Like MPs criticised nowadays for reading emails while they should listen to debates.
[130] The term 'arena' can refer to the 'amphitheatre as a cultural institution', but architecturally it means the 'performance floor of an amphitheatre', Welch 2007: xxi.

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referring specifically to the *machinatores* or stage craftsmen who let scaffolding and floors rise, and objects fit together and collapse by their art, in other words machinery which created unexpected effects through technological transformations (Hammer 2010: 63).[131] The overall aim of such technological feats was to showcase the magnificence of the emperor and to heighten the expectation of the crowd. The Colosseum had a complex underground structure of tunnels and shafts which made this possible (Davis-Marks 2021) (Fig. 4. 24).

The repertoire of the Colosseum has been well documented; all manner of flamboyance was on display: gladiators carried out battles to the death; exotic animals were set on unwary victims, even reconstructed naval engagements, which will be discussed separately below.

Figure 4.23: Remains of the Roman amphitheatre built at Thysdrus around 237 CE, today El Djem, Tunisia.

On the one hand, the arena functioned to showcase an idealised version of the Empire, where those who were defeated or died represented the uncivilised world. But the arena also 'educated' Romans about the Empire. Augustus, as had Caesar,[132] used the arena to showcase exotic and rare animals and all manner of other marvels.[133] Claudius had the surrender of the British kings re-enacted (Suet. *Claud*. 21), while other subjugated tribes were brought in and made to fight as a whole (Dio 51.22).

Plass (1995: 1) ties the cost, the escalating pageantry, and the human and animal carnage to a larger symbolic universe that reaffirmed through displays of consumption a social and cosmic hierarchy. Through these displays, one demonstrated both magnanimity and self-control. Hopkins (1983: 12)

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[131] Newmyer interprets this mastery of the technical as a reflection of the Roman desire to show their mastery over nature (1984: 1-3).

[132] The 'camelopard' was introduced in 46 BCE by Julius Caesar (Dio 43.21.3).

[133] Suet. *Aug*. 43. The novel rhinoceros and hippopotamus were slain in the *venatio* described in Dio 51.22

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and Coleman (1990: 72) argue that the historical and mythological spectacles, or the killing of wild beasts, were associated with the emperor himself and endorsed his 'charisma and authority', as a 'spectacular dramatization of the emperor's formidable power: immediate, bloody and symbolic' (Hopkins 1983: 12).

Figure 4.24: Showing the *hypogeum*, the interlinked underground tunnels underneath the arena.

Martial,[134] in his *Liber Spectaculorum*, written to celebrate the 80 CE opening of the Roman Colosseum, spares no hyperbole on praising the building and describing the opening games as being a hundred days of wild beast shows; crucifixions; gladiator combat; and the re-enactment of Greek myth with extravagant scenery and physical deaths:

> Barbarian Memphis be mute re the pyramids' wonders, and you Assyrians stop bleating of Babylon; no praise for tender Ionians, and Diana's trivial temple, and may Apollo's many-horned altar bury Delos deep; don't let the Carians cry extravagant words to the sky regarding the Mausoleum that hangs in vacuous air. All efforts now give way to Caesar's new amphitheatre, Fame can speak of the one, and that can do for them all (Mart. *Spect.* 1, transl. Shackleton Bailey).

The triumph of Julius Caesar in 46 BCE witnessed a succession of *venationes* in the arena that culminated in a mass engagement:

> Combats with wild beasts were presented on five successive days, and last of all there was a battle between two opposing armies, in which five hundred foot-soldiers, twenty elephants, and thirty horsemen engaged on each side. To make room for this, the goals

[134] As the in-house poet of the imperial court, Martial was not an impartial witness. He was expected not only to reflect the fame of the monument but to use his art to make it famous, something in which he was strikingly successful considering the rash of imitations it spawned, Hopkins & Beard 2005: 24. The 3rd century amphitheatre at El Jem (Fig. 4. 23) in modern Tunisia was modelled so closely on the pattern of the Roman example that it can be best described as 'a shrunken Colosseum'.

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> were taken down and in their place two camps were pitched over against each other (Suet. *Jul.* 39.4, transl. Rolfe).

From this elaborate opening the Colosseum continued to stage spectacles until the last recorded wild beast show which took place in the reign of Theodoric in 523 CE (Hopkins & Beard 2005: 2).

As previously mentioned, the Romans would often re-enact well-known Greek myths, but in the Colosseum, Icarus would be catapulted across the arena in order to show him flying too close to the sun and falling to Earth and death. What seemed to astonish Martial[135] the most was the intricacies of the engineering, that in the morning the Colosseum could be flooded for sea battles, but the area was drained quickly enough for gladiatorial combat to take place in the afternoon.

Coleman (1990) discusses these executions dressed as mythological enactments, calling them 'fatal charades', to examine how those public displays provided opportunities to exact punishment. These themes are well developed by Martial in his thirty or so poems. Perhaps surprisingly, only one of the poems is specifically dedicated to a gladiatorial bout[136] at the inaugural games between the aptly named 'Priscus' and 'Verus' or 'Ancient' and 'True':

> As Priscus and Verus each drew out the contest and the struggle between the pair long stood equal, shouts loud and often sought discharge for the combatants. But Caesar obeyed his own law (the law was that the bout go on without shield until a finger be raised). What he could do, he did, often giving dishes and presents. 46 But an end to the even strife was found: equal they fought, equal they yielded. To both Caesar sent wooden swords 47 and to both palms. Thus valour and skill had their reward. This has happened under no prince but you, Caesar: two fought and both won (Mart. *Spect*. 29, transl. Shackleton Bailey).

- Naumachiae

Naumachiae recreated historic sea battles, such as Augustus' recreation of the Battle of Salamis, but also used pseudo-historical themes which were meant to show off the military and naval glory of its sponsor.[137] But for all its theatre, these events were not mock-ups, these were real clashes, where many lost their lives in the violence. The *naumachiarii* who manned the ships all wore the uniforms of their particular side. Typically, the participants would be captured prisoners of war or convicts sentenced to death, but free men also took part. Julius Caesar gave the first known public *naumachia* in 46 BCE in a basin in the Campus Martius on the occasion of his quadruple triumph over Gaul, Egypt, Pontus and Africa (Suet. *Jul.* 39.4) (Goncharova 2019: 87). This event involved two fleets of

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[135] Martial frequently emphasised in his poems the sophistication of what was presented in the arena, how it echoed Rome's mythological and cultural inheritance through representation and reality of myth now as real punishment.

[136] According to Hopkins & Beard (2005) this is the only account of a specific gladiatorial bout to survive from the ancient world.

[137] Zanker refers to the *naumachiae* as propaganda for the 'spiritual revival of the state' (1988: 184-185) and also that such shows were a display of Rome as the undefeatable conqueror and 'guarantor of world order' (1988: 187-192).

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biremes, triremes, and quadriremes manned by 4,000 galley slaves and 2,000 crew members, all engaged in a full-scale naval re-enactment.

Figure 4.25: No securely identifiable ancient representation of a *naumachia* exists, but the above illustrates an imagined a mock sea battle based on descriptions of ancient texts. The wooden floor of the arena, and the supports, could be removed so that the area could be filled with water.

Suetonius (*Jul.* 64-68) notes that this event drew people from all over Italy, some sleeping in the street the previous night in their efforts to get good seats. Vendors of street stalls did a roaring trade whilst the spectators were jostled by sex workers and thieves (some were even crushed in the packed crowds, including two senators). Caesar's particular *naumachia* was a meticulously performed rendition of the historic battle between the fleets of two of Rome's traditional enemies, Tyre and Egypt, and was probably the most complex event held in ancient Rome.

To stage such an event required extensive planning and was an enormous expense, no doubt explaining why no more than a dozen more were held after that of Caesar. Such a *naumachia* needed a suitable site, and deep pockets for the skilled craftsmen and engineers required for the theatre preparation, the seating, and the ships; teams to choreograph the action, and enough willing and unwilling participants to make it happen.

While the Colosseum's arena could have been flooded for such displays, *naumachiae* are also known to have been performed on natural bodies of water. According to Dio (48.19.1), Sextus Pompeius organised one in 40 BCE in the Strait of Messina, reenacting his own naval victory over Octavian as an intended sign of contempt. Claudius staged the historic Sicily and Rhodes battle on Lake Fucine in central Italy in 52 CE, involving a hundred ships and, according to Dio (60.4), with 19,000 convicted combatants taking part in the extravaganza.

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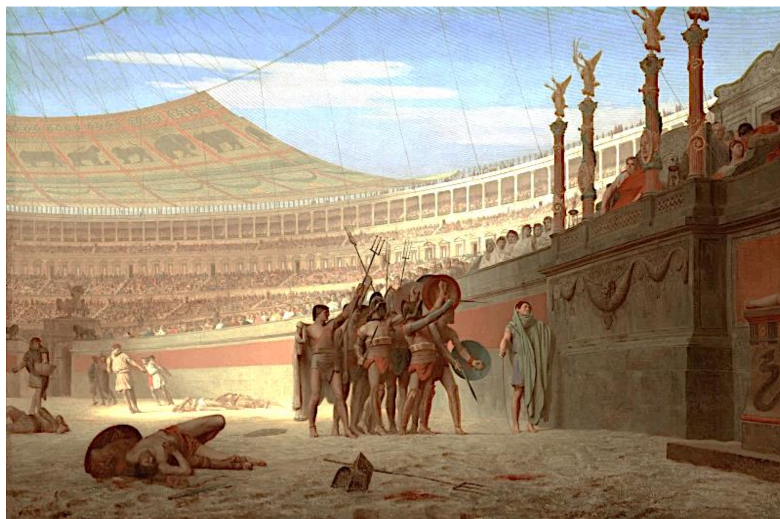
Figure 4.26: Ave Caesar! Morituri te salutant,
by Jean-Léon Gérôme.



This *naumachia* was modelled after Augustus' extravaganza half a century earlier, but it did not go off as smoothly. A silver Triton appeared from the centre of the lake and sounded a trumpet to begin the battle. The *naumacharii* then gave the salute '*Ave Caesar, Morituri te salutant*' ('Hail Caesar, those about to die salute you') – this is only referred to once in Suetonius (*Claud*. 21.6) and later in Dio (60.33.304)[138] referring to the same incident. In response to the salute, Claudius is reported as having answered '*Aut non*' in a weak joke, whereupon the fighters thought they had been pardoned and refused to fight.

As the painting by Gérôme in Fig. 4.26 illustrates, this gave rise, in all forms of media, to a misappropriation of this salute. Although gladiators are made to utter it with the left arm extended, there is a distinct lack of evidence that this phrase was ever uttered within the confines of the Colosseum or any other arena context (Hopkins & Beard 2005: 60).

Enraged at the reaction of the *naumacharii* on that occasion, Claudius leapt out of his seat and paced from one side of the lake to the other with his 'ridiculous tottering gait' (21.62). The participants were unmoved, so Claudius sent his imperial guard on rafts to prod the two sides into fighting. Tacitus relates:

> The battle, though one of criminals (*sontis*), was contested with the spirit and courage of freemen; and, after much blood had flowed, the combatants were exempted from destruction (*Ann.* 12.56.1, transl. Jackson).

Later sources still mention a few *naumachiae.* Trajan held one in a small artificial lake near the Vatican Hill in celebration of his conquest of Dacia. These ruins were discovered during excavations near the fortress of Sant'Angelo in the 18th century. The last *naumachia* was thought to have been

[138] Dio, writing a century after Suetonius on the same event, reproduces the salute as χαῖρε, αὐτόκρατορ· οἱ ἀπολούμενοί σε ἀσπαζόμεθα.

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held in 248 CE, commissioned by the emperor Marcus Julius Philippus (Philip the Arab), to commemorate the millennium since the traditional founding of Rome.[139]

- Musical Accompaniment

Figure 4.27: Musicians – an organ with organist, a trumpet player, and two seated horn players – are shown on the left, while a *threax* is fighting a *murmillo* on the right, mosaic from Zliten, early 2nd century CE.

In the *Satyricon*, the carver at Trimalchio's dinner is compared to a gladiator:

> making flourishes in time with the music, pulled the dish to pieces; you would have said that a gladiator in a chariot was fighting to the accompaniment of a water-organ (Petron. *Sat*. 36).

Music at the games was part of the tradition originally started by Augustus (Saylor 1987: 594; Rocconi 2015: 90). Fanfares announcing events, as well as musical accompaniments to mock combats and other events is shown in many ancient frescoes and mosaics and are often a sign that the scene illustrates arena fare and not actual combat (Fig. 4.27). Dessí (2020: 445-446) interprets also this as part and parcel of the attempts to control society with imperial propaganda. The arena action has been interpreted (on the basis of linguistic analysis) as taking place in time to the music (Simpson 2000: 635).

[139] The renaissance with its renewed interest in antiquity saw the revival of *naumachiae* although much toned-down in scale. One was performed in 1550 for Henry II of France in Rouen whilst in the mid-17th century, King Philip IV watched a flotilla perform fake military manoeuvres on the lake at the Buen Retiro palace in Madrid. In 1755 a river-based *naumachia* was held in Valencia in celebration of a local saint's canonization and another in Milan in 1807 for Napoleon. There is also confirmation of similar events that were for pure entertainment. Sadler's Wells Theatre in London became celebrated for *naumachia*-style spectacles in the early 1800s. Crowds thronged to see these naval battle reconstructions. The fad did not last, and 'aqua theatre' faded as a genre.

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SOCIETY AND THE GAMES

Through the period we are studying here, it can be said that there is little evidence that the Romans considered arena activities as cruel. They appeared to care little about the majority of participants who fought and died in the arena,[140] particularly criminals or even gladiators, since the expression of sympathy was proportional to the sufferer's social status (Barton 1989: 1-36). This partially supports Carucci's study (2019), which maintains that the arena was the place where justice in the form of the *summa supplicia* was meted out. Greater bloodthirstiness on the part of the crowd also makes sense in terms of the discussion in Chapter 3 on Goldstein's list of motivations for watching violence – seeing the 'bad guys' get what 'they deserve' is very satisfying viewing for most people.[141] When Seneca in his *Moral Epistles* (*Ep*. 95.33) writes 'it is a satisfying spectacle to see a man made a corpse', this is the context that he is referring to (bearing in mind also that, as a Stoic, his attitude to death was not the average view). While a crowd might have admired the gladiator bravely fighting to his death or the martyr calmly accepting their fate,[142] Kyle and Wiedemann (1999: 91, 245 & 2002: 4) agree there was very little indication of any concern about levels of cruelty enacted against criminals.

DECORATIVE IMAGERY IN HOUSES

The attitude of at least the Roman elite to spectacles of death in the arena can to some extent be discerned from the use of gladiators, *bestiarii* and executions in domestic décor – mosaics, frescoes, sculptures and various small objects for domestic use indicate that this was a popular motif (Figs. 4.28 and 4.29) (Brown 1992; Dunbabin 2016). Some of the figures are not in active combat, but there are many which are, and many show blood and death (Fig. 4.28, as well as Figs. 1.1 and 1.2 above, for example) with corpses indicated by coffins or θ signs. The Romans clearly felt no frisson at surrounding themselves with images of arena combat and animal hunts.[143] On the contrary, it was an opportunity for the owner of the house to show off his patronage and munificence as he was most likely a sponsor of such spectacles (Kondoleon 1999: 321), and this was how it was understood by those who entered his home.

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[140] Although Seneca (*Ep*. 7.2-5) expresses censure this is purely directed at the fact that criminals were executed/killed and unevenly matched gladiators were pitted against each other during the midday games and what the subsequent effect was on the spectator rather than any expression of feeling towards the participant. For Seneca, the real victims are the spectators.

[141] Discussed above, p. 58

[142] In addition to other references of sympathy, one well-known moment records the crowd's protests against the presider of games when the elephants were slaughtered. Cicero credits it to compassion (*misericordia*) for the animals (*Fam*. 7.1).

[143] As Carucci 2019: 217) puts it, we today might find such artwork 'disturbing and distasteful when viewed through our ideological lenses'.

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Figure 4.28: Roman floor mosaic of a variety of gladiatorial skirmishes, Bad Kreuznach, Germany.

Figure 4.29: Terracotta lamp with gladiator design, 1st century BCE to 1st century CE.

Reclining dining guests were privileged to able to view close-ups of gladiatorial combat recreated on mosaic floors and wild beast hunts painted onto walls amongst the variety of spectacle references that could be combined within a single room, which reflected a desire to prolong these ephemeral evens and to recreate and relive the most exciting moments.[144]

Also, since many of the decorations in people's houses feature criminals rather than professional gladiators or *bestiarii*, there was also a strong association with social justice and the keeping of order in society, which any estate owner would have been proud to support.

This provision of meta-spectacle brought the violence and spectacle of the games further into the domestic sphere and created images that were on continues display and which had multiple audiences at specific moments in history (Bergman 1999: 15). The violence of the arena was not just for the crowd's adrenaline-filled excitement; it became part of the domestic trappings of Roman family life,

[144] Kuttner (1999: 97-124) and Kondoleon (1999: 321-342) specifically discuss the rich assemblages of spectacle motifs within Roman houses in their chapters within *Art of Ancient Spectacle*.

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absorbed because their spectacular performances were central to how Romans conceptualised violence, sexuality and power.

WHAT THIS REVEALS ABOUT THE ROMANS

Whatever our modern attitudes to arena entertainments, scholarly research has made it clear that they cannot be dismissed as acts of pure sadism (Dunkle 2008: viii). The arena was just as complex as Roman society itself – the arena constituted a multifaceted array of displays and concomitant meanings, from displays of unusual animals to actual animal hunts, from gymnasts to gladiatorial pairs, all with an element of organisation, professionalism, 'competitive qualities, political character holiday atmosphere and of course its bloody violence' (Jackson 2000: 7). These acts of violence in the circumscribed locales and in their effect became an integral part of the urban population's ordinary experience in that they lacked the great theatre of war precipitated by the *pax Romana*. Ennodius, a 5th century bishop of Pavia (*Panegyricus dictus regi Theodorico* 213.25), indicates that Rutilius and Manlius, the consuls of the year 105 BCE, put on the first publicly sponsored gladiatorial games to provide people (who were now used to peace) a taste of the battlefield, to watch displays of aggressive manliness and fighting skills with a potential outcome that was carried out in an uncertain and dramatic manner (Welch 2007: 4).

It is abundantly clear that the prolonged and theatrical nature of these spectacles of death contributed to the establishment and reinforcment of Roman power in many ways. The power the emperor held over life and death was reinforced, social status and rank between the viewers was confirmed, and they were a clear reminder of the penalties for crime or revolt (Whitaker 2017).

RECEPTION TENDENCIES

The spectacularity of the gladiatorial show was rooted in Roman society, with the image of the amphitheatre, circus and theatre permeating from top to bottom across all classes, until being prohibited in the early 5th century CE by the Christian emperors. The legacy of the gladiator was revived primarily from the beginning of the 18th century through excavations at Pompeii and the discovery of an amphitheatre and a gladiatorial school. This gave rise to other art forms such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* in 1834 and perhaps the most evocative, Jean-Léon Gérôme's painting *Pollice verso* in Fig 3.2 above, which captures the drama of the gladiatorial spectacle and one which has clearly had an enormous influence on film portrayals of

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gladiators, in particular Scott's *Gladiator.*[145] Director Ridley Scott was shown a replica of this painting by the producers prior to his reading of the script:

> That image spoke to me of the Roman Empire in all its glory and wickedness. I knew right then and there I was hooked.

Also illustrated in the neoclassical painting that inspired the film's aesthetics, is the significance of white masculinity shown in the gladiator's command over the blood of his victims and his ability to make his body desirable for the predominantly feminine spectators.

Despite criticism from the 5th century Christian literature onwards the ethos of man versus man in single combat carried on in history through the medium of the duel which emerged in its various guises throughout medieval Europe. Despite obvious differences in that the duel, formalised combat between two individuals, was not advertised as popular entertainment there was still a strong connection through its very nature – merciless single combat with deadly weapons (Meijer 2007: 5). These however, were always between two men in settlement of personal quarrels and were never mass spectacles but rather often carried out more secretly.[146] Both a tournament and a duel subscribed to a predetermined code of honour, which considered the killing of an injured opponent a despicable act. In France, for example, no less than 8 000 aristocrats and officers died as a result of formal duels between 1594 and 1610. Further tournaments and duels were strictly the domain of the elite only higher nobility could take part in a tournament while a duel could only be fought by members of the nobility.

The re-enactment of moments in history on film can often be questioned and it is necessary to ask if these scenes really are serious efforts to represent the facts, conflicts and sensibilities of those times, and if they are faithful to the historical record. This is a question that *has* been asked long before the advent of film and even in the times of ancient Greece and Rome. Aristotle found it necessary to draw the distinction between poetry and prose stating that 'poetry relates more of the universal, while history relates particulars' (*Poet.* 19), thus, noting their dichotomy and acknowledging that their roles were different, each serving a different function. Many playwrights and critics have agreed with Aristotle and some, such as in the field of German literature, consider his writings authoritative in defining the rules of tragedy and the author's use of historical matter (Ganter 2008: 40). However, following on in the theme of German literature, history has played an important role ever since the

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[145] The uniqueness of the painting has had its further effect on film, 'Gérôme spins time on several different axes', said Marc Gotlieb, who compared the effect to 'bullet time' a popular technique in film. Temporally, 'the scene is slowed so dramatically that we can see events that would normally be undetectable'. But spatially, 'we can still move around the scene as normal, gaining the ability to move around the undetectable event and see it from different perspectives'. The Matrix popularized such effects in action films where the main character, Neo, is shown dodging a bullet in slow motion as the camera moves around the scene at normal speed' (Allan & Morton 2010: 63).

[146] The duel or 'trial by combat', prevalent in Europe from between the 9th - 16th century might be considered as being the closest to gladiatorial combat, where dispute was settled through single combat between two parties, although this was not seen as being for public enjoyment, but as an act of legal procedure.

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Heldendichtungen or ‘heroic literature’ of the Germanic period in which epic tales of noble and heroic acts were handed down from one generation to the next. Thus, the significance can be found not so much in form as in content (Ganter 2008: 40).

Film has proved to be an effective medium for the shaping of public awareness of, and interest in, the gladiator (Dunkle 2008: 4). Despite our censure of such gratuitous violence the word gladiator has entered modern vocabulary as a highly charged and recognisable term that is used figuratively about athletes and even those in non-athletic professions to indicate an ‘aggressively courageous nature and a willingness to sacrifice everything in the pursuit of success’ (Dunkle 2008: 5).

It would appear that gladiators were appreciated in much the same way as the stars of contact sports are today, that they were the frequent topic of everyday conversation. Just as Horace (*Sat.* 2.6.44) discusses the merits of one gladiator versus another whilst riding in a carriage with Maecenas, or Tacitus (*Dial*. 29.3) complains of ‘those characteristic vices of this metropolis of ours, taken on, as it seems to me, almost in the mother’s womb, the passion for play actors, and the mania for gladiatorial shows and horse-racing’, in a similar fashion that we too discuss the merits and defects of a particular rugby player, or a football star.

The scholarly perspective on the gladiator and on the crowd of spectators has undergone a considerable change in modern historiography, as discussed in this chapter. In popular media, however, the mob and the related theme of violence associated with social decay is still strongly favoured.

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CHAPTER 5: *SPARTACUS* – 'ELECTRIFYING THE WORLD'

In the modern era the Spartacus figure has been greatly celebrated - between the 1760s and 1960s there were 'half a dozen long poems, most of them heroic epics; a dozen dramas; six operas; many paintings' and numerous children's books focused on Spartacus (Shaw 2001: 23). The 20th century alone saw a minimum of six historical novels, a ballet score[1] and several movies, including the most well-known and influential of these, Kubrick's *Spartacus*. All the authors from the past few centuries have interpreted and stage-managed the story of Spartacus as one of a rebellion by the oppressed fighting for their freedom and deliverance from slavery. These interpretations sprang from their own political reasons despite the lack of evidence that Spartacus in his historical context and according to the ancient source material, desired a 'new world order' or the 'abolishment of slavery'. There certainly was no real class struggle or social revolution of this nature at the time. Nor was Spartacus a protagonist advocating for the abolition of slavery or the destruction of Rome, but this type of revolutionary imaging made for good viewing to the contemporary film audience, as expressed in rhetorical language by Fast, the author of the book on which Kubrick's *Spartacus* is based:

> Tales become legends and legends become symbols, but the war of the oppressors against those who oppress them went on. It was a flame which burned high and low but never went out … (1951: 363).

SPARTACUS – THE ANCIENT CONTEXT

At the end of the three Punic Wars, Rome finally defeated Carthage, her chief rival for power, in 146 BCE. Rome sold into slavery the surviving 50 000 Carthaginians as well as many other captives from vanquished territories around the Mediterranean (Shaw 2001: 8).[2] Thus in the 3rd and 2nd centuries

[1] The ballet, by Aram Khachaturian, was awarded the Lenin Prize in the Soviet Union in 1959.

[2] This was the beginning of the development of a large-scale agricultural economy based on cheap slave labour particularly in Campania, with its excellent soil, and on Sicily.

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BCE a new slave economy emerged, alongside a society that rapidly grew accustomed to slave labour.[3]

Since most of these slaves had not been born into slavery and had become enslaved during their own lifetime, they were still aware of what it meant to be free. Slave insurrections were therefore not a novelty in Rome (Shaw 2001: 10).[4] In 135 BCE on the island of Sicily (one of the Roman Empire's first overseas provinces) a revolt was sparked by extreme cruelty to slaves; in excess of 70,000 slaves rebelled and successfully fought the local militia for two years until they were eventually overcome by the Roman army (Stampacchia 1976: 23).[5]

Another servile war broke out on the island in 104 BCE and 40,000 slaves wrought havoc in rural areas.[6] After four years of bloody fighting, the rebel survivors were captured by the Roman consul Manius Aquillius and transported to Rome to suffer *damnatio ad bestias*. The final and most notorious of the major slave insurrections experienced by Rome was the Spartacus rebellion, 73-71 BCE, and the Romans would subsequently be ever vigilant in their concern for security and protection from their slaves (Bradley 1984: 107). This uprising, moreover, took place on Italian ground, something which exerted an enormous psychological effect on its Roman citizens.[7] In these insurrections the insurgent units consisted of former slaves and rural poor so in the perspective of the Romans, it was a threat to the social hierarchy. The fear engendered by the Spartacus revolt which raged through Italy for two years would haunt the Roman psyche for many generations (Czech 1994). Tacitus recounts an episode from the reign of Nero, some hundred years later, when gladiators at Praeneste, about forty kilometres southeast of Rome, made an attempt to escape, and panic erupted:

> About the same time, an attempted outbreak of the gladiators at the town of Praeneste was quelled by the company of soldiers stationed as a guard upon the spot; but not before the populace, allured and terrified as always by revolution, had turned its conversation to Spartacus and the calamities of the past *(Ann.* 15.46.1, transl. Jackson) (my emphases).[8]

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[3] Elaborated on by Appian *B.Civ.* 1.7.

[4] A thorough discussion of the social circumstances in the servile wars can be found in Barca 2020.

[5] Diodorus Siculus gives the main account of the war. Only fifteen of his original forty-books have survived and the accounts of the slave uprising are gleaned from Photios and Constantine Porphyrogenitus who made synopses of his work. Other synopses, asides and fragments are available from writers like Livy, Julius Obsequens, Orosius, Appian, Posidinius, Cicero, Strabo and Florus.

[6] The main account of the second servile war also derives from Diodorus Siculus and is again preserved in two versions by Photios and Constantine Porphyogennetos. Minor sources are from Athenaeus, Cassius Dio, Florus and Cicero.

[7] Reminiscent of the 'psychosis of fear' caused by Hannibal during the Second Punic War (*metus Punicus*), Bellen 1985; Brizzi 2012; Mehl 2014: 257–258.

[8] Athenaeus elaborates on the threat that he held for the Republic: 'If he had not been killed in the battle that he fought against [Marcus] Licinius Crassus, he would have caused no ordinary threat to my fellow citizens, just as Eunus did in Sicily' (*Deipnosophistae* 6.272f-73a). There was never again a slave rebellion of such dimensions of Spartacus, which in itself can be attributed to a variety of reasons such as the brutality of Roman repressions, the custom that developed of rewarding some slaves with privileges, including their freedom through manumission and the changing economy of the late Roman Empire which altered the role of slavery.

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SPARTACUS AS A HISTORICAL FIGURE

All accounts and references to Spartacus as a historical figure are shaped by the sympathies of authors who, like their intended readers, were all members of the educated elite, and needless to say there are no surviving texts representing the slave or rebel voice.[9] Certainly no 'hero' by the name of Spartacus existed in antiquity as the Roman writers defined heroes as men who embodied the prevailing social norms, norms they felt could only be understood and fulfilled by their own class.[10]

The main ancient accounts of the Spartacan slave rebellion are contained in Sallust's *Conspiracy of Catiline* and his *War of Jugurtha*; Plutarch, *Lives* (Crassus and Pompey); Appian's *Civil Wars*; Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*; Livy's *History of Rome from its Foundation*; and, finally, Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*. The accounts of Plutarch and Appian give similar accounts of the order of events (Plutarch is more expansive) and it is probable that similar sources were used, not least because both these writers were of Greek stock (Shaw 2001: 25).[11] Spartacus is also mentioned in the letters of Cicero (*Response to the Haruspices,* written in 57 BCE) as well as by Diodorus Siculus (fr. 39.22). Of all of these accounts, that by the Roman historian Sallust should perhaps be considered the most 'authentic' as he was writing closest to the event, although he lived a generation after the rebellion. The writings of Velleius Paterculus, Frontinus, Orisorius and Eutropius are of lesser value as sources due to their conflicting and exaggerated reports of the number of slaves involved and the final casualty lists, and their clear pro-Roman sentiments.[12] However, all these writings from historians, geographers, ethnographers, philosophers and rhetoricians in the ancient world were deliberately contrived versions of previous events incorporated into a narrative calculated to appeal to an educated contemporary elite. The ancient accounts can therefore be considered against the slaves in the same way as modern sympathies favour them.

It is therefore unsurprising that the accounts of the rebellion itself are reasonably well-known and moderately consistent, while little is known of the life of the real Spartacus prior to his activities as in the Third Servile War as one of the three purported slave leaders.

Beyond the literary accounts, there is not a great deal of evidence. At the entrance of a house in Pompeii there is a fresco (illustrated in fig. 5.1) depicting two gladiators fighting on horseback. One of these is named *Spartaks* (an Oscan form of the name Spartacus), which many think may refer to

[9] 'Whilst there are several narrative accounts by historians, official state records pertaining to the war do not survive. The conflict with Spartacus is not recorded in the *fasti consulares* for the year 73 BCE, while the text for the years 72 and 71 are lost; all three years are lost from the *fasti triumphales'*, Gerrish 2012: 130.
[10] As Urbainczyk 2016 (ebook) indicates, Spartacus may have been a symbol of the hero of the oppressed today, but this is in spite of the ancient sources, not because of them.
[11] See also more broadly, Potter 2011c: 316-345 on the Greek historians of Rome.
[12] There is a very good discussion of the relative merit of the ancient sources in Stampacchia 1976.

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the original Spartacus although there is no definite proof that this was the same man (Shaw 2001: 15; Jacobelli 2003: 106).

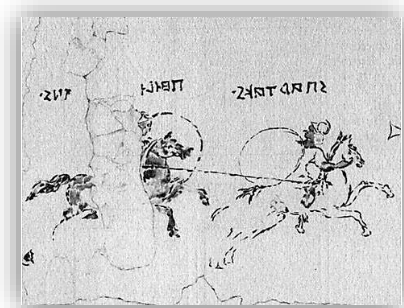

Figure 5.1: A detail from the 'Spartacus Fresco' in Pompeii dating from the early 1st century BCE. On the left the rider is given the label 'Felix the Pompeian' (or 'Lucky from Pompeii') and on the right is 'Spartaks', or 'Spartacus' in Latin, written reading right to left, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Rome.

General information on the life of a gladiator can be (and has been) applied to flesh out the picture since we know from the sources that Spartacus was a gladiator who trained at the gladiatorial training school at Capua, from which he escaped in 73 BCE along with some 70 other gladiators. In Capua, about 200 km south of Rome and north of present-day Naples, Spartacus was trained in the *ludus* of Lentulus Batiatus (Plut. *Crass*. 8.1). Several gladiatorial training schools had sprung up across Italy, and many were clustered near the wealthy town of Capua. Campanian gladiators were considered the very best in the profession, a reputation which endured into the 3rd century CE. At such schools, professional gladiators, prisoners of war and slaves were taught to fight and perform, probably receiving training in a variety of weapons though they would usually specialize in one. The diet of the gladiators and exercise routines were standard in these training schools, much like in any athletic training, but one where strict discipline could be harshly enforced (Czech 1994).

These details need to be combined with what we can gather from the literary sources. All these ancient sources mention Spartacus as one of the leaders of the rebellion, although the facts and figures about the supporters of Spartacus are likely highly exaggerated by some (Beard 2015: 248) who all see the uprising as an alarming sign of that *mundus inversus*. From the outset it appears that Spartacus demonstrated high quality leadership and military prowess, which reinforces the suggestion made by some of the Roman sources that he had spent time in the Roman army.[13] Appian for example tells us that he was a freeborn Thracian[14] who had previously been with the Roman army, either as a

[13] Goldsworthy (2004: 182-184) points out that Roman historians would have emphasized Roman attributes in their enemies. In Roman eyes great military commanders were usually cunning and mindful not to risk battle unless conditions were in their favour. This can be seen with writings on Hannibal, for instance. Romans also liked to think of their greatest enemies as having been trained by them and the theme of the Roman-trained 'enemy within' retains a place in Roman accounts of their own military history. Apart from Spartacus (who was taught to fight in a gladiator school, and possibly in the legions), another famous example includes Arminius, who massacred two Roman legions in the Teutoburg forest in modern day Germany in 9 CE.

[14] Thrace is now the extreme north-eastern part of what is now Greece, southeast Bulgaria and the portion of Turkey west of the Bosphorus. Although the Romans had already annexed part of Western Thrace to Macedonia by the late 2nd century

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mercenary or as a paid auxiliary and after deserting and being recaptured could have been sold as gladiator (App. *B.Civ.* 1.14.116). Plutarch's account dovetails with this:

> Spartacus was a Thracian from the nomadic tribes and not only had a great spirit and great physical strength, but was, much more than one would expect from his condition (τύχης) most intelligent and cultured, being more like a Greek than a Thracian (*Crass*. 8.2, transl. Warner).

Plutarch goes on to say that Spartacus and an un-named woman with prophetic qualities[15] (his wife or mistress, ἡ γυνὴ) were both despatched to Italy as prisoners to be sold as slaves.

Florus for his part also adds 'bandit' (*latro*, *Epit.* 2.8.8)[16] to Spartacus' occupations before he became a gladiator and is particularly scathing about the rebels' slave status and gladiatorial origins, calling them human beings of the lowest type and referring to them as *rabidis beluis* (translated as 'ravening monsters' by Perrin, *Epit.* 2.8.4).

In Plutarch's narrative, the gladiators, who had been severely treated and wrongfully confined to their barracks, broke out from their barracks, and overwhelmed the guards with 'kitchen cleavers and spits' (*Crass*. 8.2). He shows some sympathy for the rebels in his description:

> A man called Lentulus Batiatus had an establishment for gladiators at Capua. Most of them were Gauls and Thracians. They had done nothing wrong, but, simply because of the cruelty of their owner, were kept in close confinement until the time came for them to engage in combat (*Crass*. 8.1, my emphases).

This gives some support to the supposition that the catalyst which gave rise to the 73 BCE rebellion may have been brutality. Nevertheless, the life of a gladiator and fighting in regular combat may have been detrimental to long-term career plans, and one might have attempted to escape without any particular direct cause.

After climbing over the walls of the *ludus*, the gladiators were lucky enough to come across a wagon carrying gladiators' weaponry bound for another city, which they took to arm themselves (Plut. *Crass*. 8.2). Once equipped with such familiar weapons, the small group had suddenly become a dangerous fighting force. As word of their success spread, the gladiators were soon joined by hundreds (and

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BCE other Thracian tribes had remained free and in all likelihood provided auxiliaries for the Roman armies operating in Macedonia (Ward 2007: 96).

[15] Baldwin (1967: 290) points out the image of the prophetic frenzy of the mistress or wife foretelling a great future for Spartacus is a similar motif to one that pervades the career of Eunus the leader of the First Sicilian Slave War.

The name 'Spartacus (Spartocus) is found in references to archons and tribal leaders for the kingdom of Cimmerian Bosporus, a Greek colony settled by the Milesians in the 7th or early 6th century BCE on the shores of the Black Sea. According to Diodorus Siculus, the kingdom was taken over by a Thracian tyrant, Spartocus, in 438 BCE. The Spartocid dynasty endured until 110 BCE with several successive rulers called Spartocus' Harrsch (2010) goes onto suggest that 'he was not a simple Thracian slave or merely a Roman army deserter … must have been a nobleman'.

[16] Those who acted in violent opposition to the state, revolutionaries, or even just maligned opponents in political discourse were often branded as 'bandits' (for example, Joseph. *BJ* 2.254, 275; cf. 2.425), and this was used as a common slur (Blumell 2007: 4).

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later thousands) of runaway slaves along with shepherds and herdsmen and other Italians trying to escape the debts and hardships they faced under Roman rule.

Appian indicates that Spartacus was elected as one of the three leaders, the other two being Oenomaus and Crixus. This may have represented the ethnic grouping of the rebels, Thracian, Greek, and German.[17] Appian actually couples them as subordinates to Spartacus, although Crixus emerges as the acknowledged leader of the Gallic and German contingents:

> With the gladiators Oenomaus and Crixus as his subordinates he plundered the nearby areas … Crixus, at the head of 3,000 men, was defeated and killed by one of them [consuls] at Mount Garganus (*B.Civ.* 1.14.116-7, transl. White).

Plutarch, whose biographical focus is the figure of Crassus, writes of the several attempts to subdue and overcome the rebel army, concentrating on their unusual qualities rather than on any Roman failings. His comments on Spartacus are not uncomplimentary, but we must certainly bear in mind that Spartacus was the Turnus to Crassus' Aeneas:

> In the first place, when his horse was brought to him, he drew his sword, and saying that if he won the day, he would have many fine horses of the enemy's, but if he lost it he did not want any, he slew his horse. Then pushing his way towards Crassus himself, through many flying weapons and wounded men, he did not indeed reach him, but slew two centurions who fell upon him together (*Crass.* 11.6, transl. Perrin).

Appian informs us that afterwards, despite being killed in the decisive last battle, Spartacus' body was never found:

> The body of Spartacus was not found. A large number of his men fled from the battle-field to the mountains and Crassus followed them thither. They divided themselves in four parts, and continued to fight until they all perished except 6000, who were captured and crucified along the whole road from Capua to Rome (*B.Civ.* 1.14.120, transl. White).

Redonet (2017) has suggested that the slave rebellion was less significant than Appian and Plutarch's accounts would imply, maintaining that it constituted little more than a sequence of clashes carried out by a loosely connected network of isolated groups of escaped slaves who raided and looted, commanded by different commanders over which Spartacus exercised a certain amount of control. It is certainly true that Appian and Florus indicate that the Romans themselves initially viewed these as raids and not as an organised rebellion:

> Because the Romans did not yet class the affair as a war, but as a kind of raid akin to piracy, and they were defeated when they attacked him (App. *B. Civ.* 1.14.116, transl. White).
>
> This war against runaway slaves – all, to put it more truthfully, against gladiators – caused a general fright since it was no longer show for just a few but a cause of fear everywhere.

[17] See Shaw 2001 and Strauss 2009 for the most recent literature on the identification of the various ethnic factions within Spartacus' army.

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> Because it is called a slave, nobody should mistake it for something insignificant according to its name (Flor. *Epit.* 2.8.18-19, transl. Forster).

But the fact that ultimately a considerable force was sent out against them rather undermines the arguments of Redonet. Spartacus had moved into southern Italy through the Lucania region, where his army had begun to swell, growing to at least 90,000 men, eventually stationed on Mount Vesuvius. The new arrivals were trained and supplied with swords, and Spartacus kept military discipline very tight. The slave army was then able to evade and defeat Rome's underestimated and ill-planned attempts to defeat them for almost three years. It was only when the struggle was taken more seriously, and the legion was mobilised to meet the rebels, that Spartacus and the rebellion were defeated.

SPARTACUS' CHARACTER

It is Plutarch, some 170 years after the event, who brings together the few anecdotal strands that give some shape to Spartacus' character in his *Life of Crassus* (8-11), where he describes him as a good leader and a formidable strategist. Sallust acknowledges his spirit, strength and intelligence[18] and his attempts to curb his followers' baser instincts for rape, theft and murder (which is ascribed to their true nature or character as slaves) (*Hist*. 3.66). Appian (*B Civ*. 1.9.117) also accords some praise for his adherence to Roman military tradition (although this may be attributed to a feeling that his victories over various Roman commanders needed explaining). In Florus' account, Spartacus:

> also celebrated the obsequies of his officers who had fallen in battle with funerals like those of Roman generals, and ordered his captives to fight at their pyres, just as though he wished to wipe out all his past dishonour by having become, instead of a gladiator, a giver of gladiatorial shows (*si de gladiatore munerarius fuisset*) (Flor. *Epit*. 2.8.9-10, transl. Forster) (my emphases).

This is an interesting view, apart from the traditional acceptance of the author that gladiators were low on the social hierarchy of the time, since it seems to indicate that, at the time, there was no bias against holding gladiatorial entertainment.

Historians have long speculated on the events which led to their ultimate defeat. Redonet (2017) believes that it was the rebellion's supposed absence of any 'clear, overall objective; its failure to win support from the cities, and the inexhaustible resources of the republic that doomed the dreams of victory for the slaves who defied Rome'. But because of the nature of our sources, any actual goals of the rebels are not fleshed out in the ancient texts and are represented cursorily as very short-lived and immediate in that they preferred to remain and pillage the countryside rather than follow the plans

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[18] This is contained in a fragment found in Arusianus Messius' *Exempla Elocutionum* (p. 480 K VII) which alludes to it as an example of the use of *ingens* with the genitive (Gerrish 2012: 126).

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of Spartacus and seize the opportunity to escape Italy. It is naturally quite possible that the rebels may have preferred life in Italy and refused to cross the Alps. Unfortunately, this aspect can remain only speculative, and we must leave this to the filmic interpretations.

Clearly none of the Roman sources even implicitly claim that Spartacus intended on reforming Roman society and abolishing slavery. The suggestion of an overarching anti-slavery ideology is only brought about through the connection mentioned by Plutarch:

> At the Straits, he chanced upon some Cilician pirate craft, and determined to seize Sicily. By throwing two thousand men into the island, he thought to kindle anew the servile war there, which had not long been extinguished, and needed only a little additional fuel (*Crass.* 10.3, transl. Warner).

Hence the link is made to previous slave rebellions and a liberation ideology. However, it is far more likely that the ancient accounts of Spartacus reflected imperial interests and supported that ideology.

Spartacus – Perspectives over time

To Florus and the majority of ancient writers Spartacus was a spectacle of defeat, a bandit, a criminal and certainly the villain, an image that remained until the 18th century when Bernard-Joseph Saurin wrote the tragedy *Spartacus: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (1760), and created a hero with positive attributes:

> un homme qui joignit aux qualités brillantes des héros la justice et l'humanité, d'un homme en un mot qui fût grand pour le bien des hommes, et non pour leur malheur (Petitot 1819: 218).

This was the first point at which he is 'domesticated' and endowed with a private side alongside his political ideological priorities (which now included an overarching ideology of freedom in human society). When Voltaire[19] penned his thoughts and referred to the slave rebellion as 'a just war, indeed the only just war in history', this was entirely in tune with Parisian sentiments of the time, i.e., the years just before the French Revolution, when Rousseau also declared the right of all to individual freedom and Robespierre spoke the words 'liberté, egalité, fraternité'.[20]

The 'noble contemporary hero' was therefore staged in Paris to great acclaim. This play, based on Plutarch's writings, forms the foundation of the current, positive image of Spartacus, representing a triumph of freedom over servitude and adversity. From this point onwards popular culture has replicated his image many times. Needless to say, his role as gladiator and the issue of violent entertainment are now simply a backdrop, a minor detail since they play no essential role in the

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[19] In *Oeuvres* 52, vol. 9 of *Correspondance générale* 461-63 (1769).

[20] On the Social Contract and Discours sur l'organisation des gardes nationales, Article XVI, respectively.

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recreation of this tale. Where in the ancient authors Spartacus' role as a gladiator was part-and-parcel of the sketching of the lowly and denigrated role of the rebels, in modern receptions it is less useful to those recreating Spartacus for the modern audience.

Despite the fact that none of the ancient historical representations intimate that Spartacus was aspiring to societal reformation through the abolishment of slavery and promotion of equality, many differing intellectuals have nevertheless been motivated to recondition his story to align it to their own notions of social equality. From this point of view, his story has functioned as a stage through which issues of social stratification and equality can be explored. In short, through this re-creation of ancient time and space:

both authorship and social context are active: authors often reproduce narratives in order to elucidate specific concepts in favour of others that tie in to some form of ideology, or, at times, construct ideologies where they may be deemed lacking (Foka 2015b: 40).

Figure 5.2: Poster for the Italian film Spartaco (1953).

Figure 5.3: Poster for the American version of Spartaco (1954).

In general, the story of Spartacus is now interpreted in literature, television and film as one of a rebellion by an oppressed people fighting for their freedom and deliverance from slavery when in reality it appears that, although he attempted to lead his army to safety and freedom away from Rome's reach, there is no particular or generic evidence that it was his intention to overthrow Roman society. A pre-Victorian novel was published in 1822 (Susannah Moodie, *Spartacus: A Roman Story*)[21] where the character of Spartacus is that of the doomed hero, willing to sacrifice all for

[21] Very much in tune with the work of Moodie's close contemporary, Mary Shelley, author of Frankenstein (1818) with the dominant theme being the 'master and slave' or 'creator and creature' motif springing from the gladiatorial school and science lab respectively.

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freedom, rather than the Roman-trained auxiliary soldier-turned-gladiator who morphs into a military commander and poses a threat to Rome.

Also, Elijah Kellogg's *Spartacus to the Gladiators at Capua* (1842), a piece of fiction in which Spartacus champions national self-determination for ethnically-linguistically constituted peoples. His declamation can be only loosely connected to the original evidence concerning the treatment of gladiators and their diverse ethnic origins (Lillard 1975: 18). In this piece Spartacus addresses the slaves in what was to become in the late 1800s and early 1900s:

> a keynote address, endorsing the popular paradox that fighting and killing were the means to freedom, democracy and peace. Clearly, even after the Civil War it aroused favorite or familiar emotions (Lillard 1975: 18).

Raffaello Giovagnoli's *Spartaco* (1874) appropriated the Spartacus story for the purposes of the drive towards unification of Italy under Garibaldi. Almost forty years later, Giovagnoli's dated novel was the inspiration for the non-epic remake *Spartaco*, directed by Riccardo Freda (1953, Fig. 5.2), dubbed into English and released in the USA under the sensationalised all-inclusive title *Sins of Rome* (1954, Fig.5.3) and in other Anglophone countries merely as *Spartacus*.[22]

It ends with the death of its eponymous hero in the aftermath of the final battle, just as the ancient sources attest. The mass slave crucifixions,[23] the Roman response to insurrection mentioned in the ancient sources, are taken up by most receptions of the Spartacus story.

Since Spartacus was frequently utilised as a symbol of emancipation he was also taken up by other groups, from revolutionaries such as Adam Weishaupt in the late 18th century to Camus, a member of the underground resistance to the Nazis, to the socialist Karl Liebknecht[24] during the Cold War (Lillard 1975: 22).[25]

SPARTACUS BY HOWARD FAST

All this serves as a background to Howard Fast's novel, *Spartacus*, which was in turn the inspiration for the 1960 Kubrick film. Fast used the elements of the tradition to convey his opinions within an

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[22] A range of Spartacus film productions between 1913 and 2010 are discussed in Späth & Tröhler's chapter (2013).

[23] It must also be noted that Spartacus likewise crucified a Roman enemy soldier (Appian, *B. Civ.* 1.14.119).

[24] Karl Liebknecht (1871-1919) was a German Social Democrat, who with other radicals, founded a socialist underground group, the *Spartakusbund* (Spartacus League) in Berlin. This group eventually became the Communist Party of Germany. Liebknecht died in the so-called 'Spartacus Revolt' an attempted coup by the group in January 1919.
The failure of the *Spartakusbund* and the murder of Liebknecht and Luxemburg added resonance to the value of Spartacus as an icon (Futrell 2001: 90).

[25] Camus, *The Rebel* (1971, 80-81): 'Spartacus as illustrating the idea that a principle of equality, life for life . . . will always be found in the purest manifestations of the revolutionary spirit. . . . Spartacus had no new idea of equality, as in the distribution of land. He only helped the slaves in their brutal desire for justice'. Spartacus' reputation as a world revolutionary figure saw him taken up as a symbol in a classic of Soviet historiography by Aleksandr Mishulin (*The Spartacus Uprising: The Revolution of Slaves in Rome in the First Century before our Era*, 1936) (Shaw 2001: 17, n. 20).

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intelligible story that engaged his contemporary readership. Fast's version saw considerable changes to the original story of Spartacus and the invention of a love interest. The book contains uncompromising interpretations of 'good' and 'evil' in which the slaves are portrayed as 'innocent, true-hearted and loyal', barring Crixus, in contrast with the majority of the Romans, who are shown as 'arrogant, sexually debauched and greedy' (Harrsch 2010). Fast was careful to follow the more modern heroic tradition and exclude the less than complimentary historical information concerning the harshness of Spartacus' raids on the Roman countryside or his retaliatory crucifixion of captured Romans.

Fast's American-inflected, left-wing perspective informs Kubrick's *Spartacus* and represents the counter-hegemonic discourse of the 1950s, diminished but unrepentant. This is also the context of his ideal world, a 'golden age':

> where all men and women too had been equals and there was neither master nor slave and all things had been held in common. That long ago was obscured by a haze of time; it was the golden age (Fast 1996: 164).

As Cooper (2007: 15) points out, Fast wanted to portray someone 'engaged in an epic revolutionary struggle to overthrow Roman power in order to restore a legendary Golden Age of primitive tribal communism said to have existed in some distant epoch prior to the advent of human exploitation'. Fast began writing Spartacus just after release from a short (six-week) imprisonment for contempt of Congress in 1950.[26] It is therefore entirely plausible, as Hardwick (2003: 39) maintains, that Fast was inspired to write the book by his opposition to the late 1940s and 1950s in which the McCarthy movement in the United States took hold. Those who became the target of McCarthyism perceived the image of Spartacus as a 'paradigm of active resistance to injustice' (Shaw 2001: 18). In the film version, Crassus, the Roman Senator, states towards the end of the film 'Lists of the disloyal have been compiled', an echo of Sen. Joseph McCarthy (Harris 1995: 40) and many other political persecutions.[27] Certainly there are some strong political overtures contained in the film version, most notable and most famously the 'I am Spartacus' line spoken by the chained rebels when Crassus tempts them with the avoidance of crucifixion if they will just identify which amongst them is Spartacus. This scene has been 'interpreted as a direct reference to the infamous House Un-American Activities Commission, known more popularly as the McCarthy Hearings', which demanded that people testifying 'named names' of other communist sympathisers (Burgoyne 2011: 92). This brought

[26] The idea for the novel came from his reading Ward's *Ancient Lowly* (1883) during his incarceration.
[27] Rather than any classical sources Fast's main source for his work was Cyrenus Osborne Ward's *The Ancient Lowly* (1883) considered a minor classic in leftist circles. Fast did not have Latin and would therefore not have been able to read the original texts other than in translation and due to his incarceration as part of the anti-Communist hysteria that swept America at the time he was unable to travel to Italy. There is circumstantial evidence that he had also read Clark's *Woe to the Conquered*, and in some ways his sprawling, unedited, romantically centred novel is very Victorian (Macadam 2015: 4).

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the 'present-day context of the film' into immediate focus while simultaneously providing a moment of apotheosis when the 'male epic hero' became an idealised figure (Burgoyne 2011: 94).

In more recent years, as a result of the heroic nude movie scene,[28] the figure of the gladiator was taken up as a symbol of male homosexual emancipation. Thus, as Shaw summarises, Spartacus has become an epic individual who behaved in a 'heroic fashion' for freedom 'against all odds', a 'symbol of resistance to domination of mythic proportions' whose image has been manipulated as a political symbol to the extent that American 'red hunters' found the word Spartacus a clue to activities perceived to be subversive (2001: 2, 16).

KUBRICK'S *SPARTACUS*

As a historical person Spartacus might have gained some renown without his treatment in popular culture but it is that culture which shapes what the public memory retains and knows about him. Irrespective of accuracy or relevance it is popular culture which adds to the mythopoesis of Spartacus already present in the public memory, but which rarely dwells on his genesis. For many historical personages this memory may be fleeting but for Spartacus this was unique as his name and legacy are now permanently etched into the collective consciousness. In turn this reflects what popular culture, predominantly in the shape of film, has done for the legacy of historical characters.

McFarlane's cardinal functions (referred to in Chapter 1) are mentioned by Cornelius, who states that any changes would be accepted by the viewing audience as a history of Spartacus, as long as the:

> five cardinal functions of his enslavement, his gladiatorial training, his violent escape from the *ludus*, his initial success in leading the rebel army and, finally, his defeat at the hands of Crassus … are maintained (2015: 10).

Thus, although the films are heavily influenced by contemporary ideology and leave only the five cardinal functions mentioned by Cornelius in place, as the director Mann has stated, 'he who screens the legend keeps the legend alive in the most effective way of all and legend makes the best cinema' (Wicking & Pattison 1969: 41). Kubrick's *Spartacus* became an international box-office hit which won four Academy Awards and garnered 'Best Dramatic Film' from the Golden Globes.

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[28] The Turkish bath scene in which 'Crassus (Laurence Olivier) attempts to seduce Antoninus (Tony Curtis)' was initially cut by the studio censors as it was considered blatant homoeroticism and too depraved. This scene was restored by Kubrick for the 1989 'director's cut' (Harris 1995: 41).

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Figure 5.4: Original 1960 theatrical release poster of Kubrick's *Spartacus.*

Figure 5.5: Kirk Douglas as Spartacus.

Spartacus was written by script-writer Dalton Trumbo, directed by Stanley Kubrick and released in 1960 and starred notable actors of the time. By Hollywood standards this was a highly political movie whose message was muffled by the remoteness of its setting with a cast that probably contained actors that were more well-known than the actual historical personages they played, with Lawrence Olivier as the patrician Crassus, Peter Ustinov playing the slave-trader and lanista, Lentulus Batiatus, Charles Laughton as the Republican Gracchus and with Kirk Douglas in the role of Spartacus (Lillard 1975: 24).

There were a large number of influences in building up the character of the filmic Spartacus:

> Kirk Douglas wanted a larger-than-life hero that would enhance his stature as an actor and star. Howard [Fast] wanted a pure, principled revolutionary to personify the ageless revolt of the oppressed against the oppressor. Director Stanley Kubrick, the master of cinematic cynicism, wanted a conflicted wretch who was finally destroyed by the horror of bloody battle.[29]

Aspects of all of the above were represented on screen, and Kubrick's Spartacus emerged as a relatively complex film character. There is a strong theme around the effect of violence on the psychological make-up of the character of Spartacus in the film. Both gladiators and slaves are continually associated with animal elements in that they fight animals, they either wear the skins of animals or are scantily clad and for the Romans, are not civilised. Spartacus reflects the dominant metaphor of the gladiator as a 'trained beast' and as such is dehumanised through his association with

[29] Narrator's introduction to Dalton Trumbo's 'scene-by-scene' analysis commentary (special edition DVD of *Spartacus,* 2004).

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the gladiatorial aspect as well as with slavery. This is further brought out by Spartacus's statement that 'we are not animals', further justifying the revolt against the horrors of slavery, the ultimate cruelty.[30]

It should be noted that Kubrick, Douglas and Trumbo modelled the movie *Spartacus* more on the 1951 historical novel self-published by Howard Fast than on any classical sources, and the film certainly created a far more fleshed out Spartacus than the ancient sources would ever have wished.[31] This is an aggressive and pessimistic movie: the opening narration sets up the slavery versus freedom polarity and for another 50 minutes the film simmers until the spontaneous revolt bursts forth with an exhilarating and cathartic energy. A major part of the film's moral message resides in the slaves' story whilst most of the political debate is amongst the Roman characters. The film embodied the Christian family values of the 1960s America through the lives of Spartacus and the other slaves. This is strengthened by being embedded in (and contrasted to) a Roman elite world of corruption and decadence, and their reliance on oppression and violence.[32] The Roman slave wars of the 1st century BCE, for example, are retroactively politicised through the cross-cutting between Spartacus and senator Crassus pushing their individual armies. No film (cinema or TV) representation of the Third Servile War before or after Kirk Douglas' *Spartacus* (1960) has yet enjoyed as much success or had as much influence on the modern mind. In every study of cinema depictions of the ancient world published since 1960, a chapter on the making of Spartacus is prominent.

Cinematic epics, as Michael Wood (1989: 176) observes:

> thrive on historical success – especially the success of small, persecuted groups ... people who have God on their side, so that we see their present sufferings and setbacks through the glass of our secure knowledge of their spectacular future triumph.

Fast certainly imbued the slave revolt with a further political message when it appeared as if all Spartacus and his band of followers wanted to do was go home.

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[30] Anxiety and disgust with the institution of Roman slavery has been well represented in film and was a common theme in many epic films set in Rome, such as *Quo Vadis* in 1951, *The Robe* in 1953 and *Demetrius and the Gladiators* in 1954.

[31] Fast developed the idea while he was serving his sentence for citing the First Amendment and refusing to answer the questions of the Committee on Un-American Activities resulting in contempt of Congress at Mill Point, West Virginia in June 1950. He intended it as an allegory for the terror that gripped the United States from 1945 to 1952. Seven publishers rejected the book and therefore Fast self-published on the advice of Doubleday publishers who, whilst declining to publish, but did let Fast know and officially that should he publish the novel himself they would buy a large number of copies for their bookstores. Subsequently it became a great word of mouth success and sold exceptionally well (Ceplair & Trumbo 2014). The novel was successful in the UK, other Anglophone countries, and was lionized within the Soviet Union and its satellite domains from the very beginning

[32] This approach undoubtedly limits views of the ordinary Roman citizen in the movie which concentrates on the decadent upper class of the Roman world.

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When freed from the 'bondage economy' of Rome, the rebel leader Spartacus becomes a budding patriarch, the father of a new community of ex-slaves based on an ideology of shared labour and the family as an ethical paradigm (Futrell 2001: 96; Cyrino 2005: 102).

Spartacus is an uncharacteristic toga film due to its subject and left-wing affiliations as well as the fact that it is a secular narrative. It is a film of the progressive Left rather than the conservative Right, and was daring in suggesting that slavery, rather than licentious paganism, was Rome's defining evil. But Rome is still characterised as a debauched and evil hegemon, even though the precise nature of this characterization differs.[33] The story of the slave leader strains against the narrative formula of eventual sacred/secular success - the slave revolution fails spectacularly, and although Spartacus is linked to both Moses and Christ (as leader to the promised land and through his crucifixion), it cannot really be claimed that he has God on his side.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE 'BODY FICTION' OF SPARTACUS

Figure 5.6: Lentulus Batiatus allows the ladies to select (from his gladiatorial school) the gladiator pair who are to fight to the death before them.[34]

At this point it should be considered that, in today's popular view, Spartacus is actually associated more with Kirk Douglas - the gladiator is therefore thought to be a man with steely-blue eyes, a square chin and a conspicuous dimple (Späth & Tröhler 2013: 41). The actor's image may have been superimposed on a faceless historical figure, but we now have, in Comolli's terminology,[35] a case of

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[33] Putatively, Spartacus is also a film about the brutality of empire, but it repudiates the Roman Empire only insofar as Rome is identified with the Soviet Union. The antifascist thrust of Fast's *Spartacus*, its critique of imperial expansion as well as domestic oppression, is absent, or more precisely, it is subsumed by anti-totalitarianism.
[34] The film is a realistic reflection of the archaeological evidence discussed in Chapter 1, that gladiators were a valuable commodity who did not invariably fight to the death. In the film, Batiatus indicates that his gladiators never fight to the death and can have a life expectancy of ten years.
[35] As discussed in Chapter 1 above.

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'le corps en trop'. Popular culture of the 20th century had socially reconstructed the body of Spartacus to make it into a masculine ideal of the time, and therefore a commercial commodity (Späth & Tröhler 2013: 57-59). It was Kubrick's film which set the tone for later physical incarnations of Spartacus,[36] allowing for the moulding of the required image to be represented on screen.

The heroic character required a heroic physique on screen, what Späth & Tröhler (2013) refer to as a spectacular body.[37] Fast had moulded the gladiatorial rebel into a messianic figure leading an inevitable uprising of the oppressed with their innate longing for equality and freedom. Moreover, Spartacus is presented as a blatantly obvious contrast to the decadent, morally reprehensible Romans. His health and vigour and muscled body had to contrast with some of the fat, pasty-looking Romans, who embody many aspects seen as vices at the time the film was produced, such as homosexuality and decadence.[38]

Fast also saw the gladiator-slave Spartacus as a desirable human commodity to be consumed by the pleasure-hungry Romans, who could buy his life and ultimately his death with their 'tainted capitalist wealth'. This is upheld to some extent in the film, as illustrated in Figure 5.6. Here the objectification of the gladiators is very clear, locked in their cage while their bodies are inspected by the Roman matrons for their viewing pleasure as temporary relief from the monotony of their jaded lives. This also further emphasises the powerful sexual attraction which gladiators held for the admiring female public, attested to in the sources (Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.78-81).

PLOT AND PLAY IN *SPARTACUS*

As previously discussed, the plot of the film digressed considerably from the ancient story in its attempts to humanise the story and to domesticate some of the events. Generally, many filmmakers proceed from the assumption that the audience is not primarily interested in accurate historical details and that people simply watch to be entertained. Therefore, it is rather the atmosphere and feeling of history, a general impression, that is required rather than any academic accuracy.[39]

As production of the film continued an enormous gap began to develop between Fast's vision of Spartacus in his novel and that being prepared for cinematic consumption and subsequently projected by the film (Wyke 1997: 64). Since Trumbo had eliminated some of the book's more obvious

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[36] This could create a further step of disbelief in authenticity as 'a body too many' – the actor's – always exists (Comolli 1978: 46), it becomes part of general knowledge about a figure. This is further influenced by the popular actor's own sociocultural image generated by themselves and by previous roles. Clearly indicated body fictions exist for several characters in antiquity such as Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra and Peter Ustinov's Nero.

[37] And this applies to all the Spartacus screen characters, from the 1913 Italian *Spartaco* onwards.

[38] See the section on the hero and anti-hero in Chapter 2, pp 44.

[39] Hence Solomon (2001: 73) who stated that specific concerns with accuracy in a film like *Spartacus* are the 'petty preoccupations of Ph.D. scholars'; he in fact had some of his students working on these types of films.

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absurdities, the script was superior. Nevertheless, there were several glaring deviations from the ancient evidence. The film opens in the Roman mines of Libya where the slave Spartacus, sentenced to death, is rescued from his fate by Lentulus Batiatus, the owner of a gladiator school. While this could reflect the possible brutalising treatments of slaves who worked in the mines and provide historical context, the Roman province of 'Libya' did not come into existence until the reign of Diocletian (284-305 CE) nor was the area known for mining. It also stretches credulity that a boy sold to work in the mines at the age of 13 would have survived to maturity.

Figure 5.7: Varinia in the Appian Way showing Spartacus his son.

Further licence was taken with the Roman characters. Neither Gracchus[40] nor Julius Caesar, both well-known Roman historical figures who conveniently appear in the film, had anything to do with Spartacus. Political distortion is likewise applied when it comes to the elevation of Crassus to a dictator (when he fought against Spartacus he was actually an ex-praetor). The romantic love-interest angle is entirely fictional from beginning to end, and Spartacus did not survive the final battle to fight at the temple to honour the gods and be crucified by the authorities on the Via Appia.

There is a heavy moral overlay, and the film is strongly influenced by its clear distinction between 'good' and 'evil', with individual characters taking their respective positions. There is a strongly implied inference that Christianity would create a new society which did not contain slavery and would implement freedom for all.[41] A Christian motif is played on in several scenes.[42] Firstly, when

[40] Gracchus is likely a composite figure but many of the words he speaks are implausible and not indicative of the way people lived in the first century BCE but rather more responsive to the events of the Red Scare (Davis 2002: 185).
[41] As with other ancient peoples the Christians of antiquity accepted the existence of slavery which existed for many centuries after the establishment of Christianity.
[42] To conform with the toga genre where Romans needed to turn to Christianity to remain interesting to an American audience, *Spartacus* does not so much reject the Biblical ethos of its epic film predecessors as it appropriates it in a slightly amended form to become a proto-Judeo-Christian narrative.

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Spartacus attempts to help a fellow slave and becomes the subject of Roman punishment from an overseer and ultimately is restrained, arms spread across a boulder, as if crucified. His actual crucifixion in the final sequences, where Varinia, acted by Jean Simmons,[43] holds Spartacus' son up to him as he hangs on the cross and surrenders himself to the greater cause: freedom and equality for all men (Fig. 5.7). The holding up of the son is at the same time an incarnation of their love, the continuation of his family line and symbolises a future in which all men will one day be free (O'Brien 2014: 114).

While the idea that Spartacus' aim was to destroy Rome and create a slave-free utopia in its place may be emotionally attractive to modern sensibilities, historically that was most unlikely, besides which it would be almost impossible to prove (Baldwin 1967: 291). The way in which Spartacus is treated as a gladiator, almost sacrificing his life at the whims of the elite who want him to fight to the death, serves as the thin edge of the narrative wedge whereby soon all slaves are deemed in need of being freed. Even those whose duties and conditions of life are much more congenial are now understood as being caught up in the institution which allows for the brutality of gladiator combat.

Douglas portrays Spartacus as physically active, from his mining labours to gladiatorial training and combat and finally on the battlefield, actions which diverge from previous representations. Through his speech he also provides a dissimilarity from the previous versions 'being soft and slow-spoken, and modestly conversational' (Lillard 1975: 25). From the moment he makes an appearance, Spartacus' physical power, sweating muscularity and tonicity is shown as an instant distinction from the 'disease and death' motifs established in the 'voice-over and credit sequence' (Burgoyne 2011: 80) which portray Rome as a sick, degenerate nation. In this the film creates a universal history with a teleological resolution.

Most critics responded positively to the movie and were not concerned that it played 'fast and loose with the historical facts' (*Time Magazine* 1960: 102).

[43] In keeping with epic traditions, Douglas (1988: 314) was determined to cast the Roman characters with British actors and the slaves with American actors. Varinia is the one exception, as he explains in his autobiography; she was supposed to be exotic, 'a real foreigner', like Elsa Martinelli or Jeanne Moreau. Sabina Bethmann, an unknown German actress, was cast initially, but her acting was unsatisfactory, so the part went to Jean Simmons.

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THE FURTHER SPARTACUS TRADITION

The newer television[44] versions of Spartacus have been considered equally successful and include *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* (2010) and its prequel *Spartacus: Gods of the Arena* (2011),[45] followed by the sequel *Spartacus: Vengeance* (2010), and finally *Spartacus: War of the Damned* (2013) produced by STARZ.[46] As Kubrick's *Spartacus* paid visual and narrative homage to previous epic films, so too does the STARZ version, with echoes of ancient warrior and revenge seeking figures (Augoustakis 2013: 158).

The television versions unsurprisingly deviate considerably from ancient evidence since they need to fill far more hours with material. They are also far more veristic as viewers are invited to appreciate extreme sexualisation of both the male and female characters; surreal and gory representations of warfare and the bloody, CGI-enhanced violence of the gladiatorial shows (Augoustakis & Cyrino 2017: 1-2; Smith 2015: 118-120). In one instance, however, this version stays true to the ancient sources in that Spartacus no longer dies, Christ-like, on the cross along the Appian Way with his fellow rebels, but, in keeping with consensus of ancient opinion, is mortally wounded on the battlefield while duelling with Crassus.[47] Thus *Spartacus* is recast for a twenty-first century viewing audience despite the equal emphasis on his corporeal punishment, when his naked body is battered by Roman soldiers (O'Brien 2014: 107).

The fight-for-freedom theme and the censure of slavery continues but as Augoustakis (2013: 158) states, freedom has now acquired a 'post-political' dimension, and the 'abstract idea of freedom' has become something more tangible as the series develops. Because of its length as a series rather than the 180 minutes of a movie this has allowed this version to expand and go beyond the criticism of Roman slavery, including other topics with an emphasis on masculinity. Over the past century of film, the ancients have not only become more sexualised, but also more perverse in their pleasures and these versions contain 'more nudity, more sex, more violence and more blood than had ever been seen together on mainstream television' whilst offering 'new visual, narrative and aesthetics' for the

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[44] Kubrick's *Spartacus* was cut into two parts and screened on successive nights on specific TV channels during November 1974 but despite being uncut but it was aesthetically marred by the insertion of the usual 'enthusiastic advertisements for slide projectors, automobiles, jewellery, bed sheets, airlines, Jersey milk, root beer and household gas' (Lillard 1975: 26)

[45] In the press this six-episode miniseries prequel was referred to as *Spartacus Minus Spartacus* and focused on the rise of the House of Batiatus.

[46] The 'four season original television series from the US-based premium cable channel, was created by Stephen S DeKnight and executive producers included Sam Raimi and Rob Tapert, two collaborators responsible for the production of *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995-99) and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001). The original series was aired in 2010 in the USA and internationally which attracted a huge fan base, received record ratings and spawned a prequel and two sequels' Cyrino 2017: 299. A disclaimer is presented at the beginning of each season which claims its historicity and its stance on the explicit nature of its subject – 'Spartacus is a Historical Portrayal of Ancient Roman Society that Contains Graphic violence and Adult Content'.

[47] Conversely, O'Brien 2014: 108 suggests that the 'bloody wooden shafts piercing his torso could be read as another form of crucifixion, and Spartacus suffers the prolonged death agonies associated with the latter punishment'.

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portrayal of the story of Spartacus (Cyrino 2017: 300). Each of these episodes begins with a disclaimer:

> Spartacus depicts extreme sensuality, brutality and language that some viewers may find objectionable. The show is a historical portrayal of ancient Roman society and the intensity of the content is to suggest an authentic representation of that period (own emphases).

In reality, however, this is a blatantly postmodern formulation which cautions that it is 'not about what the show will portray for you of ancient Rome', but rather its effect on the viewer. Its 'intensity of … content' will advise that there will be 'an authentic representation' of a period the viewer knows little about anyway, and shows a disregard for who would care (Feeney 2010). Any accurate historical representation is in fact secondary to audience expectation.

McAuley (2017: 182) has noted that the STARZ version does manage to represent the tangled interactions between public and private competition that was encompassed by Roman spectacle as a whole, confirming that despite the isolation of the arena it was never detached from Roman society and politics.

Despite the emphasis on testosterone fuelled masculinity in *Spartacus*, the same scheming behaviour demonstrated in such as *I, Claudius* and certainly in *Rome* is reflected by the female characters; an inclination to wield power from behind the scenes, enabled by 'expansive sexuality' and driven by 'hegemonic tendencies' (Foka 2015b: 42). The novelty of this series comes through Ilithyia, the villain who 'displays agency' whilst scheming behind the scenes, and is not averse to committing acts of raw violence (Foka 2015b: 43). In contrast to many of those films that drew inspiration from antiquity in which violent acts, although premeditated by dominant women, are actually carried out by men, Ilithyia is prepared to inflict such violence on others herself. Within the series Ilithyia's attacks on Licinia and Seppia can be seen as examples of physicality manifested in violence that advances a form of 'sword-and-sandal femininity'. She deploys everything at her disposal including her position, acts of sexuality and brutal violence in gruesome murders to serve her own purpose, an amalgamation currently exclusive to Spartacus. Ilithyia ultimately expands on the paradigm of the 'elite scheming Roman female' and becomes the 'cruel, premeditating killer' (Foka 2015a: 201).

The paradigm of the action heroine is represented strongly in the series, with several differing depictions of powerful women with specific foci on physicality. Within antiquity's narratives and material cultures of heroism, a warrior image was not expected from a female since in the ancient patriarchal societal structures such female figures were deities or mythological rather than real women (De Marre 2020: 32). In general, Tyrell (1984: 77) indicates that the depictions of women such as the Amazons, militant females prepared to fight against men, remained unique to mythology. The pervading and progressively inter-connected character of popular culture, *Spartacus,* attempts to mirror both the Roman and the current discourse on the representation of gender, one that Foka (2015a: 205) believes can be used to further elaborate on the 'complex mechanisms of visual narratives of historically situated social identities within the sphere of popular culture'.

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VIOLENCE AND VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT IN *SPARTACUS*

PROPORTION OF VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT IN THE FILM

Kubrick's *Spartacus* is focused less on the hero's gladiatorial role and more on his role as a revolutionary and it is the latter which forms the core of the story and frames his role in a noble quest for freedom. Although over the three years of the rebellion Spartacus successfully defeated various Roman armies, this is not highlighted in the film. There is a noted absence of battle scenes depicting the great victories which Spartacus and the slaves did win against the Roman armies during the three-and-a-half years of the revolt. Thus, the film cannot be said to truly reflect his triumphs or the power of the revolt. There is evidence to indicate that the final battle on screen was inserted by Kubrick.[48] Previous victories had only been referred to, for example in the speech when Marcus Crassus informs his staff within a Roman command tent that Spartacus has destroyed nine Roman armies, warning them of the possible fall of Rome (Winkler 2005: 18).[49]

Trumbo as the writer carried out his own stubborn but unsuccessful campaign to have several scenes, or at least a montage, included that would show at least some of Spartacus; victories over the Romans:

> And this brings us down to a basic conflict of opinion about the dimensions of Spartacus and his struggle: a conflict which has been in evidence from the earliest beginnings of the project. Through three versions of the script I have fought against the idea of diminishing the scope of Spartacus' activities, against shortening to the point of absurdity the length of time in which he held the field, against the idea that he was a mere escapee who won a few encounters against provincial garrisons instead of a great military leader who for four years running defeated the finest legions and the greatest armies Rome could put in the field against him (Dalton Trumbo, *Report on Spartacus*, Section II, 46-7 cited in Cooper 1996).

Ultimately, he failed to persuade the other film- makers to include any battle scenes from the slave army's victories other than a symbolic inclusion of Spartacus' first battle when there is a successful attack on Glabrus' camp. This triumph over Roman strength receives the briefest of treatments and is shown without physical combat. Two Roman soldiers are shown dying in flames at the beginning of the incursion, and the final victory over the slaves is shown, and it is only late in the final battle that Spartacus draws his sword in anger. Hence any reflection of the real historic standing and successes of Spartacus and the rebellion are glaringly missing from both the original, censored version and the restored version of the film. As Cooper indicates, we as the audience must then decide:

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[48] Despite his efforts Kubrick had minimal say over the film content and lacked the authority to make final decisions, and he has never retracted his public disavowal of *Spartacus*. It was a film, he deliberated rather reflectively, which 'had everything but a good story'.

[49] It is at this point that one must then also reflect, once again, on the accuracy of the Roman authors, and whether their portrayal of Spartacus' victories and danger of the possible defeat of Rome was dramatized in order to give importance to the suppression of civil disobedience and to suit their agendas.

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> Either we view the slaves fundamentally as the pathetic, innocent victims of a cynical Roman genocide and thereby perceive Spartacus as a benighted Pied Piper unwittingly leading them to their doom; or we view them as fallen heroes, warriors in a noble cause who, through their heroic sacrifice, have transcended their own time and place to reach immortality (Cooper 1996).

Violent entertainment, our main focus here, fades into the background once Spartacus leaves his gladiatorial career behind. Several more placid forms of entertainment and leisure are portrayed in Spartacus' camp, but nowhere is Florus' anecdote (2.8.9-10) that Spartacus held his own gladiatorial games[50] repeated – in fact, the character in the film expresses his dislike of such forms of entertainment, as any American hero of the 1960's would be expected to do:

> I swore if I ever got out of [the gladiator school], I'd die before I'd watch two men fight to the death again … What are we becoming? Romans?

The deliberate counterbalance of 'good' and 'evil' in the film thus fails to acknowledge the possible brutality of Spartacus himself. Spartacus' rejection, even revulsion of blood sport was not reflective of the Roman world of that time. Indeed, the real Spartacus, according to Appian, 'sacrificed three hundred Roman prisoners of war in honour of Crixus' funeral games when his second in command is killed. Further, 'So that the travelling would be as light as possible … killed all prisoners of war' (*B. Civ.* 1.14.116-121), and most graphically:

> Spartacus … crucified a Roman prisoner in no-man's land to demonstrate to his own troops the fate awaiting them if they were defeated (*B. Civ.* 1.14.119).

Much of the actual violence depicted in the film is a reflection of situations which are not unfamiliar in the ancient Roman world, such as the brutality of the Roman slave system, or the facts of gladiatorial life and death.[51] A gladiatorial school at Capua, for example, would probably have been run on a system of coercion, regimentation, and surveillance. A harsh life, even if a special diet, massages and women were provided, as Lentulus Batiatus' character is made to say in the *Spartacus* film. The film is therefore not unrealistic in this respect. Writers such as Abrams (1990: 39) consider that the first half of the film was 'almost a textbook on the care and training of a gladiator'.[52] At the same time, the character of Lentulus is also fairly realistic in his description of how the gladiators will be pampered and in revealing that his gladiators do not inevitably fight to the death, as the examinations of the remains of the gladiators by Kanz and Grossschmidt (2006) have shown.[53]

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[50] Discussed above, p.124

[51] Scenes of gladiatorial combat and training are convincing, even though they do not measure up to similar scenes in earlier films (*The Chalice*), and there is nothing to compete with the truly breath-taking chariot race in *Ben Hur*; and the battle scene, for which 8,000 Spanish infantry had been hired, is brief and disappointing, Schnur 1960: 104.

[52] We do not know that much about gladiator training, however, since no training manuals remain. Epictetus talks a little about training in general with a reference to gladiators, *Discourses* 3.15.

[53] As discussed in Chapter 1. Peter Ustinov as Lentulus Batiatus says: 'A gladiator is like a stallion - you must be pampered'. In the provinces this may have been different, since the study by Redfern & Bonney 2014 for Britain indicates

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In Kubrick's *Spartacus*, Kirk Douglas' character still epitomises the epic hero expected in a 'sword and sandals' movie (Theodorakopoulos 2010: 175-212) whilst in the more recent versions this is constantly re-evaluated as the line between retributive and exploitative violence is criss-crossed. In both versions of *Spartacus,* the issue comes out strongly when the captured soldiers are compelled to fight in the arena for the enjoyment of the slaves, which brings down Spartacus' condemnation mentioned above. This reversal of roles is clearly commented on and moralised about as it is questioned whether or not it is correct for them to create such a situation and if it just reduces the former slaves and gladiators to the position of their former masters, the Romans. In the later version of *Spartacus* this point of view is echoed by Tiberius, son of Crassus who is captured in battle along with his fellow legionaries and he states 'We will not give entertainment in death. Remember we are Romans'. This not only highlights the issue but also overtly comments on the 'them and us' point in terms of status and threat to their position as free Romans as identification of the Other.

THE EMASCULATED GLADIATOR

Because of the 'good' versus 'evil' axis in the film, violence (particularly sadistic violence), is almost always portrayed by the representatives of Rome,[54] rather than the violence of Spartacus and his followers, which is largely implicit. Violence in *Spartacus* is repeatedly promoted as being morally grounded and retributive, stemming from the collective plight of the slave population. Nevertheless, violence, in particular successful violence as carried out by the oppressed, has been virtually excluded from the film.

All of these incidences purport to echo the behaviour of a man functioning within the cultural norms of 'his own time' but they in fact reflect the 'degree to which the heroic gladiator has been emasculated in this film' (Cooper 1991: 23). It was more important for the producer to showcase Kirk Douglas' Spartacus character in his metamorphosis from sub-human (as a slave and gladiator) to the human status he achieves when he is free. For the duration of the film there are constant references to this transitioning of his character (Hark 1993).[55]

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that most of the gladiators show multiple peri mortem sharp and blunt force injuries, although it is difficult to generalise from such a small sample.

[54] Particularly exemplified in forms of legal punishment which included being thrown to the beasts, burning alive and crucifixion, when intending 'to set a public example' (*Digesta* 48.19.16.10). The film's representation of Crassus' choice of crucifixion is graphic.

[55] On discussions around masculinity in *Spartacus* and other films from the same period, see Hunt 1993: 65-82.

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GLADIATORIAL TRAINING

Figure 5.8: Gladiatorial training with small sword and shield.

The film pays some attention to gladiatorial training in techniques for maiming and death which showcases the athletic prowess of its protagonist. As the archaeological studies of Kanz and Grossschmidt (2006) have shown, gladiators were not only a valuable commodity, there were also specific conventions around gladiatorial contests rather than indiscriminate killing.

Injuries to the back of the head, for example, were rare. These findings back up some ancient Roman accounts that the gladiatorial games had established rules of combat; with no 'sneaky' blows from behind.[56] Sixteen of the bones examined showed signs of non-fatal injuries that had time to heal, suggesting that the gladiators had excellent medical care.

Figure 5.9: Lentulus Batiatus addressing the gladiators.

The advantages of becoming a gladiator are conveyed in Batiatus' speech to the newly arrived slaves, whilst the film accurately portrays aspects of the gladiatorial training school at Capua as well as representations of paired gladiators fighting with differing equipment and some of the military history of the period is on a solid footing. As a Thracian, Spartacus appropriately fights as a *thraex* against a *retiarius*, or net-man armed with a fishnet and trident. Ward (2007: 94) indicates that both men have one arm protected by armour, neither of them have 'helmet nor grieves' which was indicative of the times. The only anomaly is the sword that Spartacus uses to fight with and his lack of body armour.[57]

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[56] On gladiatorial fighting techniques and codes, see Junkelmann 2000b: 40-41.
[57] For example, as described by Artemidorus in his *Book of Dreams* 2.32, i.e., 'the Thracian's body is entirely covered by his armour; …his sword is curved, and … the Thracian advances when he fights'.

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Figure 5.10: Potential wounding targets are marked as part of the training.

GLADIATORIAL BONDING

In his work *De Ira*, Seneca uses gladiators in an illustration of human vices:

They live as though they were in a gladiatorial school – those with whom they eat, they likewise fight. It is a community (*conventus*) of wild beasts, only that beasts are gentle toward each other and refrain from tearing their own kind… (8.3)

Despite his negative view of gladiators as wild animals, he nevertheless sees them as a community who eat together even when they fight one another. This is also conveyed in the film, and the character of Spartacus bonds particularly with another gladiator, Draba, played by Woody Strode. As mentioned on p. 36, the bond formed between two gladiators of different races was also a popular Hollywood motif to be taken up by later cinematic productions.

THE GLADIATORIAL PERFORMANCE

Figure 5.11: Draba and Spartacus wait to enter the arena to fight.

More attention is paid to gladiatorial training and conditions than to the actual gladiatorial arena combat, of which there is only one main scene in *Spartacus.* They do not fight in a large amphitheatre

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but in a much smaller arena, and the audience is a private one.[58] This type of private entertainment is closer to the ancient sources cited in the previous chapter, where private gladiatorial fights were staged for the amusement of a few (Nic. Dam. *FGrH* 90 F78; Sil. *Pun.* 11.51-54).[59]The fight between Draba and Spartacus (Fig. 5.11-5.13) has been voted as one of the best representations of gladiatorial combat available in any gladiatorial film in terms of two trained professionals applying offensive and defensive techniques in their quest for victory (Dunkle 2008: 298). Nevertheless, some poetic licence has been used in terms of weaponry and armour when the fight scene is compared with gladiatorial mosaics. Spartacus, fighting as *thraex*, should have used a curved *sica* as sword and a larger shield; he is also not wearing a helmet or shin protection (Figs. 5.12 13 and 15).

Draba as the *retiarius* wears his shoulder protection on the wrong side (Fig.5.13), besides which the *retiarius* type gladiator did not actually exist in Spartacus' lifetime and only came in during the reign of Augustus.

Figure 5.12: The gladiatorial fight scene between Spartacus and Draba.

Figure 5.13: Draba as *retiarius*, Spartacus as *thraex*.

[58] See Dodge 2014b: 572-573 on the adaptability of venues for various types of spectacle, and Holleran 2004: 46-60 on the development of the arena and venues for public entertainment.
[59] See above p. 80.

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Draba's character refuses to kill the defeated Spartacus in the arena for the amusement of four wealthy Romans and instead turns his weapon – and his body – against the spectators, an act of defiance for which he dies.

Finally, Crassus forces Spartacus and Antoninus to fight to the death before the temple of his fathers, as a sacrifice to them. Neither of them wears any protection, and both are armed with the *gladius*, each wishing to kill the other to spare him the lingering agony of crucifixion, as in Fig. 5.14

Figure 5.14: Spartacus fighting Antoninus

SPECTATORS

Figure 5.15: Spartacus and Draba performing as gladiators in a private spectacle**.**

The film is relatively true in its portrayal of the differences in social space and processes and the divide between high and low, free and slave is well reflected. The terrors and fascination with violence, both perceived and implicit, are equally well represented by the film (Davis 2000). We are shown the blasé pleasure taken by the spectators, particularly the women (Fig. 5.15 and 17), in those violent games of death.[60] This supports the ancient evidence and later interpretations of female admiration of ancient gladiators.[61] Evidence from the Roman world also supports the film's

[60] Further corroboration of this is implied through the decoration of the walls of the rooms where Lentulus Batiatus entrains a private gladiatorial showing. These gladiatorial scenes are similar to those depicted in mosaics from Leptis Magna in Libya and there are others currently in the Galleria Borghese in Rome (Ward 2007: 92).
[61] See p. 81 n.50 on the Netti painting in Chapter 4, as well as the section on the various *ludi* in the same Chapter.

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identification of the potentially exposed position and brutality of the gladiatorial predicament where the majority of the gladiators were slaves and condemned prisoners.

Figure 5.16: The gladiators and *lanista* salute Crassus before the fight.

Part of the cinematic legacy of *Spartacus* would be its effort to morally censure the Roman institution of gladiatorial combat as an exploitation of humanity. The film strains to bring the spectator into a headspace whereby the staging of gladiatorial fights to the death figure as the cruel exploitation of slaves by a jaded and capricious moneyed class. This exploiter-versus-exploited situation is emphasised even more by the fact that the film fails to show any representation of formal games and restricts itself to that one-on-one situation between Draba and Spartacus where they are forced to fight to the death in single combat for the amusement of the few (Figure 5.15).[62]

Figure 5.17: The modern gesture for 'kill him'.

[62] The producers of the TV version of *Spartacus,* on the other hand, have certainly captured what it must have felt like to stand in a stadium filled with tens of thousands of bloodthirsty, cheering spectators while deadly sports are played out in front of them.

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SLAVERY AND VIOLENCE

Evidence from various ancient writers suggest that slavery as an institution was taken for granted (Hopkins 1993: 3; Schumacher 2011: 589) and accepted as the natural order of things,[63] even by the slaves and this aspect, including their treatment does not sit well with modern sensibilities (Apostol 2015: 114).

The lower echelons of society are used and abused by the sexual desires of the patricians and this tension contributes to the storyline, allowing modern viewers to imagine why the real Spartacus and his gladiators may have rebelled, even though these situations probably differed in the ancient context. The 1960s film constructs sex as mainly good for the elites, but an area of potential abuse for slaves and gladiators, which allows the modern audience to identify with the victimisation of the latter.

It can be argued that the previously censored and cut homoerotic scenes between Crassus and his slave Antoninus are forms of overt violence. Having been obliged to acknowledge various coded references to sex, Antoninus is then led to the balcony by Crassus who commands him to look at Rome's garrison marching out to crush the slave rebellion. This creates a link between himself as the domineering partner and Rome's capacity to dominate the world in contrast to the position of a slave and the other inferior nations of the world. In essence this is an overt demonstration of power relations forced upon a subject who has no recourse but to submit to the whims of the dominant partner (Futrell 2001: 106). In terms of the film's political unconscious, Antoninus is choosing liberal subjectivity over totalitarian submission, heterosexuality and conventional masculinity over polymorphous perversity, democracy over dictatorship.

Although the masses' convictions inspire the narrative drive, *Spartacus* operates with the decisive powers entrusted to them. The Roman mobs are shown as having little more than visceral binary responses, in direct contrast to the army of slaves who are prepared to live and die for their desire for liberty and their power in their unification. Ideocentric groups in this and other historical epics are generally fully committed and 'arise and perish with this idea; their unity is fully encompassed by a specific concept that will come to life through them' (Kracauer 1995: 144). In a similar fashion to *Gladiator*, Spartacus assembles the rebelling slaves who are then confined inside their diegetic space until the narrative is resolved through their decision to fight, they then march to the sea only to find themselves double crossed and their ships rerouted. Levantus is prepared to offer Spartacus and his officers safe passage, an offer which is quickly rebuked. Spartacus resolves to turn back and fight

[63] The thinking of the time was very far removed from modern attitudes and predates the concept of 'human rights' as we understand it today. Slavery was also an accepted state of affairs for the contributors to the New Testament. The gospels do not challenge the master-and-slave relationship but accept it unquestioningly (Luke 12.47; Matthew 10.24-25 and 24.14-30; 1 Peter 2.18).

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Crassus in Rome, thus signifying Kracauer's (1995: 145) claim that 'the absolutely sovereign idea evolves in a sphere impervious to any individual impulses; the particular will is irrelevant to it'. The self-determining individual dissolves into the crowd, in a forerunner of Maximus' reminder to his fellow slaves in *Gladiator*: 'If we stay together, we survive.'

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CHAPTER 6: *GLADIATOR* – 'A HERO WILL RISE'

The commercial success of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) marked the return of the Hollywood historical epic that had been in decline for more than a generation. Despite its historical inaccuracies, it prompted a wealth of literature and popular interest in antiquity that had stayed quiescent for thirty-six years (Ward 2001). Although Scott repudiated some aspects of the filmic heritage of the 1950s in *Gladiator* and pagan Rome appears as yet untouched by monotheism, there are undoubtedly elements of the film, in particular 'the fighting male body as an object of display' that are as much part of the peplum tradition as they were in previous big-budget representations of the ancient world (O'Brien 2012: 49).[1] But *Gladiator* affords an interesting innovation in the utilisation of new visual technologies to relate the Roman past and this Oscar-winning film has in fact been called 'the most visually spectacular of all Roman Empire epics' (Wilmington 2000). It was in fact one of the first films which used CGI for a historical film, rather than a fantasy. Even though it may seem basic now, in the year 2000 it was ground breaking.

In *Gladiator,* director Scott used a number of intertextual allusions to both ancient contexts (Solomon 2005: 2-3) as well as to multiple predecessors in film history, layering his allusions in order to render his film both (in filmic terms) classically epic and modern. He also openly borrowed from a range of other cultural texts to lend his film stature and authenticity, invoking the collective memory of his viewers in respect of epic Roman films; the westerns[2] (chiefly of John Wayne) with their classic theme of revenge and the American mythology of the Old West; and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, which offers a model for the portrayal of a dictatorial leader. In the case of the latter both filmmakers employed an Olympian viewpoint 'to impress the importance of the moment upon us' (Pomeroy 2004: 115) - *Gladiator* by the aerial shots of Rome through the clouds and down upon the city and *Triumph* by following Hitler's Junker plane descending through the clouds to the city of Nuremburg. Other films too have echoes in *Gladiator*, from *El Cid* to *Saving Private Ryan.* By

[1] The peplum refers to the legendary and mythological themes in Italian action movies from around 1957 to 1965.
[2] Film scholars have noted that classic Westerns use the structure and characters of classical myths to universalize their stories, heighten their stature, and give a timelessness to the stories. See Winkler 2001: 118-47 for further elaboration.

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working on his audience's shared cinephile recollections of visual elements, occurrences, and characters that had already been responded to from earlier films, he is able to bring Maximus and his ancient world to life in ours.[3] *Gladiator* sets up a multifaceted dialogue with this Hollywood epic tradition, particularly with regard to specific scenes in *Spartacus* (Burgoyne 2008: 74). The references to epic films from other lands and times[4] enrich Scott's palette, giving a universality and timelessness to his picture and conveying, much like Virgil in the *Aeneid*, that his creation has classic echoes while still managing to contribute something new. In its plot and characters in combination with the visual spectacle Ridley Scott directed a post-classical, high-concept film (Gledhill 2003: 210).

Although on its release *Gladiator* was hailed in the press as a revitalisation of that waning Hollywood genre, the 'sword and sandal epic', it represented a variety of concepts to differing people, including 'Roman epic, moral drama, chance to view attractive male bodies, a high-concept, special-effects spectacle, action film, and a commentary on violent spectacle' (Tudor 2002). These aspects, and how they relate to violence and violent entertainment in the film, will be explored in this chapter.

THE ANCIENT BACKGROUND TO *GLADIATOR*

In avoiding the more glamorous and better-known world of the early Empire, *Gladiator* has not followed the norm of the majority of ancient epic films. Instead, it plays out in the relatively more sombre period around the death of the emperor and stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius in 180 CE and the accession of Commodus, his son. But apart from the use of these historical figures, the film is not an accurate narrative – Marcus Aurelius, Commodus and Lucilla all receive revised histories.

The ancient authors of the principal surviving literary sources for the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus are Cassius Dio, Herodian, and the writers of the *Historia Augusta*, with a variety of minor source references.[5] None of these is considered particularly reliable and, to varying degrees, all are given to sensationalised accounts.[6] These sources are all positive about Marcus Aurelius (and responsible for the good reputation of this philosopher-emperor and author of the *Meditations*), while they are all mostly negative about his son, Commodus, who ruled after him.

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[3] This layering of allusions is a technique perfected by Vergil in his poetry to imbue the epic genre with intertextual life.
[4] In addition to *El Cid* and *Saving Private Ryan*, the movies *Seven Samurai, Triumph of the Will,* and *Paths of Glory* are recalled in this film.
[5] Cassius Dio 71 (70), 1-3.1; 72 (71) 3.1, 3.5, 6, 1.3, 8, 10, 15-17, 22.2-3.3, 19-20, 33-36; Hist. Aug.: *Marcus Antonius the Philosopher*; and Herodian, *Ab Excessu Divi Marci*, 1.2-5; there are also mentions in Aelius Aristides, *Orationes*; Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus*; Codex Justinianus; and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, *Meditations.* Commodus is mentioned in Cassius Dio, Herodian and the Historia Augusta, *Life of Commodus*.
[6] On the relative reliability of these three works, see Marincola 1997; Potter 2011c; Sidebottom 1997 (Herodian); Hose 2007 (Dio).

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- Marcus Aurelius and Commodus

Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus was ruler of the Roman Empire from 161-180 CE. He was militarily active and waged battles along the Roman Empire's frontiers, as is shown in the film (Thill 2018: 277-278). It was the first time in imperial Roman history that an heir had been born to a reigning emperor and who succeeded him, although Roman imperial succession had, from Augustus onwards, on the whole been a dynastic affair.[7] Commodus had been born the heir apparent and the appointment of an alternative successor could very well have resulted in civil war. His father proclaimed him Marcus Aurelius Commodus Antoninus Augustus Caesar in 166 CE at the age of 5 and in December 176 CE at the age of 15 he became joint-emperor or co-Augustus. He served as a co-ruler with Aurelius for at least the last three years of his father's life. His reign was considerably longer than is portrayed in the film and he was finally killed by Narcissus (an athlete, not a gladiator) in 192 CE. The senate instantly condemned his memory, and he has been judged accordingly ever since.[8]

Historiographers have indeed not looked kindly on the reign of the last Antonine. Dio (72.14) for example, after a list of the new emperor's more inexplicably odd acts upon coming to power, adds how 'Commodus, taking a respite from his amusement and sports, turned to murder and was killing off the prominent men' and 'so superlatively mad had the abandoned wretch become' (οὕτω καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἐμεμήνει τὸ κάθαρμα, 73.4). Aelius Lampridius, writing about Commodus in the 4th century *Historia Augusta* (*Comm.* 1, 7-8) continued the negative tradition, and summarised Commodus as being, from his early childhood, 'base and dishonourable, and cruel and lewd, and moreover defiled of mouth and debauched (*pueritia turpis, improbus, crudelis, libidinosus, ore quoque pollutus et constupratus fuit*)'. Herodian too, though more moderate, is also critical:

> Up to a point young Commodus was restrained out of respect for his father's memory and his advisers. But an event occurred[9] whereby such moderation and control as he had so far shown was upset by a most unhappy, malevolent turn of chance (Hdn. 1.8.3, transl. Whitaker).

And at the end of his reign, the author of the life of Commodus in the *Historia Augusta* writes:

> Loud were the acclamations of the senate after the death of Commodus. And that the senate's opinion of him may be known, I have quoted from Marius Maximus the acclamations themselves, and the content of the senate's decree:

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[7] Irrespective of the fact that Marcus may or may not have 'believed his son morally and intellectually capable of carrying on his own work', Marcus could not simply disregard Commodus' claim to the throne without the severe risk of civil war. In the succession-arrangements of 305 CE when a 'reigning Augustus and Caesar neglected their sons when appointing successors, the effects were disastrous, and the ensuing wars, from 306 to 324CE, would only end with Constantine's final victory' (Hekster 2001: 3)

[8] For discussion Commodus as presented in the ancient source material, see Cavallini 2009.

[9] Herodian refers here to Lucilla and her plot to dethrone Commodus.

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> From him who was a foe of his fatherland let his honours be taken away! Let the honours of the murderer be taken away, let the murderer be dragged in the dust! The foe of his fatherland, the murderer, the gladiator, in the charnel-house let him be mangled! He is foe to the gods, slayer of the senate, foe to the gods, murderer of the senate, foe of the gods, foe of the senate! Cast the gladiator into the charnel house! (SHA, *Comm.* 18.2-5, transl. Magie)

Herodian, Dio and Aelius Lampridius have varyingly accused him of 'madness and insanity', one who indulged in 'cruel and murderous' habits, accused and found guilty of 'many unseemly deeds'. They considered him 'sinister and scandalous, cruel and obscene, filthy-mouthed and perverted'.[10] Julian when writing his *Caesars* in 312 CE found him 'not worth even of ridicule' (*Caes*. 312c).

However, in the case of all these pro-senatorial authors, the evident bias is problematic, and also to what extent their narratives were in fact dependent on each other, which further affects their reliability. Moreover, although Dio and Herodian lived during Commodus' reign, the *Historia Augusta* was compiled during the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine – but the latter work is in any case probably the least reliable of the three main sources (Zinsli 2017: 59-60). None of these works are totally without merit, but they need careful scrutiny before we can accept their accounts, and plausible facts need to be separated from lurid palace gossip. There is some material evidence which does partially bear out their accounts, which will be dealt with within the context in which it arises.

Commodus also had the misfortune of succeeding an emperor who was considered as one possessing great virtue by the contemporary elite. The ancient sources do lead one to feel, along with Gibbon, that Marcus Aurelius' greatest weakness was the selection of his heir:

> The monstrous vices of the son have cast a shade on the purity of the father's virtues. It has been objected to Marcus, that he sacrificed the happiness of millions to a fond partiality for a worthless boy; and that he chose a successor in his own family, rather than in the republic (1896-1900: 1.84.4)

Upon the accession of Commodus, Dio asserts that:

> Vast numbers of statues[11] were erected representing him in the garb of Hercules. And it was voted that this age should be named the Golden Age (73.15.6, transl. Cary & Foster).

While at the same time Dio expresses his pessimistic view that:

> Our history now descends from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust, as affairs did for the Romans of that day (72.36.4).

Yet the army and the lower classes were thought to have loved him and the soldiers remained loyal to Commodus-Hercules until the very end, and even afterwards, as Herodian (2.6.10-11) and the SHA

[10] Herodian 14.8; Dio 73.1.1; 73.4.1; SHA *Comm.* 1.7-8.
[11] Such as the Capitoline Bust shown in Fig. 6.2 below.

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(*Did. Jul.* 2.6) indicate. As Solomon (2005: 9) has pointed out, the ancient writers send out something of a mixed message when it comes to the attitude of the Roman populace towards Commodus.

Thus the ancient historians all reveal negative views on the emperor's sanity, with many examples of megalomania, paranoia, and other disorders.[12] Whatever the truth of this may be, or whether he was merely an indulged eccentric, his alleged gladiatorial performances both in private and in public, are of particular interest here, and this has caught the imagination of novelists, artists (as in Fig. 6.1) and film-makers. According to Dio:

> The first day he personally paired all the combatants down in the arena, where he appeared with all the trappings of Mercury, including a gilded wand, and took his place on a gilded platform; and we regarded his doing this as an omen (73.19.5).

Figure 6.1: Painting by American Edwin Howland Blashfield, 1848-1936.
Commodus leaving the arena at the head of the gladiators.

Dio chronicles, with disapprobation, how Commodus fought for fourteen days as a gladiator during the games. Commodus apparently used real weapons when he 'fought' against servants at the palace

[12] For example, Dio advises he renamed Rome '*Colonia Antoniniana Commodiana*, the Colony of Commodus', the Senate was to be known as the 'Commodian Fortunate Senate', the legions as 'Commodian', whilst he intended that the Roman people were to be given the name 'Commodianus'. A parallel with the Sun-King's Versailles, a stage on which a god-emperor could act, has already been drawn here (Oliver 1978: 379). The new colony of Commodus would be the emperor's personal stage, the imperial court from which Commodus-Hercules could preside over all his subjects, bringing a Golden Age to all his 'Commodians', as a medallion from 187 CE had already anticipated. The double head of Janus was featured on the latter, one head being Janus himself looking back, the other the emperor Commodus looking forward to the new era which he was to bring about. The reverse further specified that new era, with *Tellus Stabilis* exemplifying the peace and abundance that the emperor was to bring mankind; a Golden Age he was about to bring forth.

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where his opponents would only be allowed weapons of lead, or a wooden sword when facing gladiators in public (SHA, *Comm*. 11, 10-11):

> The form of contest that he practised and the armour that he used were those of the *secutores*, as they were called: he held the shield in his right hand and the wooden sword in his left, and indeed took great pride in the fact that he was left-handed (Dio 73.19.2-3, my emphases).

As emperor, he inevitably won. According to Herodian:

> In his gladiatorial combats, he defeated his opponents with ease, and he did no more than wound them, since they all submitted to him, but only because they knew he was the emperor, not because he was truly a gladiator (1.15.8, transl. Whittaker).

When the emperor acted as a gladiator, the tensions between high and low, power and expendability, desire for honour and shameful display, fed a growing scandal. Whatever the legal implications, fighting in the arena remained popular enough to continue[13] and nobody could doubt that the gladiator-emperor was utterly Roman (Hekster 2002: 150).

Figure 6.2: The Capitoline Bust – Commodus as Hercules.

As had been the case with previous emperors, Commodus claimed divine descent, in his case from the demi-god Hercules[14] and, taking advantage of all possible avenues to represent himself as the new Hercules, he began dressing in a similar fashion, with lion skins and carrying a club. Dressed as Hercules, Commodus would show himself to the public, often at the games or when he fought as a gladiator.

As Hercules the gladiator, he was representing himself as one who had defended the world against chaos and who would achieve immortality, becoming Commodus-Hercules, rising 'far above the people he ruled' (Hekster 2005: 212).

The Capitoline bust as reflected in Fig. 6.2 is an example of this extensive iconographical programme of self-representation. Hekster (2002: 121) observes that the bust shows Commodus with the 'beard, deep eyes and open gaze of a philosopher-emperor', whilst the characteristics of Hercules would be difficult to overlook – the sculptured head is draped with the lion skin, while he grasps in his right hand the club of Hercules and the apples of the Hesperides in the other (not shown).

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[13] Although Dio comments: 'But of the populace in general, many did not enter the amphitheatre at all, and others departed after merely glancing inside, partly from shame at what was going on, partly also from fear, inasmuch as a report spread abroad that he would want to shoot a few of the spectators in imitation of Hercules and the Stymphalian birds' (73.2).

[14] Hadrian, Trajan and Domitian had also previously promulgated a personal association with Hercules, discernible from Martial's epigrams and the number of these depict Hercules in particularly Hadrian's reign (Hekster 2005: 203-5).

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The arena was a logical choice for Commodus to act out his impersonation or association with Hercules. It was the perfect physical representation of a border-zone between civilisation and barbarism, an area which was at the same time central to important Roman political and social activities, while also housing the 'non-Roman space of the uncivilised earth' (Gunderson 1996: 134). In the amphitheatre Roman culture and lawless nature met. This was also where Imperial dominion over life and death was accentuated through criminals' execution, often in those 'fatal charades', as Coleman (1990) has coined them, which often preceded the gladiatorial games proper.

Commodus also performed as an animal hunter. Herodian (1.15.2) describes how the emperor had a terrace constructed that surrounded the arena, from where he would demonstrate his skill as a hunter. In the *Historia Augusta* (*Comm.* 8.5) this activity was also linked to his persona of Hercules who had 'killed wild beasts in the amphitheatre at Lanuvium' (SHA, *Comm.* 8.5) and Hercules' labours with animals had a natural association with a *venator*.[15] Herodian (1.15.5) describes another bizarre scene when Commodus apparently killed one hundred lions with one hundred javelins and, using arrows with curved-heads, decapitated Moroccan ostriches which then ran headless around the amphitheatre.

- Lucilla

Lucilla was the second-oldest daughter of Marcus Aurelius' and sister to Commodus, and was married to Lucius Verus, Commodus' co-emperor, in 164 CE. The ancient sources do support a conspiracy between Lucilla and a number of senators against Commodus early in his reign (182 CE), resulting in her banishment to the island of Capri where she was ultimately executed, along with Commodus' wife, Bruttia Crispina. Commodus had several sisters (unmentioned in the film) and was reputed to have had sexual relations with them (SHA, *Comm.* 5.7) – illicit sexual relations are habitually a *topos* for any unpopular public figure.

GLADIATOR'S CREATION

Gladiator owes less to academic history than it does to the imaginary Rome of Hollywood films, that Rome of the toga plays of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, to the creations of Cecil B. DeMille and D.W. Griffith, and to Italian cinema. The makers of *Gladiator* no doubt did exactly what every other producer of a historical film had done, which was to take that which was considered attractive to the target audience and to build and subtract from that. Film potentially has the power to bring history convincingly to life and historical accuracy was important for a film like *Gladiator* since its

[15] On this association of Hercules with both gladiatorial and animal hunting in the arena, see Martial *De Spec*. 17.6; 32.11-12.

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director had indicated that, although his intention was to represent the spirit of the times rather than the letter, there would be a scrupulous concern for the historical truth.

The film was highly praised for its dramatic performances and for its computer-generated special effects, in particular the sweeping panoramas of ancient Rome. Digital effects were used extensively, predominantly to re-create buildings and contexts (such as the Colosseum and Roman Forum) and for the provision of additional extras in the crowd and battle scenes. These were recreated through computer-generated imagery (CGI) resulting in a visual style that updated and went 'beyond the monumental style of earlier epics' (Burgoyne 2008: 38). As the first big-screen epic focused on the ancient world since the 1960s, this aided in the reenergising the genre of epic cinema for both big screen and television (Winkler 2005: xi; Solomon 2013: 17). Apart from the 1963 *Cleopatra* production notorious for its gargantuan financial costs, there had also been the box office failures of *The Fall of the Roman Empire*[16] in 1964 and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* in 1965. Their inability to attract audiences can be attributed to a growing public indifference, even hostility, as the ancient-world epic seemed irrelevant to audiences in a rapidly changing world. A number of scholars[17] have commented that Vietnam in particular made issues like saving the world for Christianity, or democracy, seem ridiculously out of place. Mann's 1964 *Fall of the Roman Empire* also failed because it tried to delay or at least postpone audience expectations of visual opulence by restricting the first quarter of the action to the bleak, snowy fortress on the Danube, and more importantly because the decisive gladiatorial combat, between Livius and Commodus, although staged in a crowded Forum, was literally shielded from view by the *scutae*, the large shields of the Praetorian guards, thus questioning the role of spectacle for the external audience by denying it to the film's internal audience (Paul 2013: 139).

For *Gladiator*'s director, Ridley Scott, Rome was not a sequence of historical events, but rather, as expressed by the character of Lucilla, 'Rome is an idea. Greatness'. There are several moments in the movie which highlight the fact that both Scott and screenwriter Franzoni were aware that they were manipulating the 'myth that was Rome'. One such instance is the obvious allegorical parallel drawn in the recreation of the Battle of Carthage, as we see in the following dialogue:

> CASSIUS: On this day, we reach back to hallowed antiquity, to bring you a recreation of the second fall of the mighty Carthage! ... On the barren plain of Zama, there stood the invincible armies of the barbarian Hannibal. Ferocious mercenaries and warriors from all brute nations, bent on merciless destruction, conquest. Your emperor is pleased to give you the barbarian horde!

[16] Recent response now lauds this epic with critical praise as a thoughtful and innovative example of a mid-century Hollywood epic, something at odds with its contemporary response.
[17] Wyke (1997: 184-5); Richards (2008: 93-4); Murphy (2004: 17).

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> MAXIMUS: [while Cassius continues his introduction] Anyone here been in the army? [an unknown gladiator responds yes and tells Maximus he served under his command at Vindobona]
>
> MAXIMUS: You can help me. Whatever comes out of these gates, we've got a better chance of survival if we work together. Do you understand? If we stay together, we survive.
>
> CASSIUS: I'm pleased to bring to you the Legionnaires of Scipio Africanus!

This then is a recreation within a recreation and displays the 'once-buried metaphors of Roman spectacle' (Cyrino 2005: 224), all assisted by computer imagery.

Scott was initially inspired to make *Gladiator* by Gérôme's *Pollice Verso* painting (1872), illustrated earlier in Fig. 3.2, as well as paintings like *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer* (1883) and *Ave Caesar! Morituri te salutant* (1856) (Fig. 4.26). The visceral representations of the audience clearly present in the paintings are drawn out in the movie where the power of the mob is evident visually, and through representation. Scott maintained that 'That image spoke to me of the Roman Empire in all its glory and wickedness' (Robb 2005: 107). Certainly, *Gladiator* and the reinvention of ancient Rome is the outcome of his personal vision and creative will - 'the city of power, intrigue, cruelty, and lust, and as the ultimate symbol of both the sublime and the corrupt' which in its turn speaks to the audience through its own desires and doubts (Cyrino 2004: 125). As Scott said prior to commencement of filming:

> I hope to design the film in such a way that when people see it, they'll think. 'Gee. Rome's never been done like this before.... (Scott cited in Sammon 1999: 130)

The idea that history should be more than just a reiteration of empirical data was also clearly understood by Franzoni, and both director and screenwriter appreciated that to bring a plausible ancient society to the screen an attempt should be made to comprehend the psychology and culture of its characters rather than just reciting names and dates. Ridley Scott grew up in the great age of epic films, but was aware of the necessity of updating the classic genre in line with current audience demands:

> I loved the costume drama of it all [swords-and-sandals] and remembered that world vividly. But I also knew you can't bring that to bear today. You've got to reinvent it (Corliss 2000).

One way of achieving this was to introduce contemporary Hollywood family values into their projection of the Roman world (Solomon 2001: 93). The film for example puts emphasis on the familial and ancestral veneration that Maximus exhibits, his compulsive obligation towards virtue and duty, and the character's continual stoic tendencies. *Gladiator* utilises aspects of the genre of melodrama (as do many other blockbuster films) in successfully portraying character types that

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personalise social problems.[18] This in effect creates a high level of concealment for the philosophical messages in the film, which utilises 'images of slavery, family, and violence to create an *ersatz* political morality tale with an apolitical hero' (Tudor 2002). The film has many instances of characters facing moral decisions and their actions leading to consequences that demonstrate the values of strength and honour which underpin the film's themes of family and mortality.[19]

Scott therefore does not attempt to stick too closely to empirical facts - he presents us with his own visualisation of ancient Rome's culture, in essence and in psychological attitude that seems to realistically characterise this period – as Angel (2016) puts it, he attempts to show us its '*zeitgeist*, and for the psychology of the characters, their *mentalité'*.[20] In this way, Scott, created a film that whilst being historiographically imperfect, manages to avoid many of the irritating psychological anachronisms found in films such as *Spartacus, Cleopatra*, and *Ben Hur*.[21]

Gladiator's plot was strongly influenced by *The Fall of the Roman Empire* from which it borrowed a large part of its narrative features, characters and settings, while there are also traces of *Ben-Hur* discernible in the film. As Paul (2013: 147) notes, if these films had adhered more closely to the historical record, similarities would perhaps not have been so noteworthy, but the fictional elements of each story are also very similar. This fictional plot line ran through *Fall* in the person of Lucius. For the *Gladiator* audience this may well be totally irrelevant as a large proportion was probably unaware of the existence of *Fall. Gladiator'*s audience watched the film for its current attraction, as an epic strongly themed on a strong hero and his adherence to family and honour.

More relevant to the current study, various plotlines relating specifically to gladiatorial combat are also repeated in *Gladiator*: the protagonist's ordeal as a gladiator-slave, his association with a fellow black gladiator and the inclusion of the salacious spectator harks back to *Spartacus.* In the tiger fight echoes of *Demetrius and the Gladiators* can be seen and it can be certain that *Caligula* was some of the inspiration for Commodus' depravity (Winkler 2005: 26). The strong belief system for those fighting in the arena is stressed by all, again providing a different version of identity, heroism, masculinity, and spectatorship than the reality.

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[18] For example, the character of Maximus is that of a pragmatic man who does what is necessary. When speaking to Proximo, he says, 'I kill because I am required to.' Any ethical and moral problems are shown are conveyed by either facial expressions of feelings in the film, and occasionally verbalised, which in its turn 'moves the film into melodrama' (Gledhill 2003: 210).

[19] 'Strength and honour' is not just the tag line for the movie but is also used as a greeting amongst both legionaries and gladiators; as the embodiment of the 'warrior-code of respect' it exceeds any social situations of slave and soldier.

[20] Fellini had previously attempted this in the *Satyricon*, but Scott, in this particular respect of trying to reproduce a *zeitgeist* probably advanced further than any previous filmmaker of ancient Roman epics.

[21] This was elaborated on in the Section: Modern sub-text in Chapter 2, page 42 as well as under the discussion on the character of Commodus earlier in this Chapter. Scott avoided the usual solution of the epic film – that Romans needed to turn to Christians to remain interesting to an American audience (Burgoyne 2006: 115).

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Nevertheless, one of the most significant aspects of *Gladiator* was the way in which it diverged from the previous epics by alluding to the spiritual life of Roman paganism in a way that was respectful while resisting the temptation to turn it into some kind of crypto-sublimated Christianity. Franzoni wanted to create a hero who 'transcends traditional religious morality', stating that, 'I believe there is room in our mythology for a character who is deeply moral, but who's not traditionally religious' (Soriano 2001). Maximus is shown as a man of personal spirituality in the film's opening sequences. His pre-battle speech to his troops includes the lines:

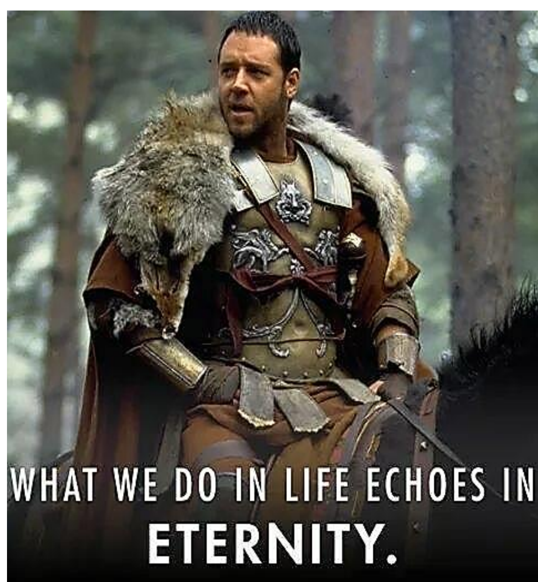

Figure 6.3: Maximus just before the Germanic battle.

> If you find yourself alone, riding in the green fields with the sun on your face, do not be troubled. For you are in Elysium, and you're already dead!

The speech gets a wryly fatalistic laugh from his troops. Snapping back to seriousness immediately afterwards, Maximus declares 'Brothers, what we do in life, echoes in eternity!' (Fig. 6.3) These types of aphorisms are meant to allude to the Stoic tradition which the film attempts to support as a sub-theme, and the characterisation of Maximus as a Stoic hero.[22]

Likewise, towards the end of the film, just before the final scenes of retribution, Maximus is confined in a captive cruciform pose (Fig. 6.4), with his body visible and his eyes looking upwards, and the light touches his forehead and arms resulting in crucifixion imagery, which is toyed with but not confirmed. O'Brien (2014: 108) considers that whilst the 'image connotes a Christ-like nobility and transcendence, underlined by his Roman-inflicted wound, the film side-lines these parallels as Maximus, mortally injured, takes revenge on his enemy before passing into a non-Christian afterlife and reunion with his slain wife and son'.

[22] For example, when Maximus is initially confronted whether or not to fight in the arena he decides to fight after Proximo states 'We are but shadows and dust', referring to the Stoic idea that 'a man may not choose his death, but may choose his manner of meeting it so as to be remembered as a man' (Dalby 2008: 445). This echoes the commands given by Maximus to his soldiers before the Germania battle and it becomes apparent that this is integral to clarifying any hesitations that Maximus might have. In this way his path becomes a lesson in virtue.

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Figure 6.4: Maximus chained in cruciform position.

There is a great deal of political symbolism in *Gladiator* which, whether intentional or not, harks back to *Triumph of the Will* such as manipulation of the crowd by slogans, symbols, and the display of strength in a totalitarian regime. Both sound and image containing politically and socially charged meanings were appropriated – the use of the Roman imperial eagle later usurped by the Nazi regime, for example, associates the two totally diverse historical eras.

Figure 6.5: Commodus, Maximus and Praetorian Guard.

The Praetorians, the emperor's bodyguard and death squad, like the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*, are dressed in in solid black.[23] While this is reminiscent of Mussolini's *camicie nere*, its primary reference is to the black uniforms of the SS seen marching along the street in *Triumph* carrying Roman standards that read *Deutschland Erwache* and not SPQR. In *Gladiator*, after the gladiatorial contest,

[23] They had worn red capes in *Demetrius* and black crests in *Quo Vadis.*

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the Praetorians come forth and form a black square around the surviving gladiators to protect Commodus, who comes onto the arena floor to share in Maximus' glory, as illustrated in Fig. 6.5.

This has greater significance for the contemporary audience, since Nazism is very alive in current 20th century memory (Tudor 2002). The film exploits a number of dark Nazi echoes, for example when Commodus suggests to Lucilla, his sister, that they should have children incestuously of 'pure blood' that would rule 'for a thousand years'. Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) is also the film from which extensive visual representations were appropriated in *Gladiato*r, in particular the monumental architecture of Rome with the Colosseum in the centre background and the perfectly masses ranks of Roman armies, a reflection of Hitler's arrival in the earlier film (Blanshard & Shahabudin 2011: 225).

In honour of the great victory in Germany, Commodus staged a grand triumph and then held games in order that the people might be able to see their new emperor face-to-face, thank him for the victory and the games, and share the experience of the games with him. In the same way, Hitler, the new supreme leader of all Germany in 1934 had staged an elaborate celebration of himself as a means of presenting his triumphant self in person to the party faithful and, through Riefenstahl's masterly film, the world at large.[24] The message is clear: the Rome of Commodus is another totalitarian dictatorship, one that is cruel, impersonal, and destined to fall, as did both Fascism and Nazism. Also it is doomed because it kills 'good men' in heroes like Maximus. This image is reinforced at other points in the film through imagery such as when Commodus, dressed in villainous black like an evil gunslinger, taunts Maximus in the arena, a scene which Scott says was taken from the classic western genre.

MGM's *Gladiator* is perhaps one of the most successful films of the last 50 years or so set in the ancient Roman world. It received both critical and public acclaim and won Best Picture and the Best Actor award for Russell Crowe as well as five additional Academy Awards.

GLADIATOR - THE FILM

PLOT AND PLAY IN THE FILM

The protagonist, Maximus Decius Meridius, played by Russel Crowe (Fig. 6.3), is a general involved in Marcus Aurelius' war in Germany. While at the front, Aurelius tells him that he has chosen Maximus to succeed him, since Commodus (played by Joaquin Phoenix) is unfit to rule. When

[24] The Nazis associated themselves with the Roman Empire because it represented a triumph that lasted one thousand years. The message was delivered through the physical properties of the rally, all designed by Speer, who drew on his considerable knowledge of classical antiquity to create Roman standards and an enormous lighted eagle for the stage at the rally of the Labor Service Men (RAD) in Zeppelin Field, all drawn from Roman models (to be fair, though, many were copied from Mussolini, who had been using them himself). Hitler often appears with a great eagle behind him, and so does Commodus, both at his triumph and in his box at the Colosseum, Briggs 2008: 24.

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Commodus is informed of this decision by his father, he murders him and quickly ensures his own succession. Although Marcus Aurelius is murdered within the first quarter of the film, even when still alive he is overshadowed by the role of Commodus' character (Winkler 2009c: 4), which bears the weight of the anti-hero role.

Proclaiming himself emperor, Commodus asks for Maximus' allegiance but is refused, whereupon a long feud begins between the two men. Maximus is arrested and escapes, riding to his home in Spain only to find that his family has been crucified. He is found by slave traders who take him to Mauretania Caesarensis and sell him to a *lanista* called Proximo, who eventually takes him and other gladiators (including his friends Juba the Numidian, and Hagen, a German) to fight in Commodus' 150 days of games in the Colosseum. This potentially provides Maximus with the opportunity for revenge against Commodus, and the prospect of fulfilling his duty to free Rome from his brutal rule. In the Roman arena Maximus initially fights with a gladiator's helmet, but at one point he is forced to reveal himself and stands face to face with Commodus. The emperor is hampered from ordering his death there and then by the fact that the crowd supports Maximus, whose battle skills and leadership of a group of gladiators are the turning point for an unforeseen victory over charioteers sent to kill them.

In the meantime, Lucilla, Commodus' sister, attempts with two senators (bearing the anachronistic Republican names of Gracchus[25] and Cicero) to topple Commodus and support Maximus, who is honour bound to empower the Senate to rule Rome once again, but they fail.

To win over the people Commodus challenges Maximus to a duel, but Maximus kills him, although he himself dies of his wounds. The film ends with Maximus asking for a return to the Republic and the freeing of the gladiators.

DIGRESSIONS FROM THE HISTORICAL

Since Scott's expression of antiquity takes on two aspects (that of ancient Rome and that of the epic cinematic genre), there are of course some discrepancies from the historical sources, even though these sources themselves leave much to be desired in terms of historical credibility. The narrative conventions of other cinematic representations of gladiators and the arena are taken and revised but still play a role in the moral schema of the film.

Gladiator begins accurately enough with Marcus Aurelius' Germania campaign but then turns its focus onto a fictional war general instead and employs a counter-history. It employs a new historicist technique which cultivates 'counterfactual' threads within social and economic history (Gallagher &

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[25] A Gracchus is also a character in *Spartacus*.

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Greenblatt 2001b: 53; 2001a). Marcus Aurelius' death in the film becomes the catalyst for the hostility between his successor, Commodus, an 'emotional egotist', and Maximus, the 'classic and determined stoic hero' (Lachs 2006: 15). The Stoic virtues of 'justice, truth, temperance and courage', as expressed by Marcus Aurelius in *Meditations* (5.12), are the virtues that underpin the movie's narrative by providing a secondary plot motif - the correct moral code required for a ruler of Rome and for a champion to serve Rome as a warrior. *Gladiator* then counter positions differing ideas about Roman leadership within this application of counterfactual conditions that resemble 'alternate histories,' a literary genre popular in post-war fiction.

Although the plot is therefore largely fictitious, it is plausibly set within a historical context and for the latter a certain amount of historical and scholarly research was carried out by the script writers and director. Historical consultants were employed for the movie, such as Kathleen Coleman, whose expert services were not heeded and who soon realised that a predisposition for artistic innovation meant that her historical guidance was of limited value to the directors of the film.[26] The film is, however, not meant to be a documentary, and even if it were, the tendentious nature of the ancient sources make the ancient narratives hardly credible. As a film, it concentrates more on being believable than on being strictly accurate, in other words it pursues authenticity rather than actuality, and the film's realism applies to how we, as a modern Western audience, think that these characters would have behaved and lived in their time. This results in some ironies, such as where the endorsement of products in the arena was removed from the script because the filmmakers did not think that it would look believable to a modern audience, whereas in fact this was actually practised in ancient times (Morgan 2021).

Some critics are of course disturbed by this pursuit of authenticity rather than prioritising the strictly historical. Allen Ward (2001), for example, considers that greater adherence to historical accuracy would not have made *Gladiator* any less interesting or exciting: 'creative artists need to be granted some poetic license, but that should not be a permit for the wholesale disregard of facts in historical fiction.' The film is certainly not burdened by any close adherence to Roman history, a thorough understanding of Roman institutions of government or even geographic and linguistic consistency.

- The character of Maximus

The fictional hero, Maximus, may be said to be drawn with plausible realism even if he is not historical actuality. *Gladiator*'s elaborate expression of the heroic warrior code makes him acceptable to many different cultures. As *Gladiator*'s hero Maximus provides broadly appropriate moral

[26] To the extent that Harvard professor Kathleen Coleman asked for her name to be removed from the credits in the film after realising that her work had little effect. But script writers and historical novelists seldom let the historical facts 'get between them and the paying customer' (Ward 2001).

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responses when faced with violence and impending death while at the same time, presents defiance in the face of defeat and overwhelming odds (Dalby 2008).

Gladiator can also attribute a certain amount of its success to the fact that it takes obvious recourse to archetypal hero tales and the heightened danger posed to the hero, created with the help of DVFx, and this image of the hero is consciously reinforced through the tagline of the movie '*A hero will rise'* (Fig. 6.6).

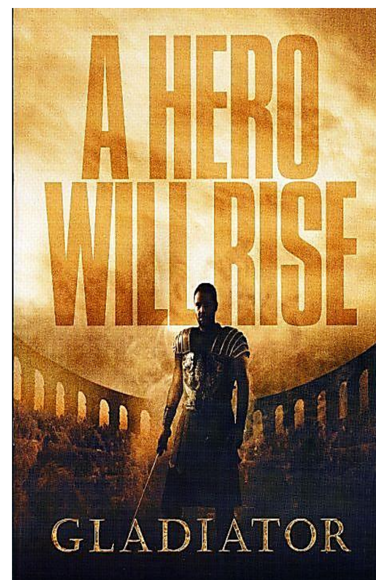

Figure 6.6: A Hero Will Rise**.**

Maximus, the 'noble, incorruptible Spaniard' who served the Roman Empire as its 'greatest general' (Tudor 2002) is an epitome of the heroic individual hero who embodies all the features of a typical hero of a classical Hollywood epic[27] – single-handedly taking on an evil emperor who is the ruler of a world power. The hero, who represents Right, prevails against overwhelming Might. The message of the film is that the world is temporarily a better place because of his heroism (Winkler 2005: 24).[28]

Maximus' character is a pastiche, a 'composite portrait of the kind of able men from the provinces who were tangible proof of Marcus Aurelius' insistence on promoting men on a merit basis' wherever he found them (Ward 2001). His character stands in contrast to the politicians of Rome in that he is uncorrupted, innocent of the machinations of power-mongering, and also an outsider.

Through the film's reshuffling of imperial history, the fictitious Maximus is elevated over male rivals aiming for the imperial throne by the moral exemplar of Marcus Aurelius, and therefore himself reflects moral excellence.

It is via the figure of Maximus that questions of a Stoic nature, as voiced by Marcus Aurelius, are articulated, such as on a moral man's nature and what virtues a man must possess to make him suitable

[27] The hero develops a relationship with the heroine and rescues her from peril; he is brave and self-sacrificing, looked up to by others, both a leader and a skilful fighter. He is naturally possessed of an upright code of morality which is tested and which he sustains. A hero needs to be well-built and is distinguishable from others. In many ancient epic films the actor's natural accents are used to distinguish them from each other in their roles.

[28] This theme of the underdog who succeeds is one that is prevalent in many films and is not just restricted to the ancient epic. For example: Gibson's *Braveheart* (1995); Spielberg's *Amistad* (1997); Emmerich's *The Patriot* (2000); Mann's *The Insider* (1999) and Soderburgh's *Erin Brokovich* (2000) to quote many of the obvious, and as a prevailing theme it is present in *Lord of the Rings, Terminator, Mad Max* and the *Matrix* films where the hero goes against the status quo represented in its many variations. There are also examples that come from outside the mainstream Hollywood film such as *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Viva Zapata* (1952)

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to rule (Dalby 2008). Maximus is saved from becoming a sanctimonious cardboard hero by plot devices designed to create empathy for him – the central vengeance plot, the background of violence, family images, and slavery.[29]

The use of a lowly figure like a gladiator as everyman's hero, a courageous and righteous man, is a modern invention and one which stands in contrast to the status of the gladiator in ancient Rome in their strictly structured social stratum. In ancient Rome they never were seen as exemplars or even as persons through whom a moral dilemma could be represented. In modern terms this is the story of a man who serves the Roman empire, subjugating his personal desires to fulfil the needs of Rome and who is betrayed, losing everything, yet through individual strength and courage rises once more and again sacrifices himself to serve others, dying a hero. He is seen in the soft admiring light of nostalgia while still being the hero that has sensitivity and emotional depth. Nevertheless, in every other way Maximus is a typical hero-figure. Cyrino sees Maximus as:

> Demonstrating all the furious rage, brooding menace, and pitiless aggression of a whole history of insulted heroes from Achilles in Homer's *Iliad* to Mad Max in George Miller's apocalyptic film trilogy (2004: 131).

Maximus is also represented as a *paterfamilias* who combines Roman Republican virtues with modern familial sensitivity (Solomon 2005: 8). The film's presumed popularity with women has been attributed to its pastoral idealization of family life, as women in the audiences were felt to 'respond to the hero's sweet devotion to his dead wife and child' (Tudor 2002). Maximus' broken familial bonds have their parallel in the American concern about the collapse of the nuclear family, as families in modern society are much less standardised in terms of the family unit (Cyrino 2004: 252-254).[30]

When confronting Commodus in the arena, Maximus declares himself:

> My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius, commander of the Armies of the North, General of the Felix Legions, loyal servant to the true emperor, Marcus Aurelius. Father to a murdered son, husband to a murdered wife. And I will have my vengeance, in this life or the next.

He therefore presents himself as a gladiator, general, and vengeful father and husband, testifying to the moral dominance that has been given to him by his torment and his diverse personas. Finally, through his defence of Lucilla and her son Lucius, Maximus finds the redeeming act that permits

[29] It is interesting to note that both the slave scenes in *Spartacus* and *Gladiator* start in Africa, which is the continent most recently associated with slavery in Western consciousness.

[30] This devotion shown by the character of Maximus seems to be indicative of a change in the characterisation of the male action hero which first emerged in the early 90s. Violence demonstrated as being for the family appears to be a developing mainstream-trend and one that is thought to be acceptable.

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atonement for his faults, reacquisition of his masculinity, and to ultimately recover his status as father, son and husband.[31]

For the hero concept to work successfully an antithesis is required and in the film this is Commodus, the epic villain, a 'preening, whining Commodus' (Cornelius 2015: 6), who represents the debauched, dictatorial Roman emperor, consistent with those from previous epics as a character type of almost undiluted evil. Here the sexually depraved, politically corrupt emperor who has an attachment to the cruel theatricalities of the arena is stereotyped, a type previously played by Charles Laughton and Peter Ustinov's Nero in the *Sign of the Cross* (1932) and *Quo Vadis* (1951) as well as Christopher Plummer's version of Commodus from *Fall*. The portrayal of Commodus at least avoids the archetypal effete Roman tyrant so often represented in the *pepla* films of the 50s and 60s.

The emperor lives elevated from the masses holding a position of power. But although as the emperor he is the most powerful man in the empire, he is subject to the masses in deciding the fate of gladiators in the arena. It may by, as Lachs says, that 'his movements hold the power to direct the thousands of men whose eyes remain focused on him, awaiting a sign' (2016: 31), but he cannot follow his whim to just have Maximus executed, because of the crowd's adulation of this gladiator.

Figure 6.7: Emperor Commodus.

While both Commodus and Maximus are rulers or potential rulers and both embrace violence, Commodus is 'informed by his narcissism', whereas Maximus employs violence in service of his case of restoring the Roman Republic, adhering to a 'higher law' (Thomassen 2009: 146). This is emphasised particularly by the fact that the tyranny of Commodus is presented as 'something unnatural', something which was acquired firstly because of his murder of his father and secondly because he wants to continue his dynasty through begetting an heir by incest (Thomassen 2009: 146).

Commodus as the dictator-emperor says to Maximus the dictator-general:

> Are we so different, you and I? You take a life when you have to, as so do I.

Commodus' authority, for example as seen in his provision of theatre of the masses, is shown to be superficial and ineffective (since he is shown as subject to the will of the crowd) while Maximus has

[31] Maximus nevertheless does not criticise Lucilla for having chosen her role as a conspirator against Commodus over her role as a mother, which also invites investigation into the responsibilities of a parent embodying stoic virtues.

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the 'true well-being of the Roman people at heart', thus legitimising any of his violent acts carried out in order to bring back the republic, the rule-of-law and a version of democratic self-rule (Thomassen 2009: 146). The violence thus becomes 'a socially redemptive act' as it transforms 'martial combat into the ennobling rhetoric of blood myths' (Burgoyne 2008: 92). Maximus must somehow unite the 'blood rhetoric of the gladiatorial ring', with Marcus Aurelius' idealised vision of Roman *civitas*. As Maximus progresses, he gains authority through his performances and the Colosseum becomes the focal position for the Republic's regeneration. Conflict represented in the film is resolved by a final confrontation, an ultimate duel, essential to crystallise the hero's role as a member of the collective.

All this goes to show that Maximus' character in the film is more that of a postmodern hero with which a contemporary audience could identify, being more familiar with modern popular culture than ancient history (Blanshard & Shahabudin 2011: 223). Russell Crowe is part Māori originating from New Zealand and which makes him a suitable non-Roman or 'subaltern of Empire' (Wilson 2002: 64): 'As Maximus, he speaks a kind of pidgin-English consent to the spectacle of peripheral domination and leads the concentric staging of the surrounding provinces of foreigners coming home to Rome to congregate as a World-Wide match of sadomasochistic spectacle' (Wilson 2002: 63).

Maximus commits his life to Rome only to be required to kill for his emperor, thus giving expression to something bordering on a pacifistic view about war, violence and patriotism. *Gladiator* is in fact quite puritanical, aligning its spectators with a hero-protagonist so singularly motivated by revenge and duty that even the temptations of sex have ceased to exist.

- A few other liberties with history

There are the usual moments, as with most films, where a suspension of belief is normal – for example, we know that the film does not take place in real time, but as viewers we accept this convention. Maximus escapes from Commodus and rides all the way to Spain, 'incredibly, bleeding all the way from Germany to Spain, but who cares?' (Arenas 2001: 2). But there are a number of instances where history is actually altered. No great final battle with the tribes of Germania happened on the day of Marcus Aurelius' death although about a year before there was a 'great daylong battle late in the campaigning season' in 179 CE in the Marcomannic Wars in Germany (Ward 2001; Thill 2018: 279). The death of Commodus came at least 13 years later, not the compressed approximation of two years that is intimated in the film, and he is not killed by a gladiator in the arena but by a wrestler in the baths. With respect to Commodus' appearance, the film also takes liberties in that he was a blond and fought with his left hand as opposed to the dark hair and right-hand fighting portrayed in the film. Further he was not single as intimated in the film; he had been married to Bruttia Crispina, the grand-daughter of a friend of Hadrian, at the age of 16, though he divorced and executed her later.

But the greatest historical inaccuracy has to be in its politics and the represented hope of Marcus Aurelius to restore the Roman Republic. Marcus Aurelius expresses this to Maximus, that he wants to 'return Rome to the people' and re-establish the Roman Republic:

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> How will the world speak my name in years to come? Will I be known as the philosopher? The warrior? The tyrant? Or will there be a more golden sounding to my name? Will I be the Emperor who gave Rome back her freedom?

Ultimately Marcus Aurelius' idea of restoring the Republic lies in the background of the film's plot and is brought up again in the concluding scenes of the film, in defiance of the historical record. This wish, of first Aurelius and then Maximus, binds the two characters together to search for what most Americans, at least, would have seen as the best form of government in the year 2000.[32] It also ties in with the expressed desires for the freedom of the enslaved gladiators, which echoes the plot that drives *Spartacus* but is really something that is outside the historical tradition and superimposed by modern ideology.[33] In *Gladiator* the dissident senator Gracchus says at one point that 'the Senate is the people… chosen by the people, to speak for the people', a phrase with resonance for American audiences and a somewhat facile appropriation of the utopian vision in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address (Rose 2004). The film implies that rule of the Roman Republic was 'by the people' in the manner of present-day American democracy, which was of course not the case. The Roman Republic had certainly never been a democracy, although, as discussed above, the people had a greater voice in the people's assemblies than under the Empire. The changing of history within the film is due to the inherent belief of Americans that democracy is the only 'true' method of government, and as such, the cause Maximus is fighting for must be the same as what the audience believe is right. This adaptation of history serves to ingratiate Maximus with the film's audience. Yet he is an unwilling hero who only wishes to depose Commodus out of revenge for his families' death and because it was the last wish of Marcus Aurelius, not some inherent belief in democratic government.

In keeping with his Stoicism and in contrast to Commodus, Maximus is accepting of the idea that death is a situation of life and is prepared to sacrifice his body and life for the Republic of Rome. When the point is reached that Maximus is acknowledged as the future for the people of Rome by both the plotting senators and the mob, he remains just a transitory and transparent instrument for the implementation of Rome as once again a republic. Maximus' body, his life and death only matter in that he is the carrier of that idea and message. Commodus sees that the only way he can continue the natural succession by blood is through killing his father in contrast to Maximus who sees that things should take a natural progression towards a democratic republic, as Aurelius wanted. According to Thomassen (2009: 146) 'he can thus lay claim to the natural progress of History conceived as a teleological movement toward democracy and freedom'.

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[32] An idea that Ward calls 'pandering to an American audience' (2004: 35). Historically, the existence of an Emperor was no longer questioned at that time, and even those Senators prepared to plot against Commodus would not have wanted to restore the Republic, but merely to pick an Emperor with proven merit from within their own ranks.
[33] This wish is expressed by the gladiators and the senators after being arrested as conspirators in Lucilla's plot.

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Gladiator therefore makes a spirited attempt but does not succeed in representing the possibility of a future Rome as a democracy. There is not enough political discourse in the film, so the political symbolism comes across as rather anaemic and apolitcalness. Despite Lucilla claiming that 'Rome is an idea'[34] the film fails to substantiate this, which ensures that the movie's political discourse stays as visionary as does Maximus' home and family. While Maximus' wife and son personify all that is important to him, they remain idealized abstractions of home and family away from any political engagement. The film's representation of 'Rome' in fact consists of 'conquest, spectacle, and tyrannous intrigue', which nullifies any concept of Rome having an advanced system of governance. With respect to Roman political culture *Gladiator* also lacks detail which diminishes its 'Romanness' to background extravaganza required for a 'male melodrama'. As a viewer you are diverted from the film's lack of substance through violent spectacle but at the same time the film encourages you to trust Maximus as the man who will restore those faded ideals and rehabilitate Rome's honour. The essence of the film's political discourse is brought down to this, to trust one specific person rather than the rule-of-law.

Figure 6.8: Sombre light at the beginning of the film *Gladiator.*

Figure 6.9: The philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Maximus' comment to Marcus Aurelius that 'Rome is the light,' follows directly after the graphically shown conquest of the Germanic tribes in a vicious encounter, and thus gives the remark a level of unexplored irony. That the battle shown against the enhanced darkness of the European winter visually supports the irony of this remark. Lane comments on the cinematic effect of this shadowed light of the film (Fig. 6.8 and 6.9):

> There are times when *Gladiator* appears to be not so much photographed as cast in iron: gray-blue skies, flesh as cold and colorless as the armor that protects it, and hardened profiles that you could stamp on a coin (2000: 25).

[34] This is also echoed in Marcus Aurelius' statement that Rome is a dream, in other words a vision of a politically ideal situation of a Roman Republic. Something that will and does not happen in practise any more than Maximus being able to return to his home and family, a desire he expresses early in the film.

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In fact, a cold blue light was used to shoot these initial war scenes.[35] It is by the use of this light that the image of Empire is consolidated with the scene where Commodus, accompanied by Lucilla, triumphantly enters Rome. Speaking to the Emperor, Maximus states that he needs to believe that his soldiers died for a cause:[36]

> MAXIMUS: Five thousand of my men are out there in the freezing mud. Three thousand of them are bloodied and cleaved. Two thousand will never leave this place. I will not believe that they fought and died for nothing.
>
> MARCUS AURELIUS: And what would you believe?
>
> MAXIMUS: They fought for you and for Rome.
>
> MARCUS AURELIUS: And what is Rome, Maximus?
>
> MAXIMUS: I've seen much of the rest of the world. It is brutal and cruel and dark. Rome is the light.

It is therefore interesting to observe the change in the lighting when the film plays scenes not directly associated with warfare. In fact the cold blue atmosphere is presented in clear contrast to the warmer hues reflected in the previous tracking opening shots across the wheatfield. The warmer tones associate Maximus with the natural world whilst the imagery of conquest is reinforced through the other.

To return to the subject of Rome as a democracy, the people of Rome, who would be the heart of any future democracy, are not portrayed very flatteringly in the film. Several of the characters in *Gladiator* reference that manipulation of the mob is the key to controlling Rome, for example Senator Gracchus, who remarks 'Rome is a mob. The heart of Rome is not the marble of the Senate, it's the sand of the Colosseum' or the *lanista* Proximo's comment, 'Win the crowd and you'll win your freedom'.

The disillusionment of Maximus with the concept of Rome is the 'analogy of the modern sense of estrangement' (Cyrino 2004: 136). The degenerate Rome which Maximus witnesses, and his ambivalence regarding his role in the restoration of Roman government to the people, is the equivalent of post-Cold War American society.

Gladiator includes some quite overt rumination on the morality of empire and democracy although it has retained this at a fairly simplistic level democracy = good/ dictatorship = bad, freedom = good

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[35] It can be seen that in the opening moments, Maximus wearing full Roman armour and the fur trimmed cape signifying rank, is deferred to and treated with respect and juniors seek his opinion. Through this, the film associates military violence as a means of retaining values and actually promotes belief in its necessity and value.

[36] 'The reference to light is echoed later in the film through the names of Lucilla and Lucius. The Republic of Rome is associated with light and with breath or speech, whereas Commodus's dictatorship is associated with blood and bodily desire' (Thomassen 2009: 146).

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/empire = bad.[37] Russell (2007: 218) also observed that, since the events of September 11 2001, and the subsequent Iran and Afghanistan conflicts, historical films about imperial warfare and invasion have taken on an increased degree of immediacy and significance.

THE FURTHER GLADIATOR TRADITION IN FILM

Gladiator paved the way for a number of other films on the ancient world, such as *Troy* (2004), *Alexander* (2004), *300* (2007), *Centurion* (2010), *Immortals* (2011) and *The Eagle* (2011), which are all ancient war films and met with moderate success, although not comparable with that of *Gladiator*. Scott himself went on to direct *Hannibal* (2001) and *Prometheus* (2012) (Nichols 2020), but *Gladiator* was to date also the highlight of his career.

There have been other antiquity themed films, such as *Agora* (2009), *Clash of the Titans* (2010), or *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010). Several others such as *Wrath of the Titans* and *Percy Jackson and the Sea Monsters* are in production whilst others have been proposed including three more Alexander films, a prequel to *Gladiator* and a remake of *Jason and Argonauts* as well as the long-awaited *Hannibal the Conqueror*. Interestingly there are a greater number of films inspired by Greece rather than Rome which is a significant change from the earlier preference for Roman epic films. *Troy, Alexander* and *300* are all seen not only as repeating modern political concerns in particular conflicts between the Western world and Islam but also as films that do not always put forward the obvious hero and villain characters (Blanshard & Shahabudin 2011: 220). The success of *Gladiator* therefore not only had an effect on the epic film genre but has resurrected a more general interest in the ancient world encouraging its depiction in mass popular culture across a variety of contexts, culminating in the production of new television programmes including historical docudrama's prestigious series like HBO/BBC's *Rome*, the subject of our next chapter, and even more recently, *Troy: Fall of a City* (BBC/Netflix, 2018).

The character of Maximus himself has been taken up into American culture in particular. In the period following 9/11, this gladiator-hero became a popular design in body-art as a symbol of 'honour and mourning' (McPherson 2002: 90). Maximus' slogan of 'strength and honour' was much in demand among tattoo artists, while other associations have been utilised in the imagery of firefighters who died on 9/11. McPherson (2002: 96) also mentions a well-known New York tattoo parlour called 'Maximus' Tattoos' that became popular after 9/11.

[37] A key subject for historical epics in the 20th century was often imperial ambitions, showcased through the use of the ancient Roman Empire (or the 19th century British Empire) as a narrational terrain where America's role in the 20th century could be safely explored through allegory.

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VIOLENCE AND VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT IN *GLADIATOR*

Overall, it is safe to say that *Gladiator* contains a great deal of explicit violence, although Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011: 223) note that due to the fast cross-cutting filming techniques this allows it not to appear overly exploited. Apart from the gladiatorial violence which will be discussed below, the film has many instances of social and interpersonal violence related to status and class (for example the way in which Maximus is treated as a slave) and the film opens with some very impressive scenes of military violence.

WARFARE

Gladiator begins with some 'up-close and personal' bloody realities of ancient warfare[38] (certainly a far cry from the somewhat anaemic battle scenes in *Spartacus*) and throughout the film violence lies very close to the surface even in times when the viewer is not directly confronted with it on screen. According to Jon Solomon (2005: 6), Franzoni wanted to show how armies with superior military crafts wiped out local populations with 'admirable defiance' and little else to ward off the attack. The first ten minutes of the film therefore show an absolute barrage of CGI-produced military fire arrows and other forms of attack on the enemy.

Despite the film's inaccuracies with respect to the use of Roman war weaponry it does convincingly and accurately portray the ugly visceral side of legionary combat with brutal hand-to-hand butchery that surely occurred on the northern frontier and elsewhere. Some of most haunting moments in *Gladiato*r come moments before the battle of Vindobona: 'the clank-clank-clank of primitive spear-lobbers being wound, the arrows being lit, the soldiers rising from their prayers into a milkily luminous mist' (Edelstein 2000), as illustrated in Fig. 6.10.

Many of the gory and graphically demonstrated deaths in combat in the film can also be found depicted on the triumphal column of Marcus Aurelius[39] in Rome's Piazza Colonna, erected by Commodus to commemorate Marcus Aurelius' northern wars against the Marcomanni and Quadi in Czechia and the Sarmatians in Hungary. The monument's realism in reflecting the horrors of war are made more graphic due to the fact that the monument is carved in high relief with contrasting shadows that increase visibility.[40] As a political expression the column illustrates the Roman point of view: as a work of art it plays on the two age-old sources of emotion, terror and pity, and places itself at the view-point of both the massacrers and the massacred (Veyne 1993: 359). Further it adds to the triumphal affirmation of the might of Rome who was justified in its crushing of the vanquished. Once

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38 Mitchell (2000) describes these scenes as having 'Bruegelesque imagery'.
39 Also known as the Aurelian column it was carved and put in place between 180 and 193 CE.
40 Originally it was Marcus Aurelius whose statue stood on the top of the column; today, the apostle Paul stands there.

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again this can be seen as reflected in many a war film's attempts to provide a contrast of 'pity without consequences' and 'sadism with neither danger nor remorse' (Veyne 1993: 358).

Figure 6.10: MAXIMUS: At my signal, unleash hell!

EXECUTION OF MAXIMUS' FAMILY

Maximus' family personify idealised concepts of home and family, far removed from the arena of politics. The melodramatic excess of their deaths - they are crucified and then burnt[41] - is thematically important.[42] The execution of such a vicious crime gives the hero a need to avenge, it increases the sympathy and empathy that the audience holds for him. It is only the fate of the little boy that we see, as he is cruelly trampled by the Romans' horses, but this subliminally persuades viewers into tolerating expansive scenes of violence because the visualisation of their torture and murder has triggered a sense of outrage, essentially the retributive motivation that was discussed in Chapter 3.[43] Cinematic violence that occurs throughout the film is presented as acceptable and justifiable as it is in the service of the ideal of the family. The death of Maximus' family and his ensuing enslavement parallel those actions he carried out as a Roman general, when he and his soldiers' acts of war were responsible for the destruction of 'barbarian' families and homes. Nonetheless, in melodrama 'excess is linked to the production of character's identities' (Gledhill 2003: 212). The excessively brutal manner of the loss of his family defines Maximus as a 'melodramatic type'; he becomes an example

[41] The film has a minor error in this scene, when Maximus' little son points to their executioners, the arriving soldiers: 'Mamma, I soldati' – which is Italian, not Latin.

[42] This is not to say that such brutal murders do not mirror the reality of the types of murderous purges that occurred under emperors such as Caligula, Nero and Domitian. Even under Marcus Aurelius such extremes were carried out in his name - the general Avidius Cassius' head was cut off by a centurion and sent to Marcus as proof of his death as a result of his attempted usurpation.

[43] See p. 60 above

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of ‘revenge for his family’ as, according to Wilson (2002: 65), he ‘moves from waging a just war against Germany to his own *bellum iustum* against the state as perverted by the preening Commodus’. Wilson also finds the narrative of imperial spectacle to be ‘neo-conservative’ in the prominence it gives to ‘righteous fathers and conscripted sons’. The film achieves this through impressive pyrotechnics of power which allow us to be persuaded to believe not only in the value of those manly warrior-values but also in ‘the myth of patriotic belonging …to the imperial community of family value, manly virtue, conquest and enlightened rule over the dark places of the earth’ (Wilson 2002: 65), essentially linking up with the redemptive justice also discussed in Chapter 3.

CRITIQUING VIOLENCE

On another level, *Gladiator* is a critique of violence. Dalby (2008: 11) sees *Gladiator* as a ‘critique of the spectacles of violence implicit in empire’, while there is a clear critical subtext with ‘violent sports and the contemporary consumption culture and the celebration of imperial power in the age of globalization’. It takes issue with the globalised urban masses’ obsession with media spectacle (Mitchell 2000), the subtle voyeuristic coercions of so-called ‘extreme’ sports, reality TV, political spin-doctoring, trash talk shows, and celebrity gossip (Nealon 2012: 25). Just like the decadent Romans depicted in the film, present ‘post-postmodern capitalists’, as Nealon (2012: 36) puts it, ‘are trained by the media masters to watch rather than act, consume rather than do’. The Empire is thus treated as a prefiguration of America. Cyrino (2004: 124-149) in fact sees the entire film as a metaphor for a contemporary America blinded to political truth by a violent yet pacifying mass media. From the opening seconds of the movie, connections are made between Rome and America, for example between the ‘imperial reach of Rome’ and the ‘global reach of Hollywood’ (Burgoyne 2006: 80).

The film also examines the idea of justifiable violence being used to overcome evil and other unjust violence. It presents the questioning of a moral code which legitimises specific systems of violence, and applicable warriors-roles. *Gladiator* exemplifies the conduct that shapes warrior behaviour when they are in a position of ‘extreme danger as well as the necessities for resistance in the face of the usurpation of legitimate power’ (Dalby 2008: 451). The film presents a warrior-code that associates strength directly with honour, and how that honour can be upheld ‘even after death partly by the careful use of strength while alive’.

According to Thomassen (2009) the interrogation of violence in the film *Gladiator* presents the viewer with a riddle to which the only answer is that violence is a natural action towards order. If one works from the premise that violence is the initiator or founding action of change, then violence needs to be acted out in order to both overthrow the old order and sustain the new order. Violence in *Gladiator* can therefore not be criticised, because it becomes part of the natural order of things. Where *Gladiator* becomes problematic is in its attempt to ‘naturalize’ violence as administered by Maximus. Maximus’ actions of violence are rendered ‘justified’ as opposed to Commodus’s gratuitous actions of violence. Violence in this sense becomes binary: violence for the greater good, versus violence for

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retention of power. However, Maximus' actions are power related – the re-establishment of the Republic.

To serve as a 'mass-culture critique of the media spectacle of violence', it would be necessary for *Gladiator* to generate a consciousness of that 'critique' in the audience, this would then be applied to the production as well (Tudor 2000). However, violence is used within the film for two purposes. Maximus as a general commits ennobled violence which is in contrast to the degrading combat of the gladiator, and this acts explicatively to reinforce our awareness of Maximus' nobility. The plot is also propelled towards its finale by violence. The action film genre is often characterised by a weak script and intensifying gladiatorial spectacles in *Gladiator's* second act substitute for any dramatic conflict. The film is dependent on violent displays to solve its personal conflict, all the while encouraging the viewer to believe in violence committed by Maximus' as being those necessary actions of a noble man responding to his family's murder. Through encouragement of identification with his quest for vengeance, presentation of his nobility, and the demonstration of violence being necessary for the achievement of his duty, the story foregoes gestures of awareness of self or any distancing from 'entertainment violence' that might allow it to function as an auto-critique of its own allure through the draw of violence.

LEGITIMATE AND ILLEGITIMATE VIOLENCE

In the movie itself, the affirmation that violence is considered acceptable when it is for more legitimate purposes such as the violence of war is clear. Within its storyline *Gladiator* draws links between violence for entertainment and violence considered legitimate, such as war, as in the graphic opening scenes representing the final battle with the Germanic tribes.[44] The battle that opens the movie demonstrates the power of the technologically superior fighting forces in contrast to those of the Other, the Germanic forces. The effect of disengagement is heightened by 'digitalised insertions of bodies, weapons, animals, flames, lightning, a whole trumpery of sublime expansion and sublimated aggression soliciting assent via awe, trauma and wonder before the force and seeming enlightenment of global Europe' (Wilson 2002: 67).

The opening scene of the battle shows Maximus as he rides between two lines of his soldiers who salute him and address him as 'General' (Fig. 6.11).

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[44] The opening battle scene owes far more to *Saving Private Ryan's* graphic violence, slow-motion and stop-motion style, the washed-out colours (a blue filter in *Gladiator*) mentioned above, sweeping battlefield shots, and the lugubrious music of the Normandy landing. The chanting of the Germans is partly modelled on the Zulu war chants in *Zulu* (1964), Briggs 2008: 26-27.

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Figure 6.11: Maximus moving between two lines of his soldiers prior to battle.

All these scenes are a necessary build-up as it is Maximus' ability and military training which, although trivialised into bloody entertainment for the masses, later saves him in the arena - it is his experience of command that allows him to unify and direct the motley collection of gladiators to achieve the impossible and triumph in the re-enacted Battle of Carthage. The interplay between military and arena violence is reflected through direct parallels and several incidences of imagery. It is also during the re-enactment of the Battle of Carthage that the power that entertainment has for people is reaffirmed, and in turn how entertainment is manipulated for the purpose of maintaining power (Cyrino 2004: 138-139).

PROPORTION OF VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT IN THE FILM

Although there is a possibility that the producers indulged in an inside-joke when Rome loses in the re-enactment of the Battle of Zama from the Second Punic War,[45] violent entertainment is represented in *Gladiator* through the medium of gladiatorial bouts, and it is these spectacles which form a central plot-device through which the character of Maximus is disclosed. It is Maximus' own refusal to make a show of his killing in the beginning that drives home the complexities of violence as entertainment and at that point removes him from the conventional image of a cinema hero. All of his opponents are dispatched swiftly and brutally in less than a minute. Hurling one of the swords out into the crowd, Maximus demands:

> 'Are you not entertained? Is this not why you are here?'

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[45] Commodus comments on the fact that he thought Rome won the battle.

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This action mimics the moment when Draba hurls a trident at Crassus and other dignitaries in *Spartacus*. But in the present instance, through this contemptuous treatment of the crowd's desire for blood and institutionalised violence, Maximus makes apparent his understanding of gladiatorial combat. Both this question and further interchanges between Proximo and Maximus restate the 'differences between the noble soldier and the crowd-pleasing gladiator' (Tudor 2002). This serves to emphasise Maximus' nobility of character – he is not merely an entertainer but is serious and has a higher goal. But to re-establish that, he must regain his moral purpose. The forthright acknowledgement of violence as entertainment initially denies Maximus the gladiator the conventional cinematic status of hero, regained later when he discovers his moral purpose. His liminal state in the entry to the arena is signalled by falling petals, a classic symbol for lost innocence (Fig. 6.12), where his ability to deliver the brutality that the crowd desires makes him no longer a hero but a celebrity.

Maximus' question is therefore directed not only at the Roman spectators, but also at us, the film viewers. But *Gladiator* is successful in foregrounding the cruelty and brutality of arena spectacles while yet avoiding explicit moralising on the subject.

Figure 6.12: Maximus is framed at a heroic low angle as the crowd showers him with rose petals.

Once he has entered the arena and stands facing his opponents, Maximus is showered with rose petals by the crowd (Fig. 6.12). This type of 'framing' builds him into a powerful, iconic heroic figure.[46] This is a variant of the film's poster image of him illustrated in Fig. 6.6 above and the simple, heroic image embodies the film's high concept aims.

The disparity between his wider imperial purpose as a general and his entertainment purpose as a gladiator is emphasised through use of this visual strategy. Maximus is only crowned as a hero once he has become a gladiator by means of these visual techniques. As a general he was never shown in such heroic imagery, any more than his warrior-standing was so visually reliant on his physical body. This visual difference serves to illustrate the control slavery has over the human body and entertainment's appropriation of violence. In the press notes that accompany *Gladiator*, Ridley Scott states:

> Entertainment has frequently been used by leaders as a means to distract an abused citizenry…The gladiatorial games were such a distraction. Our story suggests that, should

[46] Framing is essentially the way in which something is presented to viewers with the intention of influencing how they will process this image or information, Carter 2013: 1-12.

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> a hero arise out of the carnage of the arena, his popularity would give him tremendous power and were he to be a genuine champion of the people, he might threaten even the most absolute tyrant (Robb 2005: 108).

Scott's comments convey the suggestion that the film critiques violent spectacle, yet this is quite understated. The film itself uses violence and spectacle as a distraction, to deflect the viewer away from the nonpartisan, reckless essence of the hero, as well as from the movie's lack of reflection on its own present-day usage of violence. The violence supports the 'simplified melodramatic structure' and helps guarantee that 'moral conditions are expressed as the actions of melodramatic types' (Gledhill 2003: 215). Rather, Maximus' physical actions express the movie's fundamental 'goodness' discourse.

Gladiators did not only risk their lives for entertainment – they also demonstrated *devotio,* the 'aristocratic virtue of sincere devotion to Rome' (Reid 2006: 210). It is then not surprising that Hollywood could imagine a Roman general validating his military honour and valour in the arena in the way that it is presented in *Gladiator.* Ancient reality is not reflected though, when Maximus declines the emperor's command to kill – such a disobedient gladiator would in reality probably have received a thumbs-down signal and been executed on the spot.

GLADIATORIAL TRAINING – FROM AFRICA TO THE COLOSSEUM

Figure 6.13: The amphitheatre in 'Zucchabar'.

Apart from one scene of Commodus training for gladiatorial combat in the forest in Germany (almost identical to the same scene in *Fall of the Roman Empire*), not much time is wasted on this. Maximus, after being bought as a slave for gladiatorial combat, trains in Proximo's gladiatorial school and fights his first gladiatorial bouts in an amphitheatre set up for the film at the foothills of Ait Benhaddou in Morocco, ostensibly in the fictional province of Zucchabar (Fig. 6.13).

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The setting for the gladiatorial combat in Rome is the Colosseum. This is mostly digitally recreated, the product of careful research and presentation, filling out the remaining 60% of the full-scale model of the Colosseum. The first tier of the arena was built by the crew to about 16 meters, as well as the underground section leading into the arena. In circumference the reconstructed arena was about one third of the circumference of the real Colosseum. But the remainder, including the *velarium* (the great array of awnings that shielded spectators and particularly the emperor from the Roman midday sun), was constructed with CGI (Nichols 2020).[47] The use of CGI technology enabled spectacular displays for effect in the film which in previous epics had proved extremely costly and involved casts of thousands and monumental sets.

GLADIATORIAL FIGHTING SCENES

Historians of gladiature have taken issue with the fighting scenes. A gladiator like Maximus, who had won a certain renown and adulation from the crowd, and was moreover an expensively trained commodity, would not be fighting tigers or be assailed by charioteers – in such cases criminals and prisoners would have been used. Moreover, as has been discussed above, gladiators did not inevitably fight to the death and Maximus, like his real-world peer, Flamma, would not have been expected to do so, and would have gone onto many more fights, or earned his freedom.

Gladiator has also continued with another popular fallacy (unsurprising in view of Scott's fascination with Gerôme's *Pollice verso* painting). While the scene where Commodus gives the thumbs-up is accurate to the extent that emperors did have the final say in allowing a gladiator to live or die, and he was indeed led by the crowd, the thumbs-up given by Commodus meant as a *missio* was in historical terms in fact the sign for 'kill him', as discussed above in Chapter 4.[48]

Figure 6.14: The 'Legionnaires of Scipio Africanus'.

It also appears that the Carthaginians, brought into the arena as the 'Barbarian Horde' are wearing more realistic-looking Roman armour that the 'Legionnaires of Scipio Africanus' who not only have non-Roman armour but also fight in a non-Roman style (illustrated in Figs 6.14 and 6.15).

[47] Despite Scott's rather excessive use of *Thraeces* and other helmeted gladiators and the scale and detail of the interior of the Colosseum, a key influence from the Gérôme painting, the *velarium*, holds the viewer's attention as it plays with the contrast of light and shade falling over the arena and the spectators.
[48] See p. 90 above.

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Figure 6.15: The 'Barbarian Horde'.

This may, however, be intentional irony, since because they act in a cohesive manner, the Barbarian Horde becomes the civilised group present in the arena.

Nevertheless, although with respect to the arena combat, *Gladiator* got the majority of the detail wrong, preferring visual and cinematic tradition to ancient evidence, the film does manage to capture the big picture with respect to the life of a gladiator and the opportunities of redemption.

A great portion of the movie focuses on arena scenes, including the preparation, fighting in the arena and the aftermath. There are five of these scenes in *Gladiator*, two in Zucchabar and three in Rome. As in many of the traditional cinema offerings (first seen in the *Sign of the Cross*), these arena fights show a distinct preference for group fighting, as presented in the first three combat scenes. The gladiators enter from the athletes' tunnel or chute, an easily recognisable camera shot for those familiar with televised sporting events that connects modern audiences with the baying mob of Rome.[49]

In the first combat scene, Maximus and his comrades are chained together (historically more suggestive of *damnati*), given weapons but no armour and are required to fight a group of professional fighters. The opposition group are strangely helmeted[50] and their weaponry is more suited to that of medieval jousting[51] than gladiatorial combat.

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[49] Cyrino (2004: 140) goes further and highlights the reciprocity that Gladiator has had on contemporary sports 'the musical theme from *Gladiator* was used before commercial breaks and before and after half-time' and that a 'comparison of any football audience with the spectators in the ancient arena suggests that our sporting events are so enormous and extravagant that they equal or exceed the grandeur of the Romans'.

[50] The suggestion has been proffered here that the helmets were intended to be reflective of the savage animal nature of gladiators rather than any adherence to accuracy.

[51] One wields a mace and another, a flail.

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The second fight scene is commented on by Dunkle (2008: 301) as being closer to martial arts movies than representative of the Roman arena. Maximus is pitted against five gladiators who have the patience and manners to each wait their turn before attacking him, thus facilitating his success in killing all of them.[52]

It is in Rome where the sensationalised combat scene gives Maximus entrée to the equalising power of spectacle. Reminiscent of the fight between Spartacus and Draba, Maximus defeats the famous gladiator 'Tigris of Gaul'. Despite Commodus giving the 'thumbs-down' sign, Maximus does not take his opponent's life. By this act the Roman citizens in the Colosseum are able to realise the basic power of sovereignty, to give or deny life. Their response of the chant 'Maximus the Merciful' indicates a shift in that sovereign power from Commodus to Maximus. Maximus has then become the 'focus of collective identification through this action, an ideal, a symbol to rival that of Rome' and the Colosseum is portrayed as the origin of this renewal (Burgoyne 2008: 94).

There is no evidence in the film of executions by a hammer-wielding executioner, also attested by the study of Kanz and Grossschmidt (2006) who found that on the remains eleven gladiators, ten of them had square like holes in the sides of their skulls giving credibility to the concept that very badly injured gladiators were despatched in this manner.[53]

Figure 6.16: Maximus' breastplate.

Maximus himself wears a bronze breastplate (Fig. 6.16) which is decorated with figures which each represent another successful fight (Sledge 2020), an imaginative detail but one which bears no antecedents in antiquity.[54]

Maximus is confronted by various other styles of gladiatorial attack in the film. In one instance chariots are sent out against the gladiator-on-foot - this type of context is historically attested, for example in Seneca (*Ep*. 29.7), who mentions a type of chariot-gladiator or *essedario*. On the fighting scenes in the Colosseum, Mitchell (2000) comments. 'It's like a handsomely designed weapon: you can't take your eyes off it, even though you may be repelled by its purpose'.

[52] This is escalated further in *Rome* when Pollo, in the arena, faces seven opponents.
[53] Literary sources confirm this practice, e.g Tertullian *Apol*. 6, 'We have seen Jove's brother, too, hauling out the corpses of gladiators, hammer in hand (*cum malleo*). These blows to the side of the head could have been a way to avoid eye contact at the time of their death. These mercy killings were most likely decided by the crowd or the emperor rather than the gladiators themselves.
[54] See discussion on p. 81-82 on gladiatorial armour.

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The gladiatorial items offered for the delectation of the crowd – from attacking tigers to chariots – are certainly more diverse than in *Spartacus*. Even while this is not all very authentic in the detail, its diversity is reflective of developments in ancient entertainment in the ancient sources which became more and more elaborate over time.

The fighting scenes use a melodrama-action film combination in addition to utilising exaggerated imagery of entertainment-combat which permits Maximus to show his identity - he becomes 'known' to the audience. Nevertheless, this 'identity is simplistic' as the excess in the spectacle diminishes the 'character to a one-dimensional, killing machine bent upon vengeance' (Tudor 2002).

Within the fight sequences techniques of shock and corporeal engulfment are filmed in such a way that the spectator experiences a relatively direct engagement with the brutality on display. Unfortunately, however, few scenes are cleanly and coherently staged in open space. The 'violence comes mainly from the editing', in the 'cheapening use of montage' (Denby 2000).[55]

Finally, it appears also that for some the overwhelming violence is not realistic enough, and that the final duel in *Gladiator* is disappointing, to quote film critic David Denby (2000) of *The New Yorker*:

Gladiator focuses on the more visceral elements of the gladiatorial spectacle, making it once more about the arena than about the revenge of a wronged man. Interestingly this puts the filmmakers in the same position with regard to the viewing public as the intra-diegetic Commodus: prioritising easy gratification and entertainment over more serious matters. As viewers we are asked to simultaneously condemn Commodus for this and conversely praise the filmmakers (Blanshard & Shahabudin 2011: 224).[56]

MASCULINITY AND THE GLADIATOR

In 'Maximus Melodramaticus. Masculinity, Masochism and White Male Paranoia in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema', Martin Fradley (2004: 235) refers to *Gladiator* as an expression of the 'crisis of masculinity', referring to the sharp decline of the White male supremacy in American and Western societies under attack by everything from civil rights activists, feminists or the 'postmodern celebration of difference'.[57] Fradley examines how Hollywood, the bastion of white masculinity, has

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[55] Montage is the technique used in form to edit and combine different sections of film so that a particular scene presents as one continuous whole.

[56] A cinematic strategy for dealing with the problem of screening violence is to turn the camera from the action on the floor to the action in the stands. The spectators then stand for society as a whole, violence and the desire to view it is shown as a symptom of more general societal decadence and perversion. However, such condemnation cannot be limited to the on-the-screen viewers; the cinema audience must also question their own viewing habits and what they might suggest about our own society and mores.

[57] The fact that the gladiators chosen by the *lanista* Proximo represent the outermost points of the Empire - Germania, Africa, Spain and Gaul (Bourgoyne 2008: 89) – speaks particularly to the latter.

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responded to these attacks, and to what extent *Gladiator* deals with male angst. The paranoid spectacle of white masculinity as the 'victim' of social change is countered by the heroically suffering white male in a sort of hypermasculine response (Fradley 2004: 238). Maximus himself displays the spectacle of the male body – a great deal of attention was paid to honing his physique, since the epic hero's body was meant to be metonymic for the idealised national body (Fradley 2004: 243-244).

COMRADESHIP AMONG THE GLADIATORS

In *Gladiator* comradeship and male bonding are usually projected to flatteringly portray Maximus' nuanced leadership capabilities. From the initial military scenes, camera close-ups of the soldiers' faces allow the audience to see their faith in their general's abilities through their expressions. Impressions of comradeship are created when Maximus stops occasionally speaks with individual soldiers.

In his second combat in Zucchabar, as Maximus is preparing to enter the provincial arena as a single combatant, he is greeted respectfully by other fighters who accord him the title 'Spaniard', and the huge crowds chant for him. In contrast to the interactions of the pre-battle scene, there are no close-ups of men greeting him and in contrast with his soldiers, he has no interaction with the other gladiators. This is a deliberately created 'difference' in visual composition and serves to emphasise his 'difference' from the other gladiators as opposed to his solidarity with his troops.

Within the gladiators' prison compound, a social order with the applicable codes of conduct among those 'about to die' exists. As Cyrino points out, the gladiators, like a 'modern urban gang', develop a brotherhood that has its own rules and sense of honour, and they 'organize a system of allegiances that exists outside the law' (2004: 136), again reflecting what Seneca says in *De Ira* quoted above.[58] The ancient evidence also supports this when looking at various funerary inscriptions such as *CIL* X 07297 / *ILS* 5113 (the dedication to the gladiator Flamma mentioned above), which are usually erected by fellow gladiators and comrades-in-arms.[59]

As the chosen leader of the band of gladiators, the film projects Maximus' role as a type of *paterfamilias*. Although Maximus no longer has his previously-held status and position he has kept his self-respect, and it is his fighting skills that give him deference by the other gladiators. Within this context, it seems unlikely that the leadership is that of the White man and its unquestioning acceptance by black gladiators is intended to mirror the black-white relationship of African-Americans within the American social order.

[58] See above p. 137.
[59] See above p. 89.

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The gladiators are shown eating together and making jokes. Maximus is a modern leader; a *primus inter pares* that stands in stark contrast to the dictatorial leadership of the Empire. His friendships, too, are entirely unproblematic, and his relationship with the Nubian Juba is a far cry from the tense relationship between Spartacus and Draba in *Spartacus*, reflecting the modern multicultural mixture of the American population (Pomeroy 2004: 122).

SPECTATORS

Figure 6.17: Spectators in Zuccabar.

Figure 6.18: Spectators in Rome.

There are essentially two groups of spectators, first in Zuccabar (Fig. 6.17) and then in Rome (Fig. 6.18). The former is vociferous, but it is the later on which the film focuses, and which at times reflect the modern movie-goers.[60]

Gladiator reflects a good deal of crowd psychology, particularly from the moment they follow Maximus' anonymous fight in the Colosseum as a slave. Although his physique and speed define Maximus' success it is clearly revealed that it is the Roman mob whose cheers govern life and death

[60] See page 65 above – discussion of Cyrino's description of the spectators as a mirror of us. However, Hardwick 2013 argues convincingly (albeit about drama theatre spectators) about the difficulty of comparing the reactions of ancient and modern audiences.

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for the losers. The response of the crowd is audibly reflected in the film, irrespective of the likelihood of everybody being able to see and hear the furthest battles or make out all the actions. Maximus taking off his helmet at the demand of the emperor to reveal his identity is the most noticeable example. Widespread gasps and name-cheering follow this disclosure, irrespective of the probability that so many amongst the Roman citizenry crowd would know who he was. This scene reveals the mob's alignment with Maximus as well as their desire to let him live:

> COMMODUS: Rise. Rise. [Maximus stands up, clenching an arrowhead in his right hand]
>
> Your fame is well deserved, Spaniard. I don't think there's ever been a gladiator to match you. As for this young man, he insists you are Hector reborn. Or was it Hercules? Why doesn't the hero reveal himself and tell us all your real name? You do have a name?
>
> MAXIMUS: My name is Gladiator. [*turns away from Commodus*]
>
> COMMODUS: How dare you show your back to me! Slave, you will remove your helmet and tell me your name.
>
> MAXIMUS: [*removes helmet and turns around to face Commodus*] My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius, commander of the Armies of the North, General of the Felix Legions and loyal servant to the TRUE emperor, Marcus Aurelius. Father to a murdered son, husband to a murdered wife. And I will have my vengeance, in this life or the next.
>
> [Commodus trembles in disbelief]
>
> QUINTUS: Arms!
>
> [Praetorians point their spears at the gladiators while the Colosseum crowd chants for them to live. Commodus shakes his head and motions the crowd for silence. He then raises his fist and reluctantly gives the thumbs-up signal]

- Spectators – gender, class and decadence

In other ancient epics it has been the images of women that has reinforced the image of spectator behaviour and has been used to distinguish between good and bad. In *Spartacus*, it is the two elegantly dressed Roman matrons who demand a private fight to the death and who are far more stimulated by the fight than the men in the scene, which is intended to project their class as perverted and decadent. In *Gladiator*, similar images are projected onto the male figure of Commodus (perhaps taking a cue from the ancient writers) thus effectively emasculating and feminising him. The film does overlap with the ancient sources in respect of Commodus' fascination with gladiatorial shows and his willingness to participate in the arena, so it is quite possible that the film follows some of the ancient sources, which do project Commodus as having all those double-edged traits of an ambiguous

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masculinity, coupled with the feminised characteristics of urban decay.[61] He is represented as the deviant version of masculine identity and an anxious projection of what man becomes when left to pursue his own regressive aspirations.

It is evident that Commodus uses the arena entertainment as a violent political distraction and accepts the adulation of people driven wild by the displays of violence. In terms of our ancient evidence, this is entirely authentic. Maximus, on the other hand, uses the arena as a medium for social change and is able to offer the people more than mere diverting entertainment - he is able to convey a dissenting political opinion and ultimately, at the expense of his life, he completes the orders from Marcus Aurelius. This is of course a modern invention of the film, as it is most certainly unlikely that any gladiators advocated for social change.

Female adulation of the gladiator also makes a brief appearance in *Gladiator*, when two women literally hang on Maximus as he walks through the streets of Rome after his first fight against Tigris, but they are not given any prominent role in the story.

SOCIAL COMMENTARY, SLAVERY AND VIOLENCE

Where *Spartacus* started with slavery and gladiatorial combat and then moved swiftly to its main focus, the slave war, our second film reverses this and starts with warfare, moving from there to slavery and gladiatorial combat. In the latter, the Roman Empire is no longer associated with sickness and death as in *Spartacus.* The Empire is now reflected as being one victorious step away from attaining 'peace throughout the Empire' with Maximus determined as the mediator of this process, through violence to peace.

The film which begins with the imperialist slaughter of indigenous tribal peoples, continues to exalt the imperial centre in a style worthy of Leni Riefenstahl, unapologetically allowing its viewers to revel in the atavistic spectacle of gladiatorial combat, and just for good measure, finding time along the way to gratuitously kill some tigers. This counts as one of *Gladiator*'s notable creative coups, its unabashed embrace (to the historically presentist viewer at least) of heresies against liberal ideology and the rush to be 'plitically correct'.

The violence in the film can be traced from the outer perimeter of the Empire through to the centre of Rome, the games of the arena. These games not only represent the physical violence but also act as celebration of the brutality of wars of conquest and the military action employed in the Romanisation of civilising of the Other. The games re-enact a variety of battles from Roman history,

[61] In contrast to Maximus, Commodus violates the sanctity and integrity of the family in every imaginable way including not having one of his own. He is shown as always alone and reflects an incestuous longing for Lucilla, his own sister. He brings no suggestion of family stability or love but only violence.

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casting Maximus and his fellow gladiators as the ‘barbarian horde’, the Others.[62] The staged battles of the arena mask the internal erosion of an Empire as Commodus attempts to ‘give the people a vision of Rome … and they’ll love me for it’.

Figure 6.19: The selection of slaves for potential gladiatorial performance.

The message communicated by *Gladiator* concerns a new form of imperialism characterised as ‘soft hegemony’ or ‘imperial humanitarianism’ which is articulated through Maximus’ association with the subaltern groups represented through the slaves and gladiators from Gaul, Africa, Germania and Spain, as well as the Germanic tribes defeated in the opening scenes. These specific discourses are well enveloped within the ‘overarching discourse of domination and imperialism as the technological and cultural superiority of the dominant culture’, once again reaffirmed through unprecedented visual spectacle (Burgoyne 2008: 85). Maximus is also known as ‘the Spaniard’, a name that brings to the forefront his mongrel roots, preferring a hero only who is prepared to ‘invoke such a discourse of enlightenment to legitimate the makings of a global empire and the subordination of local peoples to the *Pax Romana* via conquest, integration and war’ (Wilson 2002: 65). This labelling indicates that he stands apart from the politics of Rome while yet his status as a soldier connects him with the people and he functions as an upholder and protector of the laws of Rome.

It is clear to the audience that Maximus embodies these virtues. It is made clear that the continuation of imperial power is dependent on the provision of entertainment of the masses in the Colosseum and its associated slaughter; the spectacle and the political classes’ capacity to deliver this underpins the legitimacy of power. The ruling classes’ vast wealth is based on violence and the Empire’s wretchedness, a social compact which can be seen as being clearly presented on the sand of the arena upon which the subjugation of man and beast through violence is demonstrated as entertainment to preserve order. The fundamental occurrence of slavery and the violent makeup of Empire are

[62] Discussed and illustrated above on p. 169-170.

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transported exactly to its heart, the Colosseum of Rome. Dalby (2008: 45) indicates that the ‘contrast between the extraordinary architectural power of the arena’ and the likelihood of combat was a stratagem employed to accentuate the Empire’s power, one fully exploited by Scott in his telling of the stories of Maximus and Commodus. Power is concurrently declared and legitimated through spectacle, and above all through victories.

Whilst the theme of ‘spectacle as entertainment’ is a necessarily emphasised aspect of the story, the revenge plot makes use of the violent spectacle of the gladiator scenes and visualisation of the male body to centre Maximus’ humiliation and downfall from honoured general to slave. Fig. 6.19 visually represents the enormity of this downfall. Maximus’ enslavement epitomises the most humiliating thing that can happen to a free person, in this case to a white man, who no longer holds his previously powerful status. By showing a white protagonist enslaved in ancient Rome, viewers can witness slavery in a setting other than within the historical context of black enslavement, and highlights that slavery is not a matter of race. Unlike the majority of the other slaves in the film he was not born a slave. As a free and influential citizen, he participated in the dominant political/military system but has now had everything important to him taken away. Consequently, the viewers are enjoined to appreciate that somehow the condition of slavery is worse for him than it is for the others in the film. Although Djimon Hounsou who was also cast as the gladiator Juba, he reminds the viewer that history does not exclusively belong to ‘white folks’, the story-line echoes that from many of the ancient epic films, the white man frees the slaves, but particularly in this case, for his own purposes.

The same fate of slavery is suffered by Maximus in a similar fashion to that of many of the ‘barbarians’ he defeated on Rome’s behalf, his career has involved, in the majority, the burning of homesteads, and the creation of ‘widows and orphans’. Conventionally, conquered opponents were transported to Rome as slaves, thus Maximus and those he subjugated for the somewhat ironically named ‘light of Rome’ undergo the same ultimate destiny. The subject of their similar fates is not explored further in the film.

Gladiator candidly asks for reflection on the warrior-code ‘operational both in the extremities of imperial warfare subduing distant people in the opening scenes’, and with the wretchedness of slavery in later scenes, ‘in violent combat in the Colosseum at the heart of that empire’ (Dalby 2008: 446). Further it exposes the idea of violence being used to conquer the evils used by despotic leaders prepared to consider violence as a method of rule and as such it reflects the dominant world view through provision of a clear message: ‘dictators are bad and democracy and the rule of law are the best way to organise a society’ (Thomassen 2009: 145).

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CHAPTER 7: TELEVISED *ROME*

Rome is a dramatic series of two seasons (2005 and 2007) that depicts the fall of the Roman Republic with its ruthless civil wars and treacherous political machinations, clearly shown through the assassination of Julius Caesar and the subsequent rise of the imperial period brought about by Octavian's defeat of Mark Antony in his rise to becoming the single ruler of Rome. Undoubtedly having the longest running time of the three filmic representations of the ancient world studied here, this production depicts a proportionately small amount of violent entertainment – although there is plenty of other violence to be seen. It is probably due to the latter that this series, for the first time, makes it possible for us as viewers to get some insight into why the ancient Romans watched gladiatorial sport and other violent entertainment with enjoyment. *Rome*'s extended presentation of convincingly realistic context (2 seasons of ten episodes each) credibly displays the brutality of everyday life in ancient Rome: its harshness, cruelty and a familiarity with death and killing which gives a plausible context to people being able to watch violence and death in the arena without emotion.

Executing this explicit realism proved to be costly, however. There is some irony in the fact that *Rome*, after its two seasons, was so 'notoriously expensive' (Hastings 2016) that a third series was not considered, which is exactly how the high-cost 1963 production of *Cleopatra* heralded that generation-long hiatus of the ancient world epic, as mentioned earlier.[1]

In a popular combination of striking violence, graphic sex and political manoeuvring, the producers of *Rome* once again follow the methods of our ancient historians in enhancing historical accounts with a bit of imaginative decor, to 'tart it up' as Tatum (2008: 29) says. In this manner, Heller and his colleagues bring to life many individuals from across all social classes in the context of the mass-and-elite politics that governed Roman civilisation at that time, while at the same time taking into consideration how contemporary audiences, under modern influences such as the feminist movement, receive their representation of history.

[1] For coverage of the filmic tradition in this respect, see Solomon 1995/6: 113-140.

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ANCIENT ROME – THE BACKGROUND

A few key aspects of the history of this period are well known to most people in the Western world, since the stories of, for example, Julius Caesar's assassination, or the love story between Antony and Cleopatra, have come down to us through many forms of reception, from the ancient sources, to Shakespeare, and modern novels and films. Many of the details and minor role-players in our historical sources are, however, less well known.

- The 'Great Men'

Four men appeared on the scene in the middle of the 1st century BCE who were destined to dominate Roman politics. The first was Gnaeus Pompeius (or Pompey Magnus), whose family had recently attained access to the senate. The second was Marcus Licinius Crassus, who had made a fortune in recent proscriptions (Plut. *Crass*. 1.3) and was also the commander who ended the rebellion of Spartacus. The third was Gaius Iulius Caesar, from a patrician family, who was connected by birth and marriage with the families of previously prominent political figures such as Marius and Cinna (Plut. *Caes*. 1.1). Finally, there was Marcus Tullius Cicero, son of a rich *eques* of Arpinum, who had won an immediate reputation as an advocate in 80 BCE in a case which reflected discreditably on the contemporary administration of the dictator Sulla (*Pro Sex. Roscio Amerino*).

Figure 7.1: Bust of Julius Caesar

The 1st century BCE would prove to be a time when anyone in control of legions who encountered opposition from the senate, was able to carry out his reforms by a force of arms.

Julius Caesar, having served on the staff of the governors of Asia and Cilicia from 81 to 79, and as quaestor of Further Spain in 69/68 (Plut. *Caes*. 5.6), returned to Rome in 60 BCE, with the intention of standing for the consulship of 59. The senate, fearing this and Caesar's growing popularity as one of the *populares*, took an unusual decision. After their year of office in Rome the consuls usually proceeded to important provinces as proconsuls where they were, of course, in command of the provincial army.

The senate were concerned that if Caesar obtained such a provincial command, he would not only use it to win military glory for himself, but would even use his army to gain his own personal ends in politics. For this reason, the senate decided that the consuls of 59, after completion of their year in office, should remain in Italy as 'commissioners of forests and cattle drifts', a lower position, at best, of third-rate import.

But Caesar was not to be cowed and promptly contrived a coalition with Pompey, with a view to shared action against the senate. He then persuaded his former patron, Crassus to join the coalition (Plut. *Caes.* 13.3). The alliance of Caesar, Crassus and Pompey became known as the First

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Triumvirate.[2] The two leading members further confirmed their agreement with a marriage alliance (Plut. *Caes*. 5.7), when Pompey married Caesar's daughter, Julia.[3] Caesar obtained for himself the governorship of Cisalpine Gaul and Illyricum for a term of five years (later also including Transalpine Gaul), thus gaining control of an army. The pressure of the Germanic tribes on Gaul provided Caesar with an excellent reason for military action. Caesar swept all before him and put down any later rebellions of the Belgae and other Gallic tribes (Plut. *Caes*. 20.4).

Meanwhile in Rome, control over large sections of the urban mob was affected by means of free corn doles and reviving political clubs, the so-called *collegia*, which increasingly dominated the political scene of Rome, which drove Cicero into temporary exile (58/57) and Cato to become *quaestor pro praetore* to arrange the annexation of Cyprus.

In 54, Julia, the daughter of Caesar and Pompey's wife, died and Crassus was defeated and killed at Carrhae in 53. Caesar and Pompey were thus left without a buffer between them which brought their mutual rivalry into sharper focus. The *senatus consultum ultimum* (a declaration of public emergency by the senate) was passed by the senate on 7 January 49 and three days later Caesar and his nine legions (about 50 000 men) crossed the Rubicon, a small river separating the province of Cisalpine Gaul from Italy, and civil war began. The odds were against Caesar, since Pompey's power rested on the support of the senate which enjoyed great prestige, but Pompey only had two legions in Italy. Pompey opted to abandon Italy for Greece, but Caesar won a decisive victory over him at Pharsalus in 48. Pompey escaped but was murdered in Egypt soon afterwards. Having defeated all opposition, Caesar was elected to a third dictatorship[4] for a term of ten years in 46 BCE to reorganise the *res publica* and set about the task of reform.

Although many of Caesar's reforms were necessary and beneficial for Rome, his assumption of the office of dictator for life in February 44 effectively destroyed all hope of returning to the traditional form of government unless he could be removed.

A conspiracy involving at least sixty public figures led by C. Cassius Longinus and Q. Servilius Caepio Brutus (Marcus Brutus) was formed and the dictator was assassinated on the Ides of March in 44 BCE. When Caesar's will was read, it was revealed that he had adopted his grandnephew C.

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[2] Cicero had also been asked to join but preferred a policy of friendly aloofness.
[3] In *Rome* Julia is conflated with Octavia, who is the one who marries Pompey in the series.
[4] The dictatorship was a temporary, extraordinary magistracy employed in times of military or domestic crises (e.g. a civil commotion, a quarrel between the consuls, or a grave military disaster), when the safety of the state demanded the passing of absolute power into the control of a single office-bearer. It was granted to Caesar in varying forms and for varying periods: after his return from Ilerda in 49 he was appointed dictator for the first time, to hold elections, and promptly abdicated after eleven days; late October 48 after the victory at Pharsalus, for the second time he became dictator and held the office for an entire year; in April 46 he became dictator for ten years, and at some time between January 26th and February 15th 44 BCE, he was made dictator for life, *dictator perpetuus*.

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Octavius in the event that he had no son of his own at the time of his death, and made him his chief heir.

Figure 7.2: Bust of Marcus Antonius

In the meantime, Marcus Antonius, Caesar's consular colleague in 44 BCE, had assumed leadership of the Caesarian party, making unscrupulous use of Caesar's papers and claiming the command of Gallia Cisalpina and Gallia Comata for five years through an irregular law. However, Decimus Brutus, governor of Cisalpine Gaul, refused to surrender the province and war broke out. Decimus Brutus was supported by the consuls Hirtius and Pansa as well as Octavian, who had temporarily sided with the senate. Antony was defeated at Mutina (Modena) in April 43 and retreated to Gallia Narbonensis.

Meanwhile the senate had refused Octavian due recognition for his part in the war of Mutina, and his legionaries thereupon forced his appointment as consul (19 August 43). A compromise was then reached between M. Antonius, M. Aemilius Lepidus and C. Iulius Caesar Octavianus, Caesar's adopted son, and by the *lex Titia* of 27 November 43, they secured official acknowledgement of themselves as *tresviri rei publicae constituendae* for five years. The proscription of their personal and political enemies (Cicero was one of the most prominent victims) was followed by the defeat of Brutus and Cassius at Philippi in October 42, where Antony established his reputation as a general.

In October of 40 BCE, the triumvirs reached agreement: Antony would surrender the province of Gaul, marry Octavian's sister and control the eastern half of the empire, while Octavian was given the western half and Lepidus the African provinces. In 36 BCE Antony's expedition against the Parthians ended in disaster, and the elimination of Lepidus from the triumvirate[5] left Octavian master of the west. The rivalry between Antony and Octavian was accentuated when Octavia came to the east in 35. She brought with her fewer troops than Octavian had promised to Antony who refused to receive her, giving fresh cause for offence.[6] In 34 Antony annexed Armenia and celebrated a triumph in Alexandria. This, as well as a ceremony in which Cleopatra and her children were proclaimed monarchs of an expanded Egypt and other territories both within and without the boundaries of the Roman empire, gave rise to the suspicion that Antony was sacrificing Roman interests to Cleopatra. Octavian managed to gather greater support in Rome by a propaganda campaign aimed chiefly at Cleopatra, and more indirectly at Antony. Octavian succeeded in procuring the annulment of

[5] A dispute over Sicily caused Octavian to have Lepidus stripped of his offices (although he remained *pontifex maximus*) and sent into exile in 36 BCE.

[6] The triumvirate was not renewed after its expiry (end of 33 or beginning of 32) and while Antony continued to use the title of triumvir after 33, Octavian seems to have dropped it.

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Antony's remaining powers and a declaration of war against Cleopatra which meant, in effect, war against Antony. Cleopatra and Antony were decisively beaten in the battle of Actium (2 September 31), and after an abortive attempt to defend Egypt, Antony committed suicide, followed by Cleopatra's own suicide. Octavian entered Alexandria on the 1st of August 30 BCE.

Octavian, or Augustus as he later came to be known, only celebrated this victory in August 29 BCE and in a triple triumph, commemorating his victories over the Pannonians in 34, over Mark Antony in 31 and over Cleopatra in 30 BCE (Hickson 1991: 125), and, as he tells us in the *Res Gestae* 4, he refused all further triumphs even though the senate decreed these to him.

This period is comparatively quite well documented, and some sources provide us with primary accounts, from Caesar's *Gallic Wars* to the works of Cicero. Cicero was a prolific author, but of course many of his works are rhetorical and do not offer much in the way of untainted evidence. Accounts by later authors, such as Dio Cassius, Appian, Valerius Maximus, Plutarch, and Suetonius are also tendentious but can offer useful detail for this period.[7]

- Wives, sisters and daughters

The wives, daughters and sisters of the 'Great Men' discussed above do not receive much attention in the ancient sources and any historical references pertaining to Atia, the niece of Caesar, or Servilia, Caesar's mistress, give little information on their personalities or lives. They certainly do not come across as they do in *Rome,* sexually voracious, manipulative and ambitious. Tacitus in fact portrays Atia Balba Caesonia, mother to Octavian and Octavia, as an example of a devoted parent:

> It was in this spirit, we are told, that Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, directed their upbringing, Aurelia that of Caesar, Atia of Augustus: thus it was that these mothers trained their princely children (Tac. *Dial.* 28, transl. Hutton *et al*).

After the death of her first husband, Octavius, Atia was re-married to Lucius Marcius Philippus and she herself in fact died in 43 BCE, in the year after the assassination of Caesar. Legend had it that Apollo fathered Octavian, a popular trope in ancient literature.[8]

Servilia, the mother of Marcus Brutus, a genuinely historical figure was rumoured to have been Caesar's mistress (Suet. Jul. 50), and further rumours alleged that Brutus was Caesar's son (Plut. *Brut.* 5.1-2; Suet. Jul. 50). Servilia's multiple relations, both through birth and through her marriages, make her politically-involved character in the television series entirely plausible.[9]

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[7] See also Novokhatko 2021: 416–432 on the influence of Lucan's *Pharsalia* on the portrayal of Caesar and Pompey in *Rome*.

[8] See Suetonius *Aug*. 94.4 and Dio 45.1.2-3 for these accounts, a *topos* for the great men in history, such as for example Alexander the Great.

[9] The series repeatedly show us the wax portraits of her ancestors on Servilia's walls as a reminder of the illustrious history of the Junii, from the time when Lucius Junius Brutus freed Rome from the Etruscan kings and established the Republic in the 6th century BCE (Liv. 1.56-60).

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The character of Octavia, on the other hand, is by comparison quite fleshed out in the ancient sources but along the lines of sisterly and wifely ideals current at the time. She is depicted in Fig. 7.3 with the old fashioned *nodus* hairstyle, for example, which displayed her modesty and conservative values (Freisenbruch 2010: 38).

Figure 7.3: Octavia the Younger

No doubt this idealised identity was fostered by pro-Octavian sources calculated to rouse public indignation at Mark Antony's neglectful treatment of his Roman wife in favour of his Egyptian queen, Cleopatra, as Plutarch indicates:

> But at Rome Octavia was desirous of sailing to Antony, and Caesar gave her permission to do so, as the majority say, not as a favour to her, but in order that, in case she were neglected and treated with scorn, he might have plausible ground for war (*Ant.* 52.1).

Nevertheless, although Octavia is drawn as a model of wifely piety, there may be some truth in this since we know she was generous enough to adopt the three children of Mark Antony by Cleopatra and bring them up with her own (Plut. *Ant*. 87; Dio 51.15.5).

- Soldiers

In Caesar's account of the Gallic War, he mentions two centurions by name, Lucius Vorenus and Titus Pullo. The passage is quoted in its entirety since it gives some basis for the characterisation of these minor and otherwise faceless historical characters:

> In that legion there were two most gallant centurions (*fortissimi viri, centurions*), now not far from the first class of their rank, Titus Pullo and Lucius Vorenus. They had continual quarrels together which was to stand first, and every year they struggled in fierce rivalry for the chief posts. One of them, Pullo, when the fight was fiercest by the entrenchments, said: 'Why hesitate, Vorenus? Or what chance of proving your pluck do you wait for? This day shall decide our quarrels.' So saying, he stepped outside the entrenchments, and dashed upon the section of the enemy which seemed to be in closest array. Neither did Vorenus keep within the rampart, but in fear of what all men would think he followed hard. Then, at short range, Pullo sent his pike at the enemy, and pierced one man as he ran forward from the host. When he was struck senseless the enemy sought to cover him with their shields, and discharged their spears in a volley at the foeman, giving him no chance of retirement. Pullo's shield was penetrated, and a dart was lodged in his belt. This accident threw his scabbard out of place, and delayed his right hand as he tried to draw his sword, and while he was in difficulty the enemy surrounded him. His enemy, Vorenus, ran up to him and helped him in his distress. Upon him at once all the host turned, and left Pullo, supposing him to be slain by the dart. Vorenus plied his sword at close quarters, and by slaying one man drove off the rest a little; while he pressed on too eagerly he fell down headlong into a dip in the ground. He was surrounded in his turn, but Pullo brought assistance; and both, unhurt, though they had slain several men, retired with the utmost glory within the entrenchments. In the eagerness of their rivalry fortune so handled the two that, for all their mutual hostility, the one helped and saved the other, and it was

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> impossible to decide which should be considered the better man in valour (*BGall*. 5.4, transl. Edwards, my emphases).

These two men are therefore historical in the sense that they really existed, as *Rome's* producers are eager to specify, but the lives attributed to them in the series are entirely fictional, though plausibly reconstructed in historical as well as psychological terms.[10] The same technique was used to construct lives for them as was used in the case of Atia and Servilia above, where historical individuals are fleshed out with information that is known about similar historical figures from the period. There is for example a certain amount of psychological realism in the return of demobbed soldiers which has been applied to the return of these two soldiers from the battlefront to Roman civil life. As discussed in Chapter 1, their military background and recent experiences in the field of warfare could be interpreted as the reason for their somewhat brutish behaviour in returning to their families and civilian life.[11]

ROME – CREATION OF THE SERIES

Rome was created when the BBC, HBO and RAI agreed to collaborate on the project which commenced in October 2003 and was brought to life under the directorship of John Milius, William J. MacDonald and Bruno Heller. These three studios wanted to produce an impressive and aspiring new drama series that would recreate the historical epoch of the closing years of the Republic and show the rise of the Roman Empire (Press Office 27.10.03), and with a historical realism never attempted before.

The two previously discussed feature films presented gladiatorial spectacle as one of their main drawcards – any potential socio-political message was secondary (Morton 2014: 29), if not necessarily subtle. This is not handled in the same way in *Rome*. Firstly, *Rome* was able to capitalize on the structured benefit of series-form television drama. The producers could bring multiple stories and themes to life through the progression of 20 hour-long episodes, rather than trying to squash all its themes and subthemes in a running time of two hours. Secondly, as a result, the presentation of spectacle is more varied in *Rome*, as will be discussed in more detail below.

The series took seven years to develop and produce. The size and budget of the proposed production were unparalleled for HBO but considered unavoidable for such a vast and multifaceted story, and to meet the standard which they had publicly set for themselves:

> 'The BBC and US subscription channel HBO are to co-produce an epic and sweeping new drama series which chronicles the rise of the ancient Roman empire through the eyes

[10] Few men, and certainly none at that level, are mentioned by name in Caesar's work. The use of minor historical figures as a basis for a fictional account is not new, as Galinsky 2010: 405 points out.

[11] See p. 6-7 above.

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> of two foot-soldiers', it was announced today by Jana Bennett, BBC Director of Television, and Chris Albrecht, Chairman and CEO of HBO (Press Office 27.10.03).

Although the series *Rome* might appear simply as an expansive swords-and-shields drama with a big collaborative cast and with abundant scenes of violence and sex set within ancient Rome's changeover from Republic to Empire, this two-season series actually disrupts the tradition of generic and more laboured historical epics, which often bore traces of the influence of Shakespeare's Roman history plays. Lockett (2010: 102) goes so far as to state that one of *Rome*'s 'principal gambits, both narratively and thematically, is the interruption of expectations, subtle fractures in our received history of ancient Rome' (where received history is those impressions from stories and images associated with Rome which circumscribe what we have come to expect in the 'cultural imagery'). Film and television previously treated their presentations of Rome by focusing on an idealised Rome, constructed from luminously pure white marble and gold decorations, while thoughtful, toga-clad men ambled around an otherwise austerely unpopulated forum (Hurst 2016). *Rome* offers a counter-narrative to these more generic conventions of past historical epics. It disrupts our expectations in the way in which it subtly plays with demonstrations of 'unitary and monolithic power', and with 'historical agency', conventionally positioned within such persons as Caesar or Octavian, the 'Great Men' of history (Lockett 2010: 104). The counter-narrative is also present in the under-cutting of the idea of the notorious Roman masses as a huge, amorphous mob into more fragmentary groupings with differing interests, aims and methods of survival.[12] As Heller has intimated, "We try to balance what people expect from previous portrayals and a naturalistic approach … This series is much more about how the psychology of the characters affects history than simply following history as we know it (Kinnes 2005).

It therefore comes as no surprise that HBO's *Rome* gives its audience glimpses of a city never portrayed before. It shows Rome's dark, seedy, underbelly, in which gangs control the streets, and murders are carried out openly. Historical consultant and documentary producer for the BBC's History Division, Jonathan Stamp explained that one of the aims of the programmes was to show Rome 'in a way that we haven't seen it before, a sort of down and dirty, anti-HollyRome':[13]

> We wanted the show to be as historically authentic as we could possibly make it, . . . the world in which they are moving, the context in which they exist, was something that we could flesh out with historical detail (Jonathan Stamp cited in Allen 2008: 180).

[12] *Spartacus*, for example, promotes the mass as a unitary identity.

[13] Interview in 'HBO Rome – Behind the Scenes – 360 SET TOUR,' YouTube (28 March 2007). Or, as one reviewer puts it, 'the energy, squalor and splendor that is ancient Rome' (Bianco 2007).

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Figure 7.4:
Street Scenes from HBO *Rome*, where mass and elite live cheek by jowl.

This came to encompass everything from the casting of the actors, the way they looked, moved and behaved (Bessières 2012), to the settings and the scenes. Lane Fox (2005) has commented that 'the faces are excellently cast; the sets and clothing are outstanding and the lighting and look are stunning'. Jonathan Stamp indicates that this was the effect they were aiming for with the series:

> To make these episodes historically authentic, [this] meant researching and incorporating every kind of detail we could about the way our characters behaved, the way they interacted, how they dressed and gestured, the kind of streets they walked down, the way they conducted their private and public lives. We were not, however, making a documentary. We were striving for authenticity because it enriches the experience of the drama for the viewer (Stamp cited in Kinnes 2005).

The aim was therefore not 'spectacle' as much as 'verisimilitude', that feeling of gritty realism accomplished through what McClean (2007: 117) calls imperceptible or 'seamless' effects to build 'visual and narrative authenticity' instead of exact historical precision.[14] Podeswa, director of Episode 9 in Season One, discusses the settings or background to the action and that 'historicity makes it so much richer and more textured'. From its very opening credits the series draws the audience into the minutiae of the everyday lives of people, both elite and sub-elite, who teem and bustle within the city. In the background of the title sequences of each episode, overarching themes of blood, violence, sex and mortality are graphically shown through the animated graffiti on the street walls, as people move about between the walls. Hence the series is named for the collective, *Rome*.

The series reflects realistically based behaviour and the general historically accurate atmosphere of the streets while making no attempt to be politically correct – quite the opposite, in fact, since it is clear that the identifiable human emotions we see are set in a world entirely foreign to our modern Western world. The overall tone of the series, gleaned from a multitude of off-hand moments, is one of determined earthiness and pragmatism, a refusal to use euphemism and mystification in favour of

[14] See also Elliott 2014b: 65-77 on the special effects used to recreate the setting of ancient Rome.

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blunt and undisguised directness. Against this warts-and-all backdrop the politics of Rome unfolds, reflecting how decisions that affect thousands are the result of the whims of a few rich men and women, whose political participation is predominantly for their own personal gain and certainly is not motivated by concern for the common man. This is like the historical situation which was described earlier in Chapter 4, showing how politics, particularly the relationship between the elite and the populace, influenced gladiatorial and other public entertainment.[15]

The script is particularly successful in providing insight into various strata of Roman society, with the focus drifting between the lives of tradesmen, shopkeepers, workers, peasants, accountants, criminals, slaves and the men and women of the political elite. It is in this fluctuation between the high and the low, the 'rubbing together of two worlds' while avoiding the simplistic and moralistic associations attributed to these worlds in *Spartacus* (Cyrino 2008:6) that the series is most successful. It is a cunning combination of truth and fantasy but the writers have been quite circumspect in the exercise of their imaginations. They have created several pivotal characters about which very little is known, for example, so that there can be little contradiction from critics.

Rome was filmed on massive outdoor sets in a variety of locations around the Italian countryside as well as on six sound stages at the Cinecitta Studios (Cyrino 2008: 2). Much use was made of the cypress trees in the area, still very common around Rome and the Italian countryside (Dury 1972: 85). Even the starlings – used to convey the haunting face of death in the dream experienced by Caesar's wife, Calpurnia – still swarm around the city skies of Rome at dusk during the cooler months.

Where city life itself was concerned, chief writer and executive producer Bruno Heller stressed that this was a 'third world Rome', and that their tactic was to discard any existing assumptions on life in ancient Rome and how it might have looked, and to ask what it had actually been like. This was a natural result of the series' decision to focus not just on the Roman elite, but also on the lower classes. Episodes of striking violence or graphic sexuality are set in graphically realistic physical surroundings and therefore stand out all the more convincingly because of their accuracy and degree of realism, even to scholars of the ancient world. From the start of *Rome*, the ordinary, lower-class people living in the back streets of the city are given importance, constantly contrasted with the luxurious villas which form the dwellings of the elite. The *Subura* and the narrow streets where Vorenus is shown to live, for example, were gloomy, crowded, dirty and poverty-stricken (Holleran 2011: 260), where men in dirty tunics rubbed shoulders with scurrying slaves while the litters of the elite, who are hidden from the public by thin curtains, were born in between (Fig. 7.4 above).

[15] Caesar himself, both historically and in the series, had certainly mastered the concept of mob politics as is shown by his popularity among the masses, which forced the Senate to declare him dictator for life and accept his deification after his death. In the series, his speech to his soldiers prior to the crossing of the Rubicon is also an excellent example of populism.

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The series was instantly successful and considered 'unflinching in its portrayal of sex, violence, and sexual violence' and that this was the reason why it was extremely popular (Savov 2015). Unsurprisingly, there were those who hated it for the same reasons, but viewers did not remain indifferent.

The Neilsen ratings indicate that the pilot episode of *Rome* drew 8.9 million viewers over 11 broadcasts, averaging an episode audience of two to three million. Like the two preceding filmic productions, Rome hauled in a number of accolades. 2006 saw its nomination for no less than eight Emmy awards and after its first season it had garnered four statuettes (Cyrino 2008b: 140), as well as a number of awards for its visual effects and production design.[16] One of *Slant* magazine's film critics awarded *Rome* four stars and encouraged *I, Claudius* viewers, 'history buffs (or those wanting to learn), and those just interested in violence and nudity to tune in'. It is therefore a series which has managed to capture the interest of both casual viewers and scholars.

PLOT, PLAY & HISTORICAL CROSS-POLLINATION

- Characters and storyline

The fact that *Rome* is a series rather than a film gave the producers an opportunity to make use of multiple interwoven narratives and the 'wide narrative scope of the story arcs' (Elliott 2013: 578; Creeber 2005: 7). It is this enlarged space which permits the character development and interconnecting storylines and allows them to drive the narrative forward, enhancing the semblance of authenticity through human interaction. The contrast of the elite story line on the one hand, against that of the common people on the other, and the interaction of these two strands, is intrinsic to the narrative structure of the series (Pomeroy 2017: 253). The historical narrative is presented throughout the more overriding, principal narrative of Titus Pullo and Lucius Vorenus, two of Caesar's soldiers, which, as Cyrino (2008a: 4) points out, succeeds in making the historical story more accessible to viewers rather than if they had focused solely on Caesar and other prominent historical figures. It is important to understand the emphasis on giving this pair of historically minor characters a role in the eventual downfall of Caesar. The traditional sources drawn upon for knowledge of Roman history, such as the histories of Appian or Suetonius, largely exclude the lives of the plebs, what we might call history 'from below'. The script for *Rome* reinserts the 'plebs' into Roman history, giving Titus and Lucius the chance to be more than simply unrecorded players in the politics of the Roman elite. Nevertheless, one should not make the mistake of underestimating the social divisions which existed between the classes. As Atia says to her daughter, Octavia, at one point in Season Two:

[16] A full list of nominations and awards won is provided on the Wikipedia page for the series, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome_(TV_series).

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> ATIA: Listen, Octavia, I don't mind you bringing home a tradesman's daughter, but let's just stop there, shall we? No actors, no gladiators, all that sort of thing, hey?[17]

The historical period chosen for the series, an unsettled era of Roman history in its adjustment from Republic to Empire, fashioned a 'golden age of heroes' (Elliott 2013: 576) in the literary tradition, and also its 'villains'. On the prominent central players of the series, such as Caesar, Antony, Brutus, Pompey and Cicero, members of the wealthy elite, we can garner substantial macro-historical information from literary and archaeological sources, but there are hardly any micro-historical reconstructions of the existence or behaviour of society's lower strata, people such as entertainers and gladiators and their families.[18] There is little specific information on which to base characters who were peripheral to the historical narrative, from the limited information surrounding the female characters to the non-existent for the lower-class characters. *Rome,* therefore, while admittedly the most historical of the three productions being reviewed here, has to incorporate creative imagination, use evidence transferal and draw deductions from generic evidence to flesh out the lives of these non-elite characters. Hence the narratives of the women, of the lower orders and slaves operate as a 'shadow-history' within the series to that of Great Men and their 'behind-the-scenes intrigues and machinations' prompt and form visible history in unpredictable ways (Toner 2019: 156).

- The narrative of the series

At the beginning of the series Pullo and Vorenus are on campaign in Caesar's army in Gaul (although in the series Pullo is a legionary and Vorenus a centurion).[19] On their return to Rome, just as many war veterans throughout history, they find that reintegrating into civilian life after eight years in the legion is difficult.

Lucius is a man with a strong sense of honour and an implacable black-and-white view of life who has not seen his wife and family in eight years. Titus, on the other hand, is a 'wine-drinking, brothel-loving legionary who often acts without thinking' (Weintraub 2005). In Season One the audience follows the two soldiers while Caesar is fighting Pompey and Brutus into Season Two which shows Octavian fighting Mark Antony for control of Rome. The second plotline of the well-known historical role-players in the fall of the Republic follows a more conventional historical framework, similar to the series *I, Claudius*, and begins in 52 BCE with Caesar's defeat of the Gallic leader Vercingetorix and concludes with his assassination in 44 BCE at the end of Season One. Yet, its most 'innovative idea is to provide a double viewpoint on this representation of the end of the Republic' (Roblin 2015: 144). Of course, we know that Pullo did not bring down the Republic, but the idea that Rome was unstable and that Pompey and Caesar were trying to overcome each other by playing a very dangerous

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[17] Here one is reminded of ancient authors' rhetorical associations of gladiators and gangsters, p.99 n. 98 above.
[18] See discussion on this in Chapter 1.
[19] According to Bruno Heller, this was done to show the tension of rank.

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game is true to the ancient source material. Senate rhetoric of the time is also plausibly recreated: Cato had been denouncing Caesar for some time and warning the senate to prepare and take action against him; Cicero's fears and withdrawals to his country villa, his attempts to compromise to protect the Republic from a civil conflict, and that he was followed as a moderate leader by some of the senators, are also attested in our ancient source material.

The series divides its cast between 'patricians' and 'plebeians' to represent the division between the rich elite and the poor rabble. Such simple labels were however rather out of date by the 1st century BCE, and not all the member of the elite were, in fact, patricians. Caesar came from a patrician family, but Antony came from the plebeian Antonia *gens*, and Pompey was from an equestrian family, as was Cicero. Both Pompey and Cicero distinguished themselves by their own abilities, Pompey on the battlefield and Cicero as an orator.

The first season ends with the assassination of Caesar, which in HBO's *Rome* closely follows the description in Suetonius' account:

> As [Caesar] took his seat [in the Curia], the conspirators gathered about him as if to pay their respects, and straightway Tillius Cimber, who had assumed the lead, came nearer as though to ask something; and when Caesar with a gesture put him off to another time, Cimber caught his toga by both shoulders; then as Caesar cried, "Why, this is violence!" one of the Cascas stabbed him from one side just below the throat. Caesar caught Casca's arm and ran it through with his stylus, but as he tried to leap to his feet, he was stopped by another wound… And in this wise he was stabbed with three and twenty wounds, uttering not a word, but merely a groan at the first stroke, though some have written that when Marcus Brutus rushed at him, he said in Greek, 'You too, my child? (*Iul.* 82, transl. Rolfe).

Season Two focuses on history that is in the main less well known to the general public, the conflict between Octavian and Mark Antony. This season also ends in death, this time the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra after they are defeated by Octavian at Actium, whereupon:

> Octavian laid siege to Alexandria, where Antony had taken refuge with Cleopatra, and soon took the city. Although Antony tried to make terms at the eleventh hour, Augustus forced him to commit suicide, and viewed his corpse. He greatly desired to save Cleopatra alive for his triumph, and even had Psylli brought to her, to suck the poison from her wound, since it was thought that she died from the bite of an asp (Suet. *Aug*. 17).

- Pagan religion

The visual representation of Roman paganism is the first and most fundamental way in which *Rome* continues on from *Gladiator* and, using the advantages of the longer form of television drama, extends this much further (Morton 2014: 32).

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Whereas in *Gladiator* the theme is carried by Maximus' observance of ancestor worship, and his discussions with Juba about the gods and the afterlife,[20] in *Rome* this theme is omnipresent, from Bacchic rituals to daily muttered incantations at altars (Fig. 7.5), giving a good spectrum of Roman religion but also making the Romans Other to us as viewers from a Western, Christian perspective.

Figure 7.5: Niobe in front of
a household shrine.

As we know from our ancient source material, the Romans practised their religious beliefs devoutly and involved the divine in every aspect of their lives (Gordon 2008: 72-74).

The very first episode sets the tone: Atia of the Julii enters a temple where a bull is sacrificially slaughtered above her, drenching her in its blood. This taurobolium, as it is known, is intended to gain the gods' favour for her son Octavian on his mission to Gaul.[21]

There are many less elaborate examples of such religious practices throughout the series, such as where, after Caesar's murder, we are shown the practice of a lactating woman placing her breast to the deceased's mouth and squeezing some milk to his lips at the funeral rites, demonstrating the veneration of fertility and Nature.

The fifth episode devotes a lengthy and powerful scene to Caesar's spurned mistress, Servilia of the Junii, where she enters another temple and solemnly intones a curse while etching marks into sheets of copper. She then has the sheets coiled up and gets a slave to deposit them into the facades of Caesar and Atia's houses, an act which is supposed to lay a destructive curse on them. Such *defixiones* are well known from the ancient world, with implications extending into different spheres of imagination, such as costs to family, a range of punishers and punishments, and temporal urgency (Gager 1999: 175-199). These curses were personal and unequivocal, portending explicit abuse on their subjects. The trepidation for ancient recipients must have been high.

The relationship between Atia and Servilia is vicious and both are out to try to destroy the other. Their vendetta lasts the entire two seasons, from when Atia reveals Julius Caesar's affair with Servilia. In retaliation, Servilia tries to poison Atia, but one of Atia's slaves dies of the poison instead and all is revealed, Atia arranges for men to attack Servilia's litter in the street and strip and beat her. This all

[20] In *Gladiato*r there are some un-pagan elements: Commodus' vow to 'sacrifice a hundred bulls' at his father's triumph is immediately turned down as wasteful, while Maximus does not cremate his wife and child on a funeral pyre but buries them.
[21] The most dramatic ancient description of this ritual is by an anti-Pagan writer Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 10.

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comes to a climax in Episode 7 (Season 2, 'Death Mask'), with Servilia's decision to commit suicide, using it to summon the powers of the underworld to release the most 'phenomenal curse' on Atia:

> SERVILIA: Gods below. I am Servilia of the most ancient and sacred Junii on whose bones the ancient hills of Rome are built. I summon you to listen. Curse this woman. Send her bitterness and despair for all her life. Let her taste nothing but ashes and iron. Gods of the underworld, all that I have left I give to you in sacrifice if you would make it so.

At this point Servilia plunges the sword into herself. After kissing her, her slave woman removes the sword then drives it into her own body, leaving the two women dying and bleeding on the cobblestone street, running past Atia's house. The producer of that episode explains:

> Curses in Roman culture were the most significant things you could produce and manifest…[Servilia] is drawing from the lowest, darkest sources and firing them like a machine gun…This is a very significant moment in the character's arch (John Maybury, Audio Commentary, Season Two, 'Death Mask').

In a sense, these scenes, which contain less action than battles or gladiatorial combat, convey intense dialogue, but perpetuate the accepted generalisation that it is the men that are physical, whereas it is the women who verbalise their violence.

- Women in history

Servilia's and particularly Atia's characters in *Rome* are improvisations based on women who had been seen by contemporaries as transgressing against the patriarchal norm, women such as Fulvia (also at one point married to Mark Antony) or the notorious Clodia.[22] As the men compete for the highest positions of Rome, it is the women like Atia and Servilia discussed above who contest for power from within their domesticated orbits, often by machinations to place their menfolk in advantageous positions from which they themselves indirectly benefit. Scholarship has established that women in the ancient world regularly achieved their ambition through their sons and menfolk.[23] The image of Atia created by Nicolaus of Damascus is directly taken up in *Rome*:

> She said he must show himself a man now and consider what he ought to do and put his plans in action, according to fortune and opportunity … His mother Atia, when she saw the glory of fortune and the extent of the Empire devolving upon her own son, rejoiced … (Nic. Dam.16, 18).

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[22] The daughter of Appius Claudius Pulcher, Clodia, allegedly had many sexual liaisons, and is referred to numerous times by Cicero in his *Pro Caelio*. Cicero here also alleges (36) that Publius Clodius shared a bed with his older sisters, implying incest, and this theme is also taken up in *Rome* when siblings Octavia and Octavian have sexual relations. On Fulvia as a model for Atia and Servilia, see Cyrino 2008b: 139.

[23] For example, in the Hellenistic world, Van Bremen 1996, and in Roman North Africa, De Marre 2003: 323-325. In *Rome*, Atia invests her interests and ambitions in her son, Octavian, just as Servilia invests hers in Brutus.

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As Monica Cyrino observes in her article on Atia, ‘Atia’s purpose is more than merely maternal: it is dynastic’ (2008b: 132).

The series creator Bruno Heller says that his objective was to ‘put women back in history’, drawing attention to the fact that logically ancient Roman women would have had to have been influential, in part because frequently the men were away at war for long periods.[24] In previous filmic productions women are the supporting cast in epics portraying the actions of ‘Great Men’, often productions which themselves originated in strongly patriarchal periods in which a woman’s place was ‘in the home’.[25] But women from all classes of society contribute substantially to *Rome’s* narrative, ranging from Cleopatra as a queen, the ‘patricians’ Atia and Servilia, or the ‘plebeian’ Niobe, to personal slaves, such as Servilia’s devoted slave-woman, among many others (Roblin 2015: 154). And *Rome* succeeds in this in spite of its predominantly ‘male cast and testosterone-heavy subject matter’ (Monfette & Vejvoda 2009). *Rome* makes abundantly plain the level of sway women could exert over those Roman men who oversaw society and politics. The stereotypical picture of the elite Roman woman as one of a devious, immoral, self-centred, with hegemonic propensities was part of ancient literary narratives. Nevertheless, in spite of these stereotypes, it is not implausible that people who did not have direct access to power were likely to operate on another register, and that these manipulative methods were employed not only by women.[26]

Within the *Rome* series the characters of Atia, Servilia, and Octavia can also be said to contribute to the established mode of using the Roman upper-class woman to exemplify Roman society’s corruption (Ragalie 2007). The first episode of *Rome*, for example, features Atia trading vigorous sex with a lower-class stranger in return for a particularly nice horse. Then there is the scene of consensual incest in which Octavia seduces her barely pubescent brother, Gaius Octavian.[27] This is its turn fits in with the portrayals of ancient Rome in American mass media over the past century which has repeatedly depicted Rome as a centre of exotic fornication and immoral sexual practices, often involving sexually aggressive women. In reality, ancient Roman attitudes towards incest were

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[24] An excellent example of this can be found in Susan Treggiari’s 2019 book, *Servilia and her Family*, on a woman connected to a number of influential political families and her consequent influence.

[25] This trope has been reflected as happening throughout history and ranges from *Alexander* in which his mother was reduced to a fluff piece to *Churchill* in which his wife was shown as a secondary character

[26] It appears that the scheming woman has had a place in literature and popular culture from the beginning of the written word across any number of cultures, from Eve to Pandora. In Roman literature the ‘scheming, sexually voracious, and uncontrollable woman is often used as a negative paradigm’, Foka 2015a: 198. Ironically it is really more about their menfolk, who are seen as ‘not in control’ or not manly enough. Resultantly, the concept that the behaviour of women can be utilised to characterize the erosion and decline of the Roman world became a well-known trope in both ancient and contemporary depictions, Foka 2015a: 199. Joshel 2001: 123 sees examples of such influence in Robert Graves’ *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God*, 1934. Graves’ novels portray Rome as a ‘stagnant pool sexually and politically’ while the ‘hegemonic shrewd behaviour and lack of chastity’ of the women of the imperial house (Messalina, Agrippina, Livilla, and Julia) are represented as symptomatic of a larger corruption. The subsequent television series *I, Claudius* puts ‘voracious, hegemonic, and corrupt women at the forefront of its plot’.

[27] See note 23 in this Chapter.

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relatively similar to common modern mores. The surviving laws on marriage, although they date from the later Roman Empire, are explicit in their ban on close-kin unions. Marrying a close relative was both sacrilegious and illegal in Rome.

The series therefore tries and succeeds through differing plot points to bring the camera to bear on the historically marginalised wives and mothers of Rome, in contrast to the usual ploy of focusing on the male protagonist, such as Spartacus and Maximus. This is brought even more to the fore when it is intimated that it is through vengeance sought by Servilia on Atia and Caesar that her son, Brutus, turns against Caesar and aids in his assassination. This makes her a pivotal figure in history and as such rewrites the highly competitive arena of male Roman politics through a renewed appreciation of the importance of the role women could potentially have played in history (Augoustakis 2008: 129).

THE FURTHER TRADITION

Since the end of the second season of HBO's *Rome* there have been a few cinematic productions over the past 13 years.[28] Since *Rome*'s Season One proved to be more popular than Season Two, it is not unexpected that most subsequent attempts focus on the life and career of Julius Caesar, rather than on that of Octavian/Augustus or other key figures from Roman history. In 2006 the BBC produced a docudrama *Ancient Rome: the Rise and Fall of an Empire* about Caesar's Gallic and Civil Wars, and Nero's reign, and in 2018 Netflix produced another docudrama about Julius Caesar entitled *Roman Empire: Reign of Blood*. *Roman Empire* premiered on Netflix in November 2016, with its first season based on the reign of Commodus, the second on Julius Caesar and the third season on Caligula.[29] In step with the latest fashion for fantasy epic (witness the popularity of *Game of Thrones* and *Outlander*, for example, as mixtures of historical detail in an imagined world), there has also been a blend of fantasy, fiction and history in the 2018 *Britannia*, on the Roman conquest of Britain. None of these, however, have achieved that sense of realism and authenticity projected by *Rome* or garnered as much interest in the media.

[28] Also, no doubt, because of the enormous costs involved in creating this degree of authenticity.
[29] *Roman Empire* does more than form a reception of the 2006 *Ancient Rome: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, it actually reuses footage from the former.

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VIOLENCE AND VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT IN THE SERIES

The backdrop to the opening titles, which is the same for each episode, offers a key to the entire series. On the walls, which are the background of the humdrum hustle and bustle of ordinary people in Rome, we see graffiti or line drawings in the style of the day, but animated.

Figure 7.6: From the opening credits, graffito of gladiator fighting.

Figure 7.7: Graffito of soldiers.

Fig. 7.6 depicts a character (probably in gladiatorial combat to judge from the helmet) with sword and shield, attacking the figures on the right, while Fig. 7.7 is more likely to represent soldiers (since the two appear to be part of a formation) with their victims on the ground –military warfare and gladiatorial combat are closely linked in the series as well. In another scene there is a cartoon head, from which blood bursts across the screen, and there is plenty of blood washing over the screen in the rest of the sequence.[30] This signals that much of the series will be devoted to fighting and bloodshed; its two soldier characters, Pullo and Vorenus, are almost permanently sporting visible scars to show for it.

The graffiti themselves, as Haynes (2008: 51) points out, portray the exotic element of the series, but at the same time would have been drawn and scribbled by the ordinary people who are shown going about their daily business between the city's walls. Haynes (2008: 51-52) also maintains that these are arguably the most historical aspect of the entire city, but this is no doubt because they are unnuanced, simplistic sketches of aspects of ancient Roman entertainment and political life.

[30] For a detailed analysis of the opening titles of *Rome*, see the chapter by Haynes in *Rome, Season One. History Makes Television*, 20089.

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The very first scene in the first episode of the series likewise shows a young child making a charcoal drawing of two gladiators, or possibly two soldiers (Fig. 7.8). to dispel any doubts about what the series is going to be chiefly concerned with, which is power, and power in ancient Rome will rely heavily – but not exclusively - on physical violence.

Figure 7.8: Boy drawing two gladiators on a stone.

Apart from war itself, the other instances of violence are too numerous to count: but a cursory sampling includes moments where, in punishment for an infraction of civic order, a man is waylaid in a public latrine, hoisted up, and his head shoved down the toilet while he is viciously sodomised. Elsewhere, negotiations with an eastern tribal king stall when the latter wishes only to talk about 'Roman women being fucked by baboons'. Roman matrons threaten their servants in terms such as 'bring him back safely or I'll use your children's eyes for beads'. This habit of violence in action and speech is paired with libidinal drives which are satisfied in a blunt, matter-of-fact manner, much as one would enjoy satisfying one's appetite with a good meal; this attitude to sexuality is not unplausible in a pre-Christian society.[31]

WARFARE

The main focus of the two seasons of *Rome* is on the wars that were fought in the late Republic, and since our protagonists, both elite and lower class, are all directly or indirectly involved, the omnipresence of war comes as no surprise. There is some bloody fighting in the film, certainly far more veristic than in *Spartacus* or *Gladiator* (Brice 2008: 61-62), and far more of it, but also the drudgery of a campaign: the marches, the setting up camp, the direct aftermath of war (Brice 2008: 71-77) .

The impact of war on the populace of Rome is also brought out in the film, and the difficulties of the lives of the demobbed soldiers returning to civil life. Historically veterans made up a large part of Roman and Romanised societies, and even if many former soldiers did not necessarily return to Rome itself, those that did must logically have had an impact. Brice's assessment of this aspect in the series is that it has been successfully done (2015: 27-33) and demonstrates the difficulties very plausibly, including the fact that many of these men, trained to fight, joined gangs or were often for hire for

[31] On attitudes to sex and sexuality in the Roman world, see Kiefer 2000: 309-363 but also Edwards 2002 on the ancient sources in this regard.

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specific violent tasks. The violence in *Rome* permeates the entire series, but much of it is actually committed by Vorenus and Pullo as veterans.[32] The returning Roman veteran had to find a way of making a living if he was not already a farmer, and since the reforms of Marius, there were more landless men than had been the case in earlier years (Potter 2011a: 524). The veteran problem was an issue that emerged regularly and, at the time represented in the series, was faced by both Caesar and Pompey (Broadhead 2011: 157-162).

What is also brought out in the series is the loyalty of such men to their former commanders (Brice 2015:69) or to their legion, most prominent in incidents like Pullo's cry of 'the Thirteenth' in the arena, and Vorenus' refusal to betray Antony to Octavian even at the end. This is very plausible in historical terms, as since the army reforms of Marius soldiers looked to their generals for rewards than to the senate (Gilliver 2011: 185).

The series parallels the violence and criminality in the lower orders with the same elements among the elite. Where in a visually squalid and dirty 'downtown Rome', violence and murder are carried out in plain sight and the slums are controlled by gangs (Nippel 1995: 37-38; 54; Hurst 2016),[33] within the luxurious villas of the elite, we see for example individuals like Antony or Octavian and their illegal abuse of power (Pomeroy 2015: 46-47) which they try to hide behind a clean toga. As Heller says on the Bonus DVD, 'as high flown as the rhetoric was, the senators were also willing to pull out knives and kill each other when the need arose like common thugs'. The bloody assassination of Caesar in the senate is committed by his stately fellow senators in immaculate togas, while rapes and floggings also happen in the opulently decorated villas, which morph into 'ugly torture chambers' (Roblin 2016: 149). In another parallel, Caesar dies in the Curia and the Republic collapses into chaos, while Vorenus' life also disintegrates after his disillusionment with and consequent death of his wife, and he weeps over her body at the exact same moment as Caesar's bloodied corpse lies on the floor of the senate house. Through these incidents the series purposely attempts to reflect dual aspects of action and context, thus implying that the educated, refined 'Patricians' are in actual fact as ruthlessly violent as the plebeians they look down on.[34]

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[32] This violence committed by Roman veterans echoes another trend in film: American films from 1965, such as *Born Losers* (1967), *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976), *First Blood* (1982), and *Stop Loss* (2008), veterans are portrayed as troubled and prone to anti-social and violent acts.

[33] De Groot suggests that authenticity was achieved by 'emphasis[ing] the dirt, squalor, and violence in the city, particularly shown in the explicit language, sex and violence', 2009: 199. Vorenus does try to create greater order and legal process in the *collegium*, but the odds are clearly against him.

[34] This is reminiscent of similar themes used in *I, Claudius*, where the impression is given that the marbled palace is equally if not more perilous than the battlefield or the slums could be.

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CRITIQUE OF VIOLENCE AND EXCESS

When it comes to violence in relation to class or even ethnicity, *Rome* does not use easy labels or make moral judgements in the manner of *Spartacus* or *Gladiator* (Cyrino 2008b: 6-7). Simultaneously, it provokes a much stronger sense of Otherness with ourselves as viewers in modern Western cultures.

The impression that Roman society overindulged to excess - sex, wine, food, parties, orgies and bloodlust is particularly evident in the *Rome* series. This was already the stereotype conveyed in *Spartacus*, whereas in *Gladiator* it was more the eccentricities of the emperor that were the focus of excess. It is probably that there was indulgence and excess in these areas, since great power and wealth seldom have no effect on human behaviour. We have a fair amount of material evidence that does attest to a more luxurious lifestyle (Holleran 2012: 232-257), but our literary sources from the period, which also support this impression, are often of little value since they were inclined (for their own reasons) to display aspects of social and moral decline, denouncing male rivals for effeminacy or their opponent's female family members promiscuity as examples of decaying standards, as mentioned above.[35]

However, any excesses attributed to the Romans pale against what the episodes display for the ancient Egyptians when Mark Antony, left in control of the East, finds his abode in Cleopatra's court. They started a 'dining club' with their courtesans where they ate, partied, drank hard and copulated frenetically. We know that historically, after Antony's death, the new emperor, Octavian/Augustus tried to curb Roman excess by introducing morality laws, where he would *inter alia* reward wifely piety and punish adultery (des Bouvrie 1984: 93-94). To set an example, Augustus even exiled his own daughter to Capri for alleged promiscuity. In Season Two there are several indications in the characterisation of Octavian that hint at what is to come. One can conclude, therefore, that the series is not so much critical of Rome, specifically, as it is critical of excess that is invited by the possession of great wealth and power, and it shows how violence is potentially in everyone, whatever one's social status or physical circumstances.

VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT IN THE SERIES

As part of the rampant violence in the series, we are shown slaves and prisoners being branded, tortured or crucified and, as is historically attested, fighting for public as well as private entertainment.

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[35] At the other end of the scale, we know that the Romans, as a patriarchal society, subscribed to certain virtues for women, from *pudicitia* to *obsequium* and child-bearing, Treggiari 1991a, but this is as much of a stereotype. No doubt ancient reality lay somewhere in-between.

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- Private violent entertainment

In Season One Mark Antony orders two topless women to 'really fight' each other with swords and when one of them is wounded, he licks the blood off her chest. The women are clearly not used to fighting, if the whimpering sounds are anything to go by, and certainly not used to gladiatorial combat. They may have been prisoners, or possibly even slaves.

Female gladiators are attested in the late Republican period, as discussed above,[36] but the purpose of the scene is to show the increasing love of the exotically sensual among members of the elite, which is regaled with much sensationalism by any number of ancient writers (Edwards 2002: 34-43). It also prepares us for Antony's slide into the decadence in Cleopatra's court in Season Two.

Figure 7.9: Antony and Cleopatra at their indoor sports.

This is where we witness another scene where both Cleopatra and Antony take turns trying to 'stalk' a man on all fours – dressed as a deer – with a bow and arrow, displaying how even in decadent and indolent Egypt, violent sports and entertainment are not foreign.[37]

- Street entertainment and violence

Various episodes of *Rome* depict street theatre or mimes and feature scenes in which excessively made-up actors give broadly exaggerated performances of current events: high-profile suicides or murders of members of the patrician class, or any particularly sensational episodes in the arena.[38] The first mime we see, performed on a makeshift stage, present us with something of a *miles gloriosus*, a comic soldier-figure strutting about the stage with a great mock phallus, as in Figures 7.10, no doubt meant to lampoon Caesar.

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[36] See p. 96 above.
[37] The scene has elements of Commodus' 'arena hunts' – they pose no danger to the hunter, while the quarry has little chance to escape being wounded or killed, as discussed on p. 152 above.
[38] The article by Goldberg 2018 looks specifically at technical aspects of theatre and arena performances in the Roman forum.

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Figure 7.10: Scenes from a mime, Season One, Episode 1

Another mime stages a stylised version of Pullo's fight in the arena, watched by *inter alia* Atia and Octavia in the audience, while a painted backdrop shows other gladiatorial fights just to make the significance of the scene quite clear to the spectators (Fig. 7.11).

Figure 7.11: A different mime from Season One, Episode 12, re-enacting Pullo's fight in the arena.

- Public spectacle and fighting in the arena

Arena scenes are quite limited, and the arena in which the fighting takes place is a small, wooden structure, since this predates the building of the Colosseum in Rome[39] – hence arena combat certainly cannot compare to the spectacle of *Gladiator*. In fact neither the gladiatorial fighting nor gladiators executing prisoners in the arena are in the least 'spectacular' in our modern sense, they are all given a rather sombre, even dingy, appearance on the screen, as will be discussed in more detail below.

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[39] See discussion above on p. 104.

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Spectacle in the sense of magnificent display is reserved mainly for Caesar's triumph in Episode 10 in Season One – as Caesar's character says in Episode 9, 'People love a good parade and we must not disappoint them'. Caesar, like all victorious generals returning to Rome had to show something in return for the heavy demands the wars had made on Rome's treasury, and he needed to boost his popularity in seeking new office (Haynes 2008: 54). Servilia, speaking to Brutus, calls Caesar's triumphal procession and games an 'obscene display' and the pomp and splendour of the triumph certainly deliver among the most opulent scenes in the series.

Figure 7.12: The spectacle of Caesar's triumph.

Octavian's triumph after Actium (Season Two, Ep. 10), is by comparison less colourful, although the people are shown as joyful, hailing the *vir triumphalis* (Fig. 7.13). The visual purity conveyed by the white toga and the youthfulness of the conqueror (without the face painted with red lead and *toga picta* of Caesar in the previous triumph) are in contrast to his calculated and determined assault on Antony and Cleopatra, and his ultimate victory over them. But to the public eye, a victory over another Roman in a civil war may not have seemed entirely suitable, so as part of his public image Octavian had to appear 'pure'.

Figure 7.13: Octavian's triumphal procession after Actium.

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As stated earlier in this chapter, historically Octavian only celebrated his victory at Actium in the following year, 29 BCE, and celebrated it together with his successes over Egypt and Pannonia (Suet. *Aug*. 22). Octavian would also have been careful to disassociate himself from Julius Caesar's legacy of tyranny.

If the most spectacular spectacle is Caesar's triumphal procession, it is somewhat ironic that Caesar's funeral, a massive funeral pyre in Season Two, Episode 1, provides another dramatic show for the massive crowd of spectators as seen from the air, as shown in Fig. 7.14.

Figure 7.14: Caesar's funeral pyre and the crowds of Rome, aerial view.

The first gladiatorial scenes (from Episode 2), illustrated in Fig. 7.15, show gladiators in action. They are watched by Pompey and Cicero sitting in the first row, as these two men discuss political allegiances. The tallest gladiator, with left-arm protection or *fasciae* and helmet and carrying a type of hook, is getting the better of the others.

Figure 7.15: Fighting in an arena while Cicero and Pompey discuss political matters in their seats.

In Fig. 7.15, the still on the left shows a crouched *thraex*, a *retiarius* on the right and a *dimachaerus* at the top left. Pompey at one point grabs the tall man by the helmet and says 'Beautiful, hey? A real showman'. As mentioned above, Pompey was an enthusiast and in fact the sponsor of Rome's first

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theatre built of stone.[40] Cicero's response is less than enthusiastic, and that he was not an admirer of the arena is in fact borne out by some of his less rhetorical writings.[41] The only other arena fighting that we see involves Pullo (and at the end, Vorenus). As veterans both men tried their hand at various occupations, at times drawing on the violent skills learned as soldiers. They act as bodyguards and both are conscripted at differing times by the street-gangs to serve as enforcers in the *collegia* (Brice 2015: 26, 28). It is Pullo's time as knifeman for hire (when he is caught killing a respected patrician of Rome, supposedly at the behest of Caesar) that was responsible for his sentencing to be executed in the arena.

Fig. 7.16: Pullo enters the arena as a prisoner under guard.

Viewers are then treated in Episode 11 to an extended arena scene of Pullo fighting for his life as a prisoner, rather than as a gladiator (Fig. 7.16).

Figure 7.17: Three gladiators confront Pullo.

Pullo is given a *gladius* and put in the arena with three gladiators (Fig. 7.17) but refuses to fight, amid much booing from the spectators. Pullo asks just to be executed, but this is clearly not what the crowd wants.

Eventually one of the gladiators insults his legion, the Thirteenth,[42] which calls Pullo into action. One of the gladiators wears a Samnite helmet, another carries a spiked club but no helmet, while the third

[40] See above p. 104.
[41] Cic. *Vat*. 106-108; *Off*. 2.16; but also *Tusc*. 2.18, which is more admiring of the gladiator's skill.
[42] Although Pullo and Vorenus were in Caesar's legions, there is no historical connection with the Thirteenth legion, although Caesar did cross the Rubicon with the Thirteenth (Cooke 2008: 81).

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seems to be a *secutor*, with close-fitting helmet, rectangular shield, *gladius* and arm guard. Pullo proceeds to defeat all three to the sound of a roaring crowd (Fig. 7.18), and also the *thraex* and *murmillo* sent in subsequently. When another man with a spiked club enters the arena to dispatch him, and it seems as if Pullo cannot prevail, the intervention of Vorenus for the sake of brotherly love and the reputation of the Thirteenth Legion, saves him (Fig. 7.19). Cook (2008: 85) sees this as a particularly Roman act of *pietas*, where loyalty to kith and kin supersedes all other loyalties.

Figure 7.18: Pullo defeats three gladiators.

Figure 7.19: Vorenus confronts a gladiator.

Again, as Figures 7.15 to7.19 indicate, the sombre lighting, the dull metal and lack of armoury used in these shots, not to mention the dirt, underplays the spectacular element in contrast to that so clearly shown in *Gladiator*.

VIOLENCE AND POLITICS

The dependence of the political elite on pleasing the masses is certainly present in *Rome*, where Caesar for one is shown as adept in wooing the people for support. The 'public banquet' that is announced to celebrate the senators is an example of this. When Vorenus saves Pullo from a legal execution, Caesar manipulates the situation to his advantage – he cannot punish the people's hero, but if he does nothing, he will seem weak. Therefore, he promotes him to senator. Other members of the elite are equally aware of Caesar's tactics:

> BRUTUS: You remember the low soldier who jumped into the arena to save a comrade. Caesar, pandering to the mob, has made Lucius Vorenus a senator (Season One, Ep. 12).

Similarly, Servilia cautions the conspirators that they cannot murder one of the people's heroes, and Vorenus must not be killed when they make their attempt upon Caesar.

This series supports the idea that the power of the masses is a latent one, since none of the lower order characters express the same awareness.

The master of mob manipulation is of course Antony, who wins their support while the senate supports Caesar's assassins. The producers allow us to hear about the speeches of Brutus and Antony,

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which are well known mainly through Shakespeare, through members of that mob, which gives us a good idea of crowd response and reaction to the different elements of the speeches of Brutus and Antony.

MASCULINITY AND CAMERADERIE

There is certainly plenty of testosterone-laden aggression in the series. Any questions around masculinity only arise under the influence of the Egyptian court, as this was the impression fostered by the literature and artwork at the time.[43] We therefore see the political decline of Antony with his increasing orientalisation, abandoning his Roman values for a state of permanent debauchery. Rome is therefore represented as subscribing to the traditional male warrior values.[44]

Figure 7.20: Atia and Octavia applaud a sparring scene between Octavian and Pullo.

There is a minor cameo where, at the end of a combat training scene between Pullo and Octavian, the latter receives a patter of applause from the women in his family (Fig. 7.20). In this little domestic scene, the two spectators clearly see the combat training as 'manly' and applaud Octavian's efforts on his way to attaining manhood where his role as a warrior will be of supreme importance in his career.

The series supports the historical accounts where gladiators sometimes assumed heroic status, as discussed in the previous section.

In Fig. 7.21 Pullo passes by and looks up at a wall painting celebrating the recent occasion where Vorenus, depicted in heroic stature, defends a wounded, recumbent Pullo in the arena. Vorenus' heroic rescue of his comrade of the Thirteenth legion is a striking example of camaraderie, even if it has little to do with the bonding experiences of gladiators who lived and ate together in captivity. The 'rivalry, camaraderie and allegiance' between Vorenus and Pullo, although they are marginal figures in terms of ancient status, pull the various plotlines in *Rome* together (Cyrino 2008b: 5).

[43] For a good discussion on this see Freyburger-Galland 2009: 17-30.
[44] See the excellent discussion by Toscano (2008) on how Roman masculinity is a signifier for imperial potency and lack of it symbolises defeat and loss. Mark Antony's political decline illustrates this in her discussion.

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Figure 7.21: Wall art: Vorenus defending Pullo in the arena.

The theme of two gladiators of different races forming a bond also plays no part in *Rome*, and again *Rome* disrupts the tradition established in *Spartacus* and *Gladiator*. There is also no bonding or sense of community between any gladiators in this series. If anything, the gladiators in the series are essentially the anti-heroes to Pullo and Vorenus.

GLADIATORIAL TRAINING

Again, we see nothing of this, as even when Pullo enters the gladiatorial arena he does not fight as a gladiator but as a prisoner, there to be killed for the enjoyment of the spectators.

There is a scene where Pullo trains the young Octavian to fight with sword and shield (Fig. 7.22), which does foreshadow how his soldier’s experience will benefit him when he enters the arena.

Figure 7.22 Pullo trains the young Octavian

REPRESENTING THE ANCIENT SPECTATOR

In the two different scenarios of gladiatorial fighting that we are shown in Rome, we also have two different sets of spectators. Our impression of the spectators that we get from the first gladiatorial arena scene is firstly that the fairly sedate behaviour of the spectators reveals that it was a fairly regular occurrence, with members of the elite in the first rows. The seats are not packed, however, and the spectators are not overly excited, compared with the urban mob we see at the execution of Vorenus later.

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Figure 7.23: Spectators in a small wooden arena, watching a gladiatorial spectacle. Pompey admires the dominant gladiator.

In the second scene (Fig. 7.23 and 7.24), where Pullo is in the arena, it is clear that the crowd is enthusiastic to see the execution, since they boo Pullo's initial lack of action and hand gestures of various types are seen, rather than the misrepresented thumbs down in the other filmic versions.[45]

Figure 7.23: Spectators boo Pullo's inaction.

Figure 7.24: Spectator excitement at the violence, as Vorenus watches.

The more blood spilt, the more enthusiastic the crowd becomes, which again corresponds with ancient accounts. Spectator crowds are seen in other scenes, such as the triumphs and the funeral pyre of Caesar, where the people clearly enjoy the spectacle and wave enthusiastically, sometimes with palm branches.[46]

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[45] Since even scholars are in disagreement about this (see above p. 88), the producers were clearly hedging their bets.
[46] Haynes (2008: 55) sees the spectacle of *Rome* – which lies chiefly in the triumph, where the people can vicariously enjoy Rome's splendour – as a metaphor for ourselves, as viewers drawn to the exotic, 'side by side with the familiar'.

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This therefore corresponds to Seneca's description of crowd behaviour at the games (even though he writes in the time of Nero) where the crowd is particularly excited by the execution of the criminals, whereas Seneca prefers to watch the skill of the gladiatorial contest, even though he finds these lacking in his particular case.

SOCIAL COMMENTARY - SLAVERY AND VIOLENCE

- Issues of power

The entire series of *Rome* is overwhelmingly concerned with issues of power, which is never securely hierarchical, but always shifting, between different classes as well as between the different genders,[47] influenced by the characters' interdependence. As Toscano points out, 'HBO-BBC's *Rome* is an effective critique on power because it realistically depicts its many facets, its subtleties, and its constant, ironic elusiveness' (2008: 162-163; 166).

- Gratuitous violence?

Although horrific acts of brutality are carried out throughout Season One and Two, this is not so much gratuitous violence because *Rome* intentionally reflects a dissonance between the values of ancient Rome and those of contemporary society - Rome's world is portrayed as being in total contrast to ours, they are entirely Other, a cruel, pagan society, one where sympathy, compassion and pity were considered to be a weakness rather than a virtue. When Octavia , for example, is told to divorce her husband, Gaius Claudius Marcellus, and marry Pompey as part of a political alliance instead, she is slapped by her mother, Atia, when she displays any loyalty and affection for her first spouse.[48] It is a society in which 'might was right' and one in which the practice of slavery, much as any other lot in life, was considered normal and unquestioned.

While Rome is not that hegemonic, 'evil' empire of Biblically-themed epics, it is cast as strongly Other to our own modern world. *Rome* incorporates *Gladiator*'s theme that ancient Rome saw itself as a strong force for civilisation, the superpower of the ancient world at this time, with inevitable avenues for comparison with modern superpowers of today's world, even though this is not explicitly explored in the series.

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[47] The *Rome* Bonus DVD and commentary has two sections named for 'Women in Rome' and 'Slave Society' which show the producers' special interest in this.

[48] Octavia did not marry Pompey in the end, as the Caesar-Pompey political alliance fell apart. Although Octavia was next married off to Antony to cement another political deal, divorces for political alliances were not as frequent as her example suggests, see discussion in Treggiari 1991b.

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- Slaves in *Rome*

Figure 7.25: A slave market in Episode 1.

We see a range of slave characters in *Rome*. Slaves in the wealthy households, for example those of Caesar or Atia, sometimes share a close relationship with their masters, such as Posca's character, a situation which is borne out by some of our sources, as Bankston (2012: 203-215) discusses in the case of Cicero's slave Tiro.

Otherwise, there is not much individualisation among the slaves, most of whom are not given names in the series, and as Fig. 7.25 and Vorenus' ventures into slave-trading show, they are certainly a commodity. This still from the series also contrasts interestingly with Fig. 6.19 above, from *Gladiator*, where the variety of physical characteristics in the slaves make some of them stand out.

The series demonstrates that most slaves are at least materially better off than the poor, where the latter are usually shown scrabbling for survival in a harsh world.[49] The slaves in the series are seldom characterised as conniving, whereas in historical fiction series from other periods, such as *Downton Abbey*, for example, the amount of manipulation of the upstairs masters by downstairs servants is a key plot device. In *Rome*, women fulfil this manipulative role, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

CONCLUSION

In almost all the above aspects that have been discussed here we can conclude, therefore, that *Rome*, 'exotic, excessive and unfamiliar' (Haynes 2008: 49), is Other to us as viewers, much more so than either *Spartacus* or *Gladiator*, while its excessive element is also paired with the familiarly human. This is what makes it so plausible that it seems real, even when we know that it is a construct.

[49] A dichotomy shown by the slave stealing bread while Cato commits suicide in another room.

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CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

The present study has attempted to provide an understanding of both the ancient context of violent entertainment as well as our Western popular perceptions of that ancient world, gained mainly through film, which have consciously shaped these perceptions to fit their own times and *mores*. Our own modern context plays a critical role in how we perceive the ancient world. History, whether in literary form or visually presented, is offered in a linear, continual, sequential narrative. It is that implication of continuousness that facilitates the grasp of concepts, but in actuality, happenings rarely occur in perfect order as a 'trail of dominos'. As Cristen Conger (2009) succinctly states 'the roots of modern revisionism sprang from that theoretical struggle for objectivity'. In his 1931 speech given by American Historical Association President Carl Becker, history was defined as a 'living, evolving entity that was moulded by human memory and individual perspective' (Becker 2019). Challenging the widely held idea that history consisted of a set of immutable truths with minimal relevance to the present he proposed that history was open to interpretation and revision.

Given the obvious distance between our own sensibilities and those of the past, it seems unlikely that ancient expressions of ritualised violence would compel so much attention were we not engaged in a broader conversation about human violence in the 20th and 21st centuries. It would be a fallacy to claim that our fascination with these ancient spectacles could be somehow pristine, and not shaped by the violence of our own time.

In terms of scholarship the subject of gladiatorial games has in recent years undergone re-evaluation, putting a far greater emphasis on context and socio-political significance than ever considered by Michael Grant when he described them, more than twenty years ago, as 'bloodthirsty holocausts in the arena' and 'orgies of cruelty' (1967: 118). Recent studies now also link the amphitheatre with the struggle between nature and culture, as dealt with in Chapter 4, with the amphitheatre becoming the 'liminal zone in which order and civilisation constantly do battle with chaos and barbarism' an area in which '*virtus* is shown, mythology re-enacted, and even death symbolically challenged, and conquered' (Hekster 2005: 212). Through 'theatralising' that which could be a 'potentially real danger', that danger was, in a fashion, overcome (Plass 1005: 32). Spectators were reassured that they had yet again survived disaster - irrespective of the outcome in the arena, the audience remained safely on the winning side. Through the institutionalisation of 'chaos and disorder' normality's breach

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became part of the fabric of society (Plass 1995: 32).[1] Nevertheless, in the popular imagination it is the images evoked by Michael Grant's type of terminology that draw spectators to the big and the small screen.

The three filmic productions which have been examined in this study, *Spartacus, Gladiator* and HBO's *Rome,* evoke some similar thematic tropes which reflect ancient Roman politics, society, women and sexuality (Augoustakis & Cyrino 2017: 1) and some similarities in their representation of violence and gladiature, as this study has attempted to demonstrate. The time and context in which each was created strongly influenced their representation of gladiature, as will be dealt with in the sections below.

THE GLADIATOR – BETWEEN MASS AND ELITE

As outlined in Chapter 4, when seen against its socio-political background the history of the gladiator – where he originated and how gladiature manifested itself from small contests to massive extravaganzas – holds a mirror to Roman civilisation itself (Stepney 2013: 80), just as the three films under discussion mirror the Western societies for whom they were created. The visual element of spectacle and the emotions it engendered played an integral role in Roman political relations, between the giver of spectacle (the public figure or emperor) and the receiver (the masses). The development of gladiatorial spectacles reflects the changes in the balance of power between mass and elite, although, as Stepney has pointed out, ancient sources suggest an inability of the mob to harness its own political power. This last aspect is consciously inverted in particularly the first two of the filmic productions under examination here, under the influence of modern socio-political thought and to highlight contemporary concerns. There are attempts to harness the power of historically disempowered groups (the slaves in *Spartacus* and to a lesser extent, the fellow gladiators in *Gladiator*), which were or would have been anomalies in their historical context. Those who would historically have been disempowered because of their social status are also empowered in the films. Similarly democratic thinking is often idealised and given verbal expression in both *Spartacus* and *Gladiator*. Although the dialogue in *Rome* does give some attention to, for example, Caesar or Antony's awareness of mob power and the need for conciliatory gestures, empowerment of people of low status such as slaves or gladiators does not come into play, and *Rome* is already for this reason far more historically in line with what we know of the ancient world. In the portrayal of Commodus in *Gladiator*, we see something of that trepidation that the crowd could evoke in a ruler, which Potter describes (1996: 130):

[1] 'Real threats cannot be gotten rid of in complete safety, and so the efficacy of ritual depends on how strongly their reality is felt' (Plass 1995: 32).

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> [W]hether it jeered, snorted at, or incinerated those who did not appeal to it, there could be no worse beast than an uncontrolled *demos* in the political demonology of the high empire.

Public entertainment thus provided a context for eloquent 'confrontation between the people and their patrons' (Coleman 2011: 347) – as is shown by the statement of Josephus who says 'They gather enthusiastically in the circus and there the assembled throngs make requests of the emperors according to their own pleasure' (*AJ* 19.24).

GLADIATORIAL BODIES

Chapters 5 and 6 in particular paid some attention to the specific representations of the male body in the shape of the gladiator. Kirk Douglas became Spartacus as much as Russell Crowe became The Gladiator in those two films, with splendid displays of their muscular bodies. As was pointed out in Chapter 6, the spectacle of Maximus' body brutalised by an indifferent mass spectatorship, reveals in *Gladiator* that nostalgia for transcendental masculinity allegedly dismantled by modern society. Masculinity and its decline are also a prominent theme in *Rome*, particularly Season Two, in the shape of the effeminisation and eventual death of Mark Antony (Toscano 2013: 123-136).

US AND THEM

Film has consistently aimed to show Roman civilisation as Other to that of the modern viewer, an imperialistic society driven by sex and violence. As Rose (2009: 242) puts it:

> Rome is consistently represented as a militaristic, decadent, slave exploiting, and corrupt example of a totalitarian society sharply at odds with what are represented as quintessentially 'American' values such as freedom and the one true religion of Christianity.

This is certainly true of *Spartacus*, and, as Winkler's (2009c: 1) remarks of *Gladiator*, this film deals with Roman history as though the entire civilisation were itself a blood sport. *Rome* also is driven mainly by its multiple political machinations, its almost casual violence and many sex scenes,[2] although the extended format of the series does allow the political intrigues of the Great Men and the figures which surround them to develop more naturally. Nevertheless, viewers are still left with the impression that most Romans 'were sexual deviants engaged in militarism, conquest, slavery, and bloody games' (Winkler 2009c: 2).

[2] Film allows the viewer to see what in actuality (in Chapman's sense of the term) he or she would be unaware of. In other words, the 'endless sex' referred to by Winkler in *Rome* may be quite plausible, it is just that no-one, in the normal course of life, sees these essentially private activities performed.

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As asked at the beginning of this study, to what extent do these films then give an accurate perspective of these elements of Roman life when compared with a full complement of the ancient sources or are they a product of filmic sensationalism? But then again, how accurate are the ancient sources themselves, and how sensationalised are their accounts? As I have attempted to show here, critical examination of ancient writings, where subjects were often selected because they made for dramatic listening when read out loud, reveals that these are often misleading or, at least, cannot be taken literally.[3]

So, to what extent or how regularly were Roman citizens spectators to 'bloody games'? According to the *Res Gestae* 22 in which Augustus records his regular distributions of cash and the number of beneficiaries along with other kinds of gifts and sponsorships there is mention of 'gladiatorial shows, athletic spectacles, wild beast hunts with animals' specifically brought in from Africa as well as a *naumachia*. This type of evidence indicates that the people of late Republican/early Imperial Rome would have been provided with approximately one major entertainment annually at the expense of the emperor. This fails to translate into the constant 'daily bloodbath of popular pleasure that the modern movie image of ancient Rome suggests despite its vast outlay of time, logistics and cash as well as human and animal lives' (Beard 2015: 365).

A detailed examination of the evidence also brought to light that gladiators did not routinely fight to the death, as popularly presented in film. If gladiatorial combat was not as deadly as it is presented on the screen, then why is it so often shown that way? The primary reason has to be that such a representation is what the modern audience not only expect from the genre, but what they wish to see, and it is the arena scenes that are often shown prominently in advertorials. In the popular imagination, what is a movie about ancient Rome if it does not involve some form of violence and carnage, after all?

Admittedly *Spartacus* does not fall into this category, since Lentulus Batiatus' character expressly says that his gladiators do not normally fight to the death. He is, however, persuaded to allow it by the promise of money. *Rome* also does not follow the stereotype and tries to follow sources of the 1st century BCE in its representation of its two gladiatorial scenes.

The bloodthirsty nature of the Romans as reflected in the ancient spectators enjoying the slaughter of gladiatorial combat is another popular theme in film. Members of the audience are generally depicted as enthusiastically calling for the death blow to fall, clamouring or shouting for death and blood, and giving the misunderstood thumbs down sign. In this only *Rome* has worked with this stereotype with some subtlety. Here the first scene of gladiatorial combat is witnessed by a small, mainly passive,

[3] Public and private readings were commonly held for the elite in classical times – 'highly skilled professionals could even be hired for those occasions' (Webster 1978: 16).

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audience (including an animated Pompey and a less than enthusiastic Cicero).[4] This is in contrast to the gladiatorial execution of Pullo, where the crowds are shown baying for blood. This corresponds roughly to Seneca's description discussed on p. 9, where the masses are said to care less about skill[5] than about the kill.

Nevertheless this element of the execution of justice also plays an important role in why spectators may have been so bloodthirsty in reality, and as portrayed in *Rome* in this scene. Foucault maintained that for justice to be justice, it must be seen to be delivered; it should be 'carried out in public and seen by the community to have taken its proper course' (cited in Coleman 1990: 44-49). The audience could and did criticise the treatment of the protagonists. When the two female martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas were presented naked in the arena and covered with nets only in 203CE, the spectators felt that propriety had been violated and demanded that they be removed, dressed into tunics and then returned to the arena (*Pass. Perpet*. 20.2-3). Also, once wounded, the audience demanded that they be executed where all could witness the act.

Productions such as *Spartacus* critique the Roman spectators for their bloodthirstiness, while conversely facilitating flattery of the modern viewers by showing them their moral superiority; killing people for entertainment is not acceptable to modern sensibilities. Nevertheless, the audience is attracted by assurances of cinematic bloodshed, suitably contained and shown in a 'realistic style' (while in fact there is greater carnage than is probably correct for any actual combat). This presents the attraction of imperial power all the while seeking a partially-guilty, supremely 'pleasurable and voyeuristic consent from its cinematic effected global/ local subjects' (Wilson 2002: 70).

Only in *Gladiator* is there any acknowledgement of the fact that the modern audience itself is indulging its human nature and takes as much pleasure in watching carnage as any other society has done before us. In the majority of gladiator plots the moralizing is left to the camera and the audience is left to draw their own conclusions, but in this particular movie a scene is included that expressly points out the moral conclusion. When Maximus is first made to fight in the arena, he easily and single-handedly defeats a number of gladiators; he faces the baying throng, raises his voice and sardonically delivers the question, 'Are you not entertained? Is this not why you are here?'. Maximus directs this self-reflexive question as much at the film audience as at the arena crowds, before throwing away his sword and spitting in disgust. *Gladiator* therefore embraces the presumption of bloodlust on the part of its audience and dispenses with any attempt at moralizing about gladiatorial

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[4] Cicero's writings do show a lack of enthusiasm towards the games: 'But what pleasure can a cultivated man get out of seeing a weak human being torn to pieces by a powerful animal or a splendid animal transfixed by a hunting spear? Anyhow, if these sights are worth seeing, you have seen show them often; and we spectators saw nothing new' (*Amic*. 7.1, transl. Shackleton Bailey).

[5] As described by Cicero *Orat*. 228: 'For as we observe that boxers, and gladiators, not much less, do not make any motion, either in cautious parrying or vigorous thrusting, which does not have a certain grace, so that whatever is useful for the combat is also attractive to look upon' (transl. Hendrickson & Hull).

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combat itself. The sequences set in the Colosseum are filled with cut-aways to audiences cheering the slaughter with a total lack of self-consciousness, openly censuring the bloodthirstiness of the Roman audience. But the reason the majority chose to watch *Gladiator* was to see Russell Crowe 'kill people'. Rarely has Hollywood spectacle staged such an unapologetic meta-commentary on its own nature.

Characters like Spartacus, Maximus, or Pullo after all still have a choice in committing violence – they could instead accept death at their opponent's hands. In the case of Maximus, he believes his own death would take him to Elysium and unite him with his dead wife and child, an even stronger motivation.[6]

But of course, if it were that simple it would contravene one of Hollywood's basic rules for action films, that violence can indeed resolve problems (in contradiction to the modern Western *mores* professed in school, church and elsewhere). At least the action-film attempts to make this more acceptable to today's audience by portraying violence as the only remaining option, in addition to which the 'bad guy' must be killed because it is not possible to reason or negotiate or even shame such a person into conceding. It is the application of violence that is unfailingly shown as the only morally satisfactory way to resolve problems and is acceptable to average modern audiences, as discussed in Chapter 3. The violence enacted by Spartacus and Maximus, and even to some extent Pullo and Vorenus, is deemed acceptable in the context that is provided by the film/series; it is moral because it is for the greater good, or understandable because of the context; they fight to stay alive, or gain revenge for great wrongs and they eventually triumph over the anti-hero, even if this is not always a physical victory, as in the case of the endings of *Spartacus* and *Gladiator*.

Thus, the only feasible avenue open to resolve their situations and invert the dominance of the anti-hero is violence, through which society will be saved and be the better for it. Such a narrative is very familiar and is one that is offered by the majority of Hollywood action films.

THEM AND US

The ancient Romans of the 1st centuries BCE to the 3rd century CE were not influenced by our Christian *mores* and their attitudes to many things, such as nudity and sex, were probably different to ours today. They also lived in an unforgiving world in which death was much more directly present than it is in our world today. Individual death retreated from the status of public ritual and became a private family affair. The corpse and its care were left to the home until undertakers began to assume

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[6] This trope of family values originates from his first desire to be away from the carnage of battle and again throughout the film, as illustrated from pp. 180 onwards.

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the responsibilities formally.[7] Without doubt Roman society contained a high tolerance for cruelty and violence and, as in many preindustrial states, life was harsh. This is most clearly conveyed in the *Rome* series. But this does not mean that an overall propensity for individual sadism can be suggested as a reason for the obvious enjoyment of this sport. It would be a mistake to 'reduce the spectacular to the gruesome' as 'bloodlust alone was not sufficient to make a spectacle successful or unsuccessful, exhilarating or boring' (Hammer 2010: 69).[8]

Nevertheless, *ad fundum* the ancient Romans have many things in common with Western modernity. One of the reasons that ancient Rome offers such a close analogue to Hollywood is that it was entirely frank in its unapologetic embrace of the amoral and lurid in spectacle. And popular responses to violent entertainment, as was discussed in Chapter 3, are not very different from descriptions of spectators at the games. Exactly the same responses to violent spectacle can be seen today when watching a UEC championship match or the latest ultra-violent Hollywood film. In 2016 the Portuguese mixed martial artist Joao Carvalho died after a bout in the city of Dublin against Charlie Ward, referred to at the time by *Irish Times* sportswriter Johnny Watterson as 'legal killing' and graphically described by O'Dwyer in the same publication as follows:

> On a side street in Temple Bar is a mural of Conor McGregor that reads 'Long Live the King'. McGregor has a UFC belt draped over one shoulder. In his left hand he raises the head of his rival fighter Jos Aldo. In the background are piled the skulls of his previously vanquished foes (O'Dwyer 2016).

This type of writing is no different to the graffiti found in Pompeii commemorating the victories of gladiators. In terms of our fascination for violence, we have a lot in common with the ancient Romans, even if it is socially frowned upon today. This is why David Potter can devote his book, *The Victor's Crown: A History of Ancient Sport from Homer to Byzantium* (2011b), to demonstrating how ancient Greece and Rome and our own modern age were the two periods in history when spectator sports played the most prominent role in society, where athletes or gladiators became famous, even having their own 'bloggers' in graffiti writers.

All of which indicates that then as now, we are a violent species and gain a stimulating thrill from viewing violence. Our obsessions are based in both dread and fascination of something that is not normative – even sometimes incomprehensible – inflicting harm goes against the grain of socialisation and partly because it is not something normally participated in, it becomes absorbing.

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[7] This detatchment from close association and glossing over of death also extends into religiosity as even Christ's death ceased to be a primary subject for artists, in many cases being substituted by representations of his life as the main theme (Goldberg 1998: 38).

[8] Hence the following words in Petronius' Satyricon, a satire, are not to be taken as literal evidence. Its freedman protagonist and his cronies give an exaggerated idea of the tastes of their class, when mention is made of a promised *munus:* 'He'll provide really good gladiatorial sword fighting (*ferrum optimum*), no running off to fight another day, but a butcher's shop (*carnarium*) in front of our eyes, so that the whole amphitheatre can see it' (*Sat.* 45, transl. Schmeling).

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Violence draws attention simply because it is not a daily occurrence and is something we are 'not good at'. Our civilisation has not enabled us to put our past, the days of crowds watching gladiators fight to the death, behind us, despite Keith Hopkins' observation that bloody gladiatorial and wild-animal spectacles are so foreign to us today that they are 'almost unimaginable' (1983: 5).

The 21st century audience's experience of bloodshed is often vicarious, even voyeuristic, where the Greek and Roman spectatorship was more interactive and immersive. Although, watching violence on screen today could offer some advantage over the games, where viewing for the majority would be restricted by seat position – not everyone could grab a gladiator by the head, as Pompey does in the scene in *Rome*. On screen it is up-close and at wide angle with crucial moments shown in slow-motion. We now have a plethora of semi-dystopian films[9] and television series that involve such action which allows anyone to satisfy an appetite for viewing bloodshed and violent death at, thanks to technological advances, one remove. If a society is judged by its entertainment the modern Western society has some way to go before it can claim to have repressed the dark and vicious underbelly of what we like to think of as civilisation. As the British poet Shelley once said of the ancient Greeks, it is possible to allocate the label 'We Are All Romans' to ourselves, considering the many surprising ways in which we modern Westerners are indeed still connecting violence with entertainment. When this thesis was entitled *From Bread and Circuses to Movies and Popco*rn, it soon became clear that it was not a matter of 'them and us' – they *are* us.

THE END OF THE GAMES

Gladiatorial combat in the arena slowly faded from the public eye. Constantine the Great abolished the fights by edict in 326, although it does not appear that there was a serious attempt to enforce this. The next emperor, Constantius II, made it illegal for soldiers and Roman officials to take part in them. But all in all it appears that gladiatorial fighting was only truly abolished in the 7th century CE.

And today they live on in their received form, in novels, cartoons, film, television, and virtual reality games. Film in particular has shaped and reshaped the ancient world to such an extent that Hollywood's version of Rome is now the only version that is universally familiar (Coleman 2004: 52). It has become evident that film can be considered as an authentic mode of historical investigation, when one considers the significant influence that Rome has had on both history and the popular imagination. Films and TV-series representing the historical epic endeavour to connect the distance that exists between academic history and the general public by showing a past that mirrors both

[9] Such as for example Death Race (2008), Rollerball (1975 & 2002); Deadly Prey (1987), Southern Comfort (1981); Surviving the Game (1994); The Running Man (1987); Maze Runner (2014); Run Lola Run (1998) and The Hunger Games (2012). Still to be released at the time of writing are Mortal Engines and Mom and Dad.

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'historical reality and the popular imagination' (Cufurovic 2018: 7). The limited time span seperating *Gladiator* (2000) and *Rome* (2005-2007) witnessed the upswell of historical films that focused on those 'spectacular, monumental and immersive' times in history that convey a combination of 'historical reality and speculative fiction'. Resultantly, history has become something of popular interest as global enthusiasts write reviews for on-line forums and movie-content sites giving their opinions on the representations of the past.

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APPENDIX 1

ANCIENT LITERARY SOURCES ON GLADIATORIAL GAMES

Author	Text reference
AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS	16.10.14
APPIAN	*B.Civ.* 116-120
APULEIUS	Met. 4.13
ARTEMIDORUS	2.32
ATHENAEUS	4.153f-154a
AUSONIUS	Griphus 36-7
	ECL. 23.33-7 = Athenaeus, 4.153f-154a (quoting Nicolaus of Damascus, FGrH 90, F78 = FHG iii.265)
CAESAR	B.Civ. 1.14
CICERO	*Att.*4.46; 7.14; 4.4b
	Tusc. 2.41
	Fam. 7.1.3:
	Off. 2.57-58
	Mur. 40; 67; 72; 77
	Quint. 2.4; 3.8.6
	Amic.7.1
	Off. 2.57-58
DIO CASSIUS	10.1; 17-22; 39.38.1-4; 43.22-24; 59; 51.23; 60; 61.33.1; 62.16-18; 66.25.1-5; 68.15.1; 78; 79.25.2, 3
DIO CHRYSOSTOM	*Or.* 31.121-122
EPICTETUS	3.15
FLORUS	*Epit*. 2.8
FRONTINUS	*Str.* 1.20-22
SCRIPTORES HISTORIA AUGUSTA	*Hadrian* 6-7; 11.8-12;19.1-9
	Commodus 15-16
	Severus Alexander 24.3
	Claudius Gothicus 5
JUVENAL	*Sat.* 6; 10.77-80; 11.193-204
HERODIAN	15-17
LIVY	9.40; 23.30.15; 31.50.4; 34.54; 39.46; 41.28; 41.20
	Per. 16; 18
MARTIAL	*Spect*. 4.2; 6;
MARTYRDOM OF PERPETUA & FELICITAS	5-6; 10; 14; 16-21

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MARTYRDOM OF POLYCARP	1.1; 3.1; 11.1; 13.1; 15.1
MARTYRDOM OF THECLA & PAUL	5; 11; 8; 9
OVID	*Ars*. 1.167-171
PETRONIUS	Sat. 45
PHILOSTRATUS	VA 22
PLINY THE ELDER	*HN* 7.19-22; 33.53; 36.117
PLINY THE YOUNGER	*Ep*. 9.6
	Pan. 3.1
PLUTARCH	C. Gracchus 12.3-4;
	Cicero 13
	Titus Flaminius 18.2-5
	Caesar 5.4
	Crassus 8-11
	Antony 9.4
POLYBIUS	31.28.6
RGDA	22-23
SENECA	*Clem*. 3.24.2
	De brev. vit. 13.6; 16.3
	Ep. 7; 117.30
SILIUS ITALICUS	*Pun.* 11.51-54
STATIUS	*Silv*. 1.6.52-64
STRABO	4.1.7
SUETONIUS	*Iulius* 10.2; 39; 26.1-3
	Augustus 9.1; 29.4-5; 43-44; 45
	Tiberius 34.1; 47.1:
	Caligula 18-21; 27; 32; 54
	Nero 11.1; 22-24
	Vitellius 12
	Vespasian 9.1; 19.1
	Titus 7.3; 9.2
	Domitian 4.2-3
	Nero 11-12
	Claudius 21.1; 21.4; 34.1.2
TACITUS	*Dial*. 29
	Annales 11.35; 14.17; 14.24; 15.32; 47
TERTULLIAN	De Spect. 12
VALERIUS MAXIMUS	2.3.2
VEGETIUS	*Mil*. 1.11

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APPENDIX 2

GLADIATOR TYPES & TIME OF POPULARITY

Type of Gladiator	Arms and Armour	Time of Popularity	Opponent
Andabata	‘Blind’ helmet without eyeholes.	Republican period	*Andabata*
Arbelas	Helmet, scale armour or mail (?), two greaves, sword and weapon with crescent-shaped blade and tubular vambrace.	1st century BCE (?) - 2nd – 3rd centuries CE	*Arbelas*
Dimachaerus	Close-fitting helmet with brims, short greaves on both legs, mail (?), two swords or daggers.	2nd – 3rd centuries CE	*Dimachaerus ?*
Eques	Broad-brimmed helmet without crest, *manica* arm-guard, round medium-size shield, spear (when mounted), sword (when on foot).	1st century BCE – 4th century CE	*Eques*
Essedarius	Helmet without brims, manica arm-guard on the right arm, oval shield, sword.	1st century CE – 3rd century CE	*Essedarius*
Callus	Probably helmet, greave, large shield *(scutum)* and sword.	(?) – mid-1st century BCE	*Callus ?*
Hoplomachus	Helmet, *manica* arm-guard, high greaves, small round shield, spear, sword or dagger.	Late Republican end of gladiatorial games	*Myrmillo, rarer thraex*
Laquerarius	Lasso, spear and dagger.	(?)	*Secutor (?)*
Myrmillo	Helmet with a crest in the shape of a fish fin, short greave on the left leg, *manica* arm-guard on the right arm, large *scutum* shield, *gladius* sword.	Mid-1st century BCE-end of gladiatorial games	*Thraex, rarer hoplomachus*

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Paegniarius	Quilted wrappings on the legs, left arm and probably head; whip and stick.	1st – 3rd centuries CE	*Paegniarius*
Provocator	Helmet, *manica* arm-guard, *cardiophylax* chest-guard, short greave on the left leg, large shield and *gladius* sword.	Late Republican-Imperial period	*Provocator*
Retiarius	Net, trident, dagger, *manica* armguard and *galerus* shoulder-guard on the left arm.	Early 1st century CE – end of gladiatorial games	*Secutor*
Sagittarius	Composite bow, conical helmet, scale armour.	(?)	*Sagittarius*
Samnis	Helmet, large shield, spear, sword, greave on the left leg, and probably three-disc armour.	Late 4th century BCE – mid-1st century CE	*Samnis (?)*
Secutor	Close-fitting helmet completely covering the head, large rectangular *scutum* shield, *gladius* sword, greave on the left leg, *manica* arm-guard.	Early 1st century CE-end of gladiatorial games	*Retiarius*
Thraex	Helmet, high greaves, small rectangular shield, *manica* armguard, curved *ska* dagger.	Early 1st century BCE-end of gladiatorial games	*Myrmillo, rarer boplomachus*
Veles	Javelins, sword and shield (?).	Republican period	*Veles (?)*
Venator	Spear.	2nd century BCE – CE 681	*Animals*
(Nossov 2009: 170-1)			

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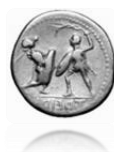
APPENDIX 3

MOST COMMON PAIRS OF GLADIATORS

Period	Pairs of gladiators
1st century BCE	gallus – gallus (?) myrmillo – hoplomachus samnis – samnis (?) eques – eques myrm illo – thraex
1st century CE	myrmillo – thraex essedarius – essedarius myrmillo – boplomachus eques – eques retiarius – secutor
2nd century CE	retiarius – secutor provocator – provocator myrmillo – thraex (east of the Empire) myrmillo – boplomachus arbelas – arbelas essedarius – essedarius (east of the Empire) eques – eques arbelas – retiarius (east of the Empire)
3rd century CE	retiarius – secutor provocator – provocator myrmillo – thraex (east of the Empire) myrmillo – boplomachus arbelas – arbelas essedarius – essedarius (east of the Empire) eques – eques arbelas – retiarius (east of the Empire)
4th century CE	retiarius – secutor myrmillo – hoplomachus myrmillo – thraex

(Nossov 2009: 171)



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1.1	Gladiator mosaic from the Archaeological Museum, Verona	https://www.agefotostock.com/age/en/details-photo/mosaic-with-gladiator-scene-from-the-roman-villa-of-negrar-verona-veneto-roman-civilization-1st-century-verona-museo-archeologico-del-teatro-romano/DAE-86022648
1.2	Gladiator wall painting from Pompeii	https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/bloody-gladiator-fresco-unearthed-pompeii-180973349/
1.3	Graffiti (inscription in *CIL* 4, 0237)	https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Graffito_mit_Dipinti_aus_Pompeji_(CIL_IV_10237).jpg
3.1	'Habet! In the Colosseum A.D.XC', by Simeon Solomon (1865)	http://www.artnet.com/artists/simeon-solomon/habet-in-the-coliseum-adxc-2v-9Cvh7qSOHNNV7_MKveQ2
3.2	Jean-Léon Gérôme (1872), entitled *Pollice Verso*	https://joyofmuseums.com/museums/united-states-of-america/phoenix-arizona-museums/phoenix-art-museum/pollice-verso-by-jean-leon-gerome/
3.3	'Are you not entertained?'	https: //eaglesanddragonspublishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Snip20180207_18.png
4.1	Charioteer, Girona	https://www.flickr.com/photos/sebastiagiralt/3766584039
4.2	Charioteer, Cyprus	https://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/putting-horse-chariot-gorgeous-ancient-roman-mosaics-unearthed-cyprus-020942
4.3	Leopards attacking criminal	https: //www.seeingspectacles.org/?page_id=864
4.4	Bear devouring a criminal.	https: //en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damnatio_ad_bestias
4.5	Mural of beast hunt, showing a venator or bestiarius fighting a lion/ lioness	(https: //en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damnatio_ad_bestias#/media/File: Illustration_at_page_107_in_Europa%27s_Fairy_Book.png)
4.6	Early frescoes of gladiatorial combat from Campania, Italy	http://eaglesanddragonspublishing.com/gladiators-the-implements-of-death/
4.7	Fresco of the Pompeian riot, 59 BCE	https://thepaideiablog.wordpress.com/2015/02/07/the-amphitheater-of-pompeii-fresco/
4.8	Galea or Samnite helmet	https://www.worldhistory.org/image/953/samnite-gladiator-helmet/
4.9	*Retiarius* and *secutor* from Zliten	https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Retiarius_vs_secutor_from_the_Zliten_mosaic.jpg
4.10	Mosaic of retiarius and secutor	*https: //eaglesanddragonspublishing.com/gladiators-the-implements-of-death/*
4.11	Mosaic of the Thracian gladiator	https://za.pinterest.com/pin/53550683039434348/
4.12	Thraex helmet	https: //eaglesanddragonspublishing.com/gladiators-the-implements-of-death/
4.13	The two *equites* can be identified by their sleeveless tunics	https://www.worldhistory.org/image/3272/equites-gladiator-mosaic/
4.14	The epitaph of the *dimachaerus* gladiator Diodorus	http://www.imperium-romana.org/gladiator-tombstone.html
4.15	The *summa rudis*, or head referee, overseeing combat	https://www.livescience.com/14650-roman-gladiator-tombstone-epitaph.html
4.16	Mosaic with retiarius, secutor and summa rudis	https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Retiarus_armed_with_trident_and_dagger_fighting_against_a_Secutor,_the_gladiator_mosaic_at_the_Roman_villa_in_Nennig,_Germany_(9288878145).jpg
4.17	Hand gesture for *missio*	Corbeill 1997, p.17 fig. 8.
4.18	Section of the Gladiator Mosaic, Galleria Borghese	https: //eaglesanddragonspublishing.com/gladiators-the-implements-of-death/
4.19	Possible victorious female gladiator	https://classicalwisdom.com/culture/sport/the-truth-about-roman-gladiators-and-how-they-live-on/
4.20	ΑΜΑΖΩΝ and ΑΧΙΛΛΙΑ, female gladiators	https://www.forbes.com/sites/drsarahbond/2017/04/12/female-gladiators-were-a-part-of-the-lure-of-the-roman-arena-too/
4.21	Part of the Zliten mosaic at Leptis Magna	https: //en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zliten_mosaic#/media/File: Bestiarii.jpg https: //en.m.wikipedi0.org/wiki/Gladiator#History_of_gladiatorial_games
4.22	Colosseum seating plan	https://www.the-colosseum.net/games/loca.htm
4.23	Roman theatre El Djem, Tunisia	https://www.sciencephoto.com/media/446940/view/inside-el-jem-roman-amphitheatre-tunisia
4.24	The hypogeum, interlinked underground tunnels under the arena	https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/tunnels-beneath-romes-colosseum-are-open-public-first-time-180978080/?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=socialmedia&fbclid=IwAR3nlehnQIecbwKQR7d0_7nqHlGXZgaqSgi8-wAad5gek0tzn6CjAPnub9k
4.25	Reconstruction of mock sea battle	https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/secrets-of-the-colosseum-75827047/

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4.26	Ave Caesar! Morituri te salutant, by Jean-Léon Gérôme	https: //commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Ave_Caesar!_Morituri_te_salutant,_by_Jean-L%C3%A9on_G%C3%A9r%C3%B4me.jpg
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4.28	Roman floor mosaic of gladiators	http://romanhistorybooksandmore.freeservers.com/p_ga.htm
4.29	Terracotta oil lamp, 1st century BCE to 1st century CE	https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/241580
5.1	Spartacus fresco	https://latin4everyone.wordpress.com/2013/05/02/citizen-or-slave-nyrb/
5.2	Spartaco (1953)	https: //www.imdb.com/title/tt00045183/
5.3	Poster for the American version of *Spartaco* (1954)	https: //www.imdb.com/title/tt00045183/
5.4	Original 1960 theatrical release poster	https: //en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spartacus_(film)#/media/File: Spartacus_-_1960_-_poster.png
5.5	Kirk Douglas as Spartacus	https: //kubricksfilms.tumblr.com/post/19992467285/5th-spartacus-1960
5.6	Lentulus Batiatus allows the ladies to select gladiator pair	Still from the film *Spartacus*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, remastered 2015
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5.16	The gladiators and *lanista* salute Crassus before the fight.	Still from the film *Spartacus*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, remastered 2015
5.17	The modern gesture for 'kill him'.	Still from the film *Spartacus*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, remastered 2015
6.1	Painting of Commodus leaving the arena at the head of the gladiators	https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/spectaclesintheromanworldsourcebook/chapter/case-study-ii-commodus-161-92-ce/
6.2	The Capitoline Bust - Commodus as Hercules	https: //www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=nTNAVZrx&id=A8B366DD2E2EAE730E0A6AA51151F7DBA7339D05&thid=OIP.nTNAVZrxWQNW_X4MRQ8siQHaLH&mediaurl=http%3a%2f%2fmaitaly.files.wordpress.com%2f2011%2f04%2f4023174043_abab8a8f4b.jpg&exph=500&expw=333&q=commodus&simid=608016858632028220&selectedIndex=38&ajaxhist=
6.3	Maximus prior to the Germanic battle	https: //www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.527834014394078&type=3
6.4	Maximus chained in cruciform position	http: //movieimage4.tripod.com/gladiator/part2.html
6.5	Commodus, Maximus and Praetorian Guard	https: //www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=JYFxtTz8&id=F5A60355F5A3C3E9BE0E26BE1BC21712B80B9E9B&thid=OIP.JYFxtTz84dpRDI8fCCRufwHaD9&mediaurl=http%3a%2f%2fsocialpsychol.files.wordpress.com%2f2011%2f08%2fgladiator-joaquin-phoenix-russell-crowe.jpg%3fw%3d949&exph=508&expw=949&q=Commodus+Gladiator&simid=607998978701919592&selectedIndex=18&ajaxhist=0
6.6	'A Hero Will Rise' poster	https: //thecinematicexperiance.wordpress.com/2016/11/28/reflection-22-gladiator/
6.7	The emperor Commodus	Listverse.com / pininterest.com
6.8	Sombre lighting in Gladiator	Still from the film *Gladiator*, directed by Ridley Scott
6.9	Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher emperor	Played by Richard Harris, who, in this poetic portrayal of the truths of history chooses the fictional Maximus as his true spiritual heir.
6.10	Maximus: At my signal, unleash hell!	http: //movieimage4.tripod.com/gladiator/index.html
6.11	Maximus moving between two lines of his soldiers prior to battle	https: //tuesdayshorse.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/crowe_gladiator.png.
6.12	Maximus is framed at a heroic low angle as the crowd showers him with petals	https: //www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc45.2002/tudor/index.html
6.13	The amphitheatre in 'Zucchabar'	Still from the film *Gladiator*, directed by Ridley Scott
6.14	The "Legionnaires of Scipio Africanus"	http: //movieimage4.tripod.com/gladiator/part2.htm
6.15	The barbarian horde	http: //movieimage4.tripod.com/gladiator/part2.html
6.16	Maximus' breastplate	https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2551001/gladiator-behind-the-scenes-facts-from-russell-crowes-epic-movie
6.17	Spectators in Zuccabar	Still from the film *Gladiator*, directed by Ridley Scott

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6.18	Spectators in Rome	Still from the film *Gladiator*, directed by Ridley Scott
6.19	The selection of slaves for potential gladiatorial performance	Still from the film *Gladiator*, directed by Ridley Scott
7.1	Bust of Julius Caesar	https://www.cs.mcgill.ca/~rwest/wikispeedia/wpcd/wp/j/Julius_Caesar.htm
7.2	Bust of Mark Antony	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Antony
7.3	Octavia the Younger	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Octavia_the_Younger
7.4	Street scenes from HBO *Rome*	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One Episode 4 and Season 2, Episode 10,
7.5	Niobe in front of a household shrine	https: //romanpagan.wordpress.com/offerings-to-the-gods/
7.6	Graffiti from the opening credits, gladiator	Still from the *Rome* series, opening titles.
7.7	Graffiti from the opening credits, soldiers	Still from the *Rome* series, opening titles.
7.8	Boy drawing two gladiators on a stone	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode1.
7.9	Antony and Cleopatra at their indoor sports	Still from the *Rome* series, Season Two, Episode 9.
7.10	Scenes from a mime	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 1
7.11	Another mime, re-enacting Pullo's fight in the arena.	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 12
7.12	The spectacle of Caesar's triumph	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 10
7.13	Octavian's triumphal procession after Actium	Still from the *Rome* series, Season Two, Episode 10
7.14	Caesar's funeral pyre and the crowds of Rome	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 12
7.15	Fighting in an arena as Cicero and Pompey discuss political matters in their seats	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 2
7.16	Pullo as a prisoner being led into the arena	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 11
7.17	Pullo refuses to fight	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 11
7.18	Pullo defeats three gladiators	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 11
7.19	A gladiator confronts Vorenus	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 11
7.20	Atia and Octavia applaud a sparring scene between Octavian and Pullo	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 6
7.21	Wall art: Vorenus defends Pullo in the arena	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 12
7.22	Pullo trains the young Octavian	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 6
7.23	Spectators in a small wooden arena	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 2
7.24	Spectators boo Pullo's inaction	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 11
7.25	Spectator excitement at the violence	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 11
7.26	A slave market	Still from the *Rome* series, Season One, Episode 1

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