

(‘Alcyone and Merope, Celaeno and Taygete, Electra and Asterope, and also most holy Maia’). This predates Virgil’s use of the device of filling a hexameter with Greek names, as in *Georgics* 1.437, *Glaucō et Panopeae et Inoo Melicertae* (‘to Glaucus, to Panopea and to Melicerta, son of Ino’). Cicero was on the cutting edge of this poetic practice (Quint. 12.10.33). Alexandrian poetics were already available for Cicero as they were for his predecessors Livius Andronicus and Ennius. Cicero chose in the *Aratea* to combine Alexandrian aspects with the diction of earlier Latin epic. This choice is a highly appropriate one. How better to render Aratus’ Homeric dialect than to draw on the diction of early Latin epic, which itself strives to imitate Homer? Not evolution, but differing principles of choice can be said to operate in Cicero’s and Germanicus’ translations of Aratus. Whereas Cicero reads Aratus as Callimachean *epic*, Germanicus reads Aratus as *Callimachean epic*.

Cicero is a better model for Germanicus than Possanza admits. Both play at enacting poetic secondarity. Germanicus excuses his variant version of the Orion myth with the words *haec ego non primus, veteres cecinere poetae* (‘I am not the first to sing of these things: the ancient poets did too’, *Ph.* 647) According to Possanza, *veteres poetae* can be taken as a reference to actual predecessors, including Cicero (p. 198). But he misses the force of the intertextual play: the phrase is a *quotation* from Cicero, albeit a different passage (the Pleiades again): *sed frustra, temere a vulgo, ratione sine ulla / septem dicier, ut veteres statuere poetae* (‘but it is an empty and rash belief of the common people, based on no reasoning, that [the Pleiades] are seven, as the ancient poets established’, *Aratea* 33f.) Here Cicero is sceptical of tradition. Acknowledgement of this would make Possanza’s argument about Germanicus’ ‘disclaimer’ (for the myth, in his retelling) stronger. Cicero, a self-conscious witness to his own intellectual thoroughness in the *Aratea*, belongs in Germanicus with the other purveyors of spurious tradition he sought to discredit. At the same time, Germanicus playfully acknowledges his poetic debt to his predecessor, with critical dialogue marking respect of one author for another.

## IMPERIALISM THEN AND NOW

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Martin M. Winkler (ed.), *Gladiator: Film and History*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. Pp. xii + 215. ISBN 1-4051-1043-0. GBP15.99.

For all those Classicists drawn into the slip-stream of media and communication courses, this is a very welcome and timely book that will give them a chance to compete on similar terms, should they choose to do so. First, the contributions to the book are on the whole perceptive, comprehensive, and well-

argued. Secondly, they address a worthy subject; Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) is a sophisticated, well-structured, fast-paced and visually stunning movie that has done more than anything else in recent times to bring ancient Rome to the attention of our postmodern generation of students. It has already drawn lively scholarly interest<sup>1</sup> and demands serious attention in its own right, as Winkler points out (pp. xif.). Thirdly, the film implies an intriguing analogy between the idea of Rome as a world empire and the role of the United States in world affairs today that deserves—and has here received—careful scrutiny.

The first contribution to the book, '*Gladiator: From Screenplay to Screen*' (pp. 1-15) by Jon Solomon, provides a fascinating insight into the development of the ideas of the production team. Solomon points out the wide array of resources for studying the film. Besides filmscripts, there are interviews with the director, stills (perhaps redundant in the age of frame-grabbers), discarded footage, neoclassical art (e.g., Gérôme's *Pollice Verso* to which Scott attributed part of his inspiration for making *Gladiator*), historical novels and the intriguing narratives of Cassius Dio, Herodian, and the *Historia Augusta* (conveniently printed at the end of the book on pp. 175-204).<sup>2</sup> All of this is, of course, everyday fare for today's media-conscious student. Solomon shows that the script writer, David Franzoni, who also wrote the dialogue for Spielberg's *Amistad* (p. 2), did make use of the ancient evidence, including archaeological material, and gives the reader useful aperçus such as that Maximus' dog was in fact intended to represent the wolf of the Roman foundation legend, that Proximo is supposed to be 'a sort of Ted Turner' (p. 4), that the opening scene reflects the crushing of German freedom by the military technology of the Roman army (although how exactly this plays out in international politics today is unclear), and that Commodus' plea to his father draws from Marcus Aurelius' own *Meditations*. The last point was of course to be expected, but Commodus' perversion of the canonical Stoic virtues distorts them grotesquely under the inspiration of modern popular psychology: it rather incongruously implies that the emperor is guilty of not spending enough quality time with his son in the gladiatorial barracks.<sup>3</sup> In his chapter, Solomon anticipates two further lines of interpretation that are also followed by other contributors to the book: the degree of historical realism in the film and its relation to other cinematic representations of the Roman world. These are not unrelated since Franzoni's idea of ancient Rome was largely coloured by Fellini's *Satyricon* (p. 9). The use of a gladiator to represent the mythological Minotaur is a

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., A. Arenas, 'Popcorn and Circus: *Gladiator* and the Spectacle of Virtue', *Arion* 9.1 (2001) 3-12.

<sup>2</sup> Solomon helpfully provides the URL for a website that makes available the first two drafts of the filmscript and a transcript of the dialogue and storyline of the movie (<http://www.hundland.com/scripts>).

<sup>3</sup> Birley provides encouragement for this kind of analysis in his assessment of Commodus as a 'lonely figure'. See A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus: The African Emperor* (London 1999) 57 and the criticism of Ward in the present chapter of Solomon (p. 35).

good touch; historical realism, however, suffers in the film at the hands of commercialism. The mass slaughter of animals in the arena is avoided in order not to offend modern sensibilities, for example, and the clay figures of Maximus' *Penates* become sentimental figurines of the hero's wife and son. Franzoni's script was fairly light hearted and the second draft, revised by John Logan, also had a fairly sanguine ending. In Scott's final version, however, the hero's vengeance for his family's murder comes at the cost of his own life. By using the two preliminary drafts of the script together with interviews with the director in this way, Solomon is able to prove convincingly that '*Gladiator* was always a work in progress' (p. 15).

Winkler's contribution, '*Gladiator* and the Traditions of Historical Cinema' (pp. 16-30), puts the movie into the context of films such as Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964). Winkler confronts the issue of historical authenticity versus artistic licence directly in this chapter. He concludes that the appeal of any recreation of the past 'rests at least as much on their fictional as on their factual side' (p. 17). Winkler argues somewhat tendentiously that ancient historians were no different in their approach to writing history; the speeches of Thucydides and the anecdotes of Herodotus are likewise 'inventions' (p. 18). This point of view reflects the antipathy to genre and the defacement of the author in contemporary criticism, where the distinction between history and imaginative fiction has been blurred by the convergent approximation of the two.<sup>4</sup> Scott follows earlier directors in feeling the need 'to stay true to the spirit of the period, but not necessarily adhering to facts' (p. 23). After dispensing with the shackles of historical veracity in this way, Winkler shows that *Gladiator* follows the pattern of archetypal hero movies such as *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), more ideological films such as Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960) and Delmer Daves' *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), and non-classical action flicks such as Miller's *Mad Max* series (the name Maximus was therefore inevitable).

Historical inaccuracies in the film are, in fact, 'legion' (p. 31). Allen Ward takes up the challenge of pointing these out in his chapter, '*Gladiator* in Historical Perspective' (pp. 31-44). With regard to military history, there was no final battle in Germania immediately before the death of Marcus Aurelius; the Romans did not literally use war-dogs (nevertheless, Maximus' dog is a brilliantly polysemous touch invoking the Roman wolf, Shakespeare's 'dogs of war' at *Julius Caesar* 3.1.273, and the wild animals of the arena); and siege weapons such as *ballistae* would not have been used in close battles in the forests of Germania. The chronology of Commodus' reign is foreshortened. His family connections are oversimplified and misrepresented (especially in the case of Lucilla); here Ward or his editor Winkler could have

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<sup>4</sup> For history-as-fiction Winkler might have referred to the work of J. L. Moles, 'Truth and Untruth in Herodotus and Thucydides', in C. Gill and P. Wiseman (edd.), *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World* (Austin 1994) 88-121, and T. P. Wiseman, 'Lying Historians: Seven Types of Mendacity', in C. Gill and P. Wiseman (edd.), *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World* (Austin 1994) 122-146. Conversely, for fiction as history see G.W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Berkeley 1994); J. R. Morgan, 'History, Romance and Realism in the *Aithiopia* of Heliodoros' *ClAnt* 1 (1981) 221-265.

provided a genealogical tree to clarify these complex relationships. Commodus' character is distorted: the film suggests sexual deviance arising from intense loneliness; in fact, Commodus was a married man who eventually fathered fourteen children. There was no desire to restore the republic in Commodus' day and in all probability Marcus Aurelius was not assassinated by his son, who had been joint ruler with his father for some time before his father's death possibly as a result of the plague.<sup>5</sup> The representation of gladiatorial fighting is full of inaccuracies. The Latin language is frequently garbled and grammatically wrong. Most importantly, there was no such person as Maximus Decimus Meridius. On the positive side, the film correctly shows that death was ubiquitous in the second century, but this issue is not adequately discussed in the present book, which lacks a full discussion of the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius and their relationship to Stoic teachings on this subject. Ward's most interesting point is reserved to last (pp. 42-44): the scriptwriters missed much of the dramatic material in the *Historia Augusta*, particularly the account the escape of Sextus Quintilius Condianus from Commodus' troops in Dio 73.5-6, which could have been used to excellent effect. Why, to take another famous example, do we not see senators chewing their garlands to prevent themselves from bursting out in hysterical laughter when confronted by Commodus holding the freshly decapitated head of an ostrich (Cass. Dio 73.21)?

Coleman's brief chapter, 'The Pedant Goes to Hollywood' (pp. 45-52), reinforces the arguments outlined above that the boundary between fact and fiction in ancient history has become blurred (p. 46) and that film-making is a complex process in which the lines of communication between historical consultant and the production team may easily break down (pp. 47f.). Coleman underplays her own accountability for the recent sustained surge of interest in Roman gladiatorial games,<sup>6</sup> but she does provide sensible insights into the role of the historical consultant in period films and shows how much of a challenge the reconstruction of the ancient world presents to the serious scholar of antiquity as opposed to the Hollywood director, especially when the ancient evidence may be limited or altogether lacking (p. 50). Her observation that film directors have to deal with the horizons of expectation of their audience is an acute one and her reference to the influence of Alma-Tadema on our preconceptions of the Roman world (pp. 50f.) is extremely important for a proper appreciation of the visual splendour of Scott's Rome; the garlanded young children who welcome Commodus to Rome from the steps of a temple/the senate-house and the splendid panorama of the crowd inside the Colosseum are memorable examples of this. Unfortunately, the book does not reproduce a single example of this kind of neoclassical art; even the supposedly influential painting of Gérôme, mentioned frequently in the book, is absent, and Pomeroy's reference to Thomas Cole's *Course*

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<sup>5</sup> See Eckstein's discussion on pp. 65f.

<sup>6</sup> See K. W. Coleman, 'Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments', *JRS* 80 (1990) 44-73; K. W. Coleman, "'The Contagion of the Throng': Absorbing Violence in the Roman World', *Hermathena* 164 (1998) 65-88.

of *Empire* 1836 (p. 122) is without visual referent. A greyscale copy of Edwin Blashfield's painting of Commodus leaving the amphitheatre together with his gladiators is magnificent, but it is all that is provided (fig. 4). Perhaps a future edition might reproduce an Alma-Tadema (in colour naturally) in the place of one of the redundant black-and-white stills from the film or instead of one of the supernumerary views of the depressingly familiar ruins of the Colosseum that the book provides in abundance. On the subject of illustrations, the map of the Roman empire (fig. 1) has been badly photocopied; it is totally illegible and an atrocious precedent for a respected publisher to set for others.

In his chapter, 'Commodus and the Limits of the Roman Empire' (pp. 53-72), Arthur M. Eckstein makes a lively case for his view that Mann and Scott were wrong to show Romans struggling 'to bring the Germans north of the Danube into the Roman Empire' (p. 54) and to suggest that Commodus' decision to abandon the campaign was wilful and wrong. Eckstein argues that Commodus' decision to end the campaign was not motivated by the fact that the fighting had finally pacified the territory south of the Rhine-Danube frontier; neither was it influenced by Augustus' precept to limit the extent of the empire (Tac. *Ann.* 1.11.4); nor was it due to a lack of sufficiently remunerative targets in the region. Instead, Eckstein argues, the cessation of fighting in Germany was part of an overall tendency towards peace during this period associated with the demise of aggressive challenges to Roman power (pp. 62f.). Moreover, according to Eckstein (pp. 69f.), Commodus was not strategically wrong to end hostilities after his father's death. The Rhine-Danube frontier remained peaceful after his departure; the war had been expensive; and Roman honour had been upheld. Eckstein's discussion shows that the aims and methods of the ancient military historian are indeed very different from those of a Hollywood director (p. 72).

Central to *Gladiator* are the games (*ludi*). David S. Potter, 'Gladiators and Blood Sport' (pp. 73- 86), considers the importance of human and animal fighting in the arena for Roman culture. This chapter does not add much that is startlingly new to the subject. The dissonance with contemporary values is familiar material: although Romans invested considerable time and expense in these spectacles, they were nevertheless considered unsuitable activities for free-born citizens of either sex; gladiators shared this opprobrium with actors, which is a rather surprising link to modern thinking; and despite the possibility of death or flogging, free-born Romans did from time to time voluntarily join gladiatorial schools.<sup>7</sup> The importance of the games as vehicles of imperial patronage and as demonstrations of the power of the ruler has also been clearly established before, as has the use of amphitheatres as venues at which to reenact myths. Nevertheless, Potter provides an indispensable and convenient discussion that will aid student to understand this central aspect of the background to the film.

Winkler adds a discussion of the cultural significance of the Flavian amphitheatre in his chapter, '*Gladiator* and the Colosseum: Ambiguities of Spectacle'

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<sup>7</sup> A surprising omission from the bibliography is M. Grant, *Gladiators* (London 1967).

(pp. 87-110). The 'ambiguities' of the title refers to the combination of admiration and disgust that this edifice arouses in those who study it today. Winkler argues (p. 93) that modern north American architecture provides a contemporary analogue: just as the Colosseum was held to represent the stability of the Roman state, so the Statue of Liberty often stands for the fall or endurance of the USA. Surprisingly to a non-American, the inevitable connection with 9/11 is made only cursorily and obliquely (p. 4), but as always Winkler provides convincing substantiation of his general argument from film history. Winkler ends this chapter by considering the psychology of gladiatorial games and the role of digital technology in enhancing it. Violence sells; mass violence sells massively (p. 105). There is also a good discussion of the historical importance of the games for the characterisation of Commodus as an evil emperor.

Arthur Pomeroy builds a sustained comparison between Leni Riefenstahl's film of the 1934 Nazi rally at Nuremberg, *The Triumph of the Will* (1935), and *Gladiator* in his 'The Vision of a Fascist Rome in *Gladiator*' (pp. 111-23). In its use of conservative morality, technology and a nearly superhuman hero '*Gladiator* may be re-creating the Fascist values it appears to condemn' (p. 112). This is an exaggerated standpoint inasmuch as conservative values do not necessarily imply belief in national socialism, and Maximus is clearly portrayed as a moral rather than an amoral hero. To be fair, Pomeroy himself notes the clear differences, for example, the rejection of the doctrine of racial superiority through the prominence given to Maximus' black comrade Juba. The similarities that Pomeroy observes are striking, particularly the serried ranks of 'Romans' welcoming Commodus in the forum on his triumphant return from Germania and the massive and grandiose architecture of Rome. On balance, though, I found Pomeroy's analysis strident in places, particularly in the use of a word like 'reactionary' (p. 122), although his analysis is generally solid. The influence of the rather feminine neoclassical paintings of Rome on Scott and the ethical discussions of the ideology of Rome and her empire in the film go a long way to balance the fascist imagery.

The final two chapters of the book address the relevance of the film to contemporary north American society. Monica S. Cyrino ('*Gladiator* and Contemporary American Society', pp. 124-149) and Peter W. Rose ('The Politics of *Gladiator*', pp. 150-72) provide comprehensive discussions. Maximus is a reluctant hero, a Republican family-man, and a soldier disaffected by politics. Cyrino believes that his character reflects the views of many conservative north Americans today (pp. 136f.) especially in their attachment to the land and the rural way of life. The exhaustion of Marcus Aurelius and his cynicism about Roman politics may have its counterpart in the supposed contemporary disillusionment of many north American citizens. Here too, however, there is a danger of exaggeration: gladiatorial spectacles resemble American sports competitions only in part (p. 138), while resemblances between Commodus and George W. Bush are rather forced and trivial (p. 146). Moreover, Rome, like the United States, is a complex entity, towards which a wide variety of attitudes are possible. *Gladiator* reflects something of this complexity since

Marcus Aurelius, Maximus, Commodus and Lucilla all articulate competing views of the city and its cultural significance. Rose's insightful theoretical analysis gives a good idea of this. He shows (pp. 153-57) that at least some of the scenes devoted to the idea of Rome are borrowed from Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), in which the ideals of empire and Rome's role in the socio-economic development of the Germans, for example, are more fully explored. He also underscores Cyrino's discussion of the political cynicism of *Gladiator* and its refusal fully to confront the problems of race (represented by Juba in the film), communism (as in Kubrick's *Spartacus*), sexuality (Commodus' sexuality is to some extent treated in the film, but women are dealt with altogether less prominently and less sympathetically on p. 169) and globalism (p. 171). The aesthetic quality of the film, its thematic richness, and Hans Zimmer's emotional score nullify the charge that the film is an adventure story for boys. On the other hand, I found the view that the emphasis on conspiracy in *Gladiator* 'convey[s] a message of the overwhelming complexity of a worldwide system that escapes the control of individual protagonists' (p. 172) rather unsubstantiated.

Despite the omissions and drawbacks noted above, this book provides a very useful resource that will enhance the analytical sophistication of students of Scott's film and one that will deepen their appreciation of the complexity of Roman society in the reign of Commodus as well as the problem of imperialism then and today. I have no doubt that it will be a great success and a distinct credit to its editor and his contributors.

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