

Senior Thesis: The Portrayal of Roman Gladiators and Slavery in Film

Megan Gingerich

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Carey Martin, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

Robert Mott, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Christopher Nelson, M.F.A.
Assistant Honors Director

Date

Abstract

This thesis project will endeavor to examine how prominent historical films set in the Roman Empire deal with slavery and gladiators, said research to inform a corresponding creative project. In studying and analyzing *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Spartacus* (1960) and *Gladiator* (2000), the three most prominent films that deal with the topics of slavery and gladiators in ancient Rome, I hope to uncover how films treat the topic, how the films are influenced by more modern values, and how accurate the films are. I will also identify commonalities between all three films, and supplement my discoveries with observations from two less successful but more modern films, *Pompeii* (2014) and *Ben-Hur* (2016).

Based on my findings, I will write a portion of my own film script influenced by the common events and themes regarding slavery and gladiators, as observed in the films stated above. In addressing similar thematic elements and dealing with a similar conflict, the creative portion of the research seeks to fit into the same genre of epic, historical film.

The Portrayal of Roman Gladiators and Slavery in Film

Epic films, especially those centering on ancient Rome and gladiators, have faded in and out of popularity for decades.

While older films like the 1959 *Ben-Hur* and 1960 *Spartacus* are timeless, *Gladiator* brought the historical epic back in 2000 when it won best picture, inspiring many to dig deeper into Roman history, specifically Roman sport. We love these films because they are exciting and action-packed, but also because they showcase characters who overcome incredible adversity as gladiators, exemplifying strong morals and leadership paired with physical strength that make for engaging combat scenes. Even though the gladiators present in these films are slaves, they rise above their circumstances and come to symbolize something much greater.

In looking at how these three noteworthy films portraying slavery and gladiatorial combat in the Roman world, I hope to be able to summarize how epic films have treated these topics in the past, unearth inaccuracies and determine why Hollywood chose another direction, and then to write my own film script that incorporates the most impactful elements of these films.

Assessment of *Ben-Hur* (1959)

Ben-Hur, an epic film produced in 1959, tells the story of Judah, an affluent Jewish man living in the Roman Empire during the time of Christ's ministry. When he is betrayed by his childhood friend Messala, a Roman, Judah embarks on a journey that takes him to the galleys of Roman warships to Rome, where he earns his freedom and faces Messala in the Roman games as a charioteer. *Ben-Hur* is a fictional story, but it does feature a few historical characters, most notably Pontius Pilate and Jesus Christ. The ministry of Jesus takes place in the background of the movie and ends with his crucifixion.

Adjusted for inflation, *Ben-Hur* is the 14th highest-grossing film of all time, earning \$875.5 million at the box office (Box Office Mojo). It also won 11 Academy Awards during the 1960 awards season, including Best Actor, Best Director, Best Cinematography, and Best Picture (IMDb).

Slavery & The Galleys

Throughout the film, the theme of slavery is shown through Judah's journey from being a free man to being sent to row in the galleys of Roman warships. The galleys are depicted as a brutal environment where men were chained to their oars and row to the beat of a drum. The film implies that men often die at their oars, passing out from exhaustion and poor living conditions. Failure to row at the appropriate speed would result in lashes, and the men who row are referred to only by numbers rather than their names. Later, Judah is offered a position as a gladiator/charioteer by a Roman consul on board who has taken note of his physical strength, but Judah refuses because he would still be a slave.

On a historical level, the portrayal of life for a galley slave is very inaccurate even though it has had a considerable effect on how people view the galleys. While there certainly were instances where condemned men were sentenced to row, professional rowers were used much more often (Casson, 1966, p. 37). Using slaves was often considered to be scraping the bottom of the barrel. There are several cited reasons for this, one being that rowing was hard technical as well as physical labor- it required skilled professionals, not unskilled slaves (Casson, 1966, p. 36). The navies of antiquity would actually bid on rowers to operate their ships, and according to Casson, "In a context such as this, slave rowers simply have no place" (1966, p. 37). According to Simon James, although the Romans didn't have galley slaves- at least not in the way the

movie shows- *Ben-Hur* was so successful, it caused "...motifs such as galley slavery and chariot racing [to pass] permanently into popular understandings of Rome" (2001, p. 35). In this case, *Ben-Hur* can be cited as an example of how popular culture can affect our view of history (James, 2001, p. 40).

In the Roman era, more sophisticated ships led to slaves becoming more common in the galleys, but professional rowers were still needed (Casson, 1966, p. 37). The environment never looked like the one presented in the film. However, despite what *Ben-Hur* has led many to believe, the Roman warships would never have been powered exclusively by slaves chained to their oars. Even if they were, rowing to avoid death would not have been enough motivation considering their dismal qualities of life and the fact that, according to the film, they expected to die at their oar anyway.

All this said, Judah is treated brutally in the galleys and never expects to be free again. Despite the inaccuracies, the feeling of hopelessness and the barbaric treatment of slaves is founded on true accounts of the brutality of Rome. The galleys are a unique way to show this; there is a reason why these scenes are so memorable. Not only is Judah's condemnation to the galleys an accurate portrayal of the 1880 novel by Lew Wallace, but it also sets the film's tone and gives legitimacy to Judah's hardened character.

Manumission and Adoption

Another unique concept present in the *Ben-Hur* film is that of manumission and the adoption of a slave into one's own family. After saving the life of a Roman consul, Judah Ben-Hur relocates to Rome and serves him in the arena as a charioteer. After years of faithful service

and forming a relationship with the consul, he adopts Judah as his own son and bestows his name upon him, freeing him from slavery (manumission).

There is evidence to say that this did happen. In the case of a typical manumission, a slave could be granted Roman citizenship by his owner and become a “freedman” (Gardner, 1989, p. 236). However, in these cases, the freedman was the start of a new family line, and according to Roman law, did not have any legal relatives (Gardner, 1989, p. 236). This makes the process of adoption different from a typical manumission because in being adopted into the family of a Roman citizen, obviously, the freedman would have legal relatives. There is evidence of this happening in Rome as well, and even evidence of adoption happening simultaneously along with manumission (Gardner, 1989, p. 236).

This latter practice is exactly the sort of process that takes place in *Ben-Hur*. Historically there are some limitations; a freedman’s rights as an adopted member of a Roman family should never usurp the rights of a man born free, for example, but, “A patron lacking direct heirs might prefer to adopt a known and trusted freedman rather than a free outsider” (Gardner, 1989, p. 243). The Roman consul in *Ben-Hur* had no direct heir, but because of his personal relationship with Judah, he chose to adopt him and make him an heir. It’s unlikely this happened every day, but the adoption process is depicted in this film helps to show that Romans weren’t always cruel to their slaves. Sometimes they were seen and treated as members of the family. This small part of the film is important in the overall portrayal of slaves in film because it provides another dimension and serves as a reminder that Romans, just like people today, were all different, and the treatment of slaves varied greatly.

Chariot Races

Charioteers are portrayed very differently than gladiators in *Ben-Hur*. While it is possible that some charioteers would have been slaves, such as Judah was when he raced for the Roman consul whose life he saved, not all of them were. A free man was also eligible to race (Potter, 2012), as demonstrated by Messala, the Roman who races against Judah. However, the historical training process was very different than what the film presents. In the film, it is understood that Judah spent several years in service to the consul learning how to race chariots and acting as his champion. We don't actually see Judah train, but historically a young man would have begun training in his teens, starting out with two horses and working his way up to the typical four-though as many as seven horses could be used (Potter, 2012). It is unlikely, based on the way the pacing of the film and aging of the characters, that Judah spent this much time training.

For the sake of suspense, the film also spends time developing strategy similar to horse racing: pacing is essential and it's probably not best to shoot to the front right when the race begins. On a cinematic scale, it's much more exciting to see Judah pull through against all odds and surpass multiple chariots on the way to the front. Historically, this wouldn't have happened. The initial front runner was always the most likely to be the winner, and it would have been exceedingly rare for a charioteer to win from behind (Potter, 2012).

Another detail that sets the charioteers apart from the gladiators is the diversity of both ethnicity and social status. Many charioteers were private individuals who came to race from all over the Roman empire (Potter, 2012); while there would have been ethnic diversity in gladiatorial combat as well, it's usually not emphasized as much in films focusing on gladiators as it is in both the 1959 and 2016 *Ben-Hur* films.

A final observation on the chariot races in *Ben-Hur* is the aspect of gambling. When setting Judah up to race against Messala, the African trainer is willing to bet an enormous amount of money on Judah's victory. Gambling at this level isn't seen in any other competitions in films depicting this era, and rightfully so. Gambling was significantly more popular in the context of the circus than it was for any other Roman competitive sport (Potter, 2012).

All these elements work together to create a climax that is known for creating an epic spectacle. The stakes are high and the scene is impressive, drawing the viewer in as a spectator of the Roman games. But following the epic scene in which Judah bests Messala in the races, the film uncovers its true message- earthly victory does not heal the heart, and Judah is still unsatisfied (Theodorakopoulos, 2010). The grandeur of the race and the defeat Judah feels despite his victory is indicative of the theme that vengeance does not satisfy; a particularly affecting message when set against the backdrop of Jesus Christ's ministry and crucifixion.

Assessment of *Spartacus* (1960)

Spartacus is one of the most famous gladiators of all time and chances are most people have at least heard his name. This fame can be credited in part to the 1960 film *Spartacus*, where we first see the iconic "I am Spartacus!" scene and learn the story of Spartacus himself and the slave uprising. Against all odds, Spartacus is known for revolting against his oppressors and dreaming of a world without slavery. After rallying others to his cause, he makes a stand against Rome and ultimately dies fighting for freedom. It is another notable example of an epic film set in the Roman Empire and earned several Academy Awards in 1961, including Best Supporting Actor and Production Design. At the 1961 Golden Globes it was awarded Best Picture (IMDb).

Spartacus was also a huge success in the box office. It earned \$30 million in 1960 (the-numbers.com), which adjusted for inflation using the calculator from Dollar Times would be equivalent to about \$256.3 million.

Slavery

With the plot of the film being focused on Spartacus' and his desire to be free from slavery, slavery is a huge theme in the film. In the opening scene Spartacus is seen working on a mountainside in Libya, where he has been chained up in the sun without food or water as punishment for challenging a Roman official. The treatment of slaves in this setting is brutal, though Spartacus doesn't spend much of his time here before being transported to a private gladiator training facility in Capua. Comparatively, the gladiators are treated much better in Capua than they were on the mountainside. The purpose of the opening scene is meant to create a powerful first impression about the physical horrors of slavery (Theodorakopoulos, 2010), but the gladiator school is nowhere near the same level of brutality. This is understandable and consistent with Roman history; if gladiators were expected to fight and win, their physical needs needed to be met so that they would be strong enough for combat.

One of the most important elements regarding the portrayal of slavery in this film is the heavy influence of Western values. Spartacus is portrayed as a hero for leading the slave uprising and for his dream of a world free of slavery, but according to historical sources, there is no evidence that Spartacus' goal was the elimination of slavery; anti-slavery values likely didn't exist at all (Ward, 2007). Reports tell of Spartacus crucifying a Roman general to demonstrate to his army what would happen to them if they didn't win and forcing captured Romans to fight as gladiators themselves (Ward, 2007). Had this version of Spartacus been shown in the film,

audiences likely would not have identified as much with him as a character or the message of the film. Instead, audiences want to cheer for a clear hero and villain, which *Spartacus* delivers. The portrayal of Spartacus as a hero overcoming opposition is furthered by the exposition that Spartacus was born into a family of slaves- this isn't historically accurate, because the real Spartacus was born as a Thracian elite who served in the Roman army and the more likely explanation for him becoming a slave is that he fell out of favor with the Romans (Sandvick, Whelan and Lembrecht).

Similar to the misrepresentation of Spartacus, Crassus, the film's primary antagonist, is portrayed as a greedy, power-hungry villain when he actually had a reputation for living modestly despite his great wealth and was known to be a man of purity (Ward, 2007). This is the perfect example of how cinema alters history to fit modern values- slavery is bad and portraying it as anything but would have been confusing for audiences. We are attracted to, epic, heroic individuals that fight for what is right against all odds (Shaw, 2001). This is exactly what *Spartacus* provides by giving us a hero that we want to see stomp the opposition and earn his freedom.

Tragically, Spartacus fails, and the film doesn't have a happy ending. Spartacus is crucified with the remainder of his army and never lives to see slavery abolished. The ending of the film is controversial and has many interpretations regarding the film's overall political message, but the ending dialogue and imagery leaves a heavy impression of Spartacus as a Christ-like figure, sacrificing himself fighting to save humanity and make the world a better place (Theodorakopoulos, 2010).

Gladiatorial Combat

The historical Spartacus never actually fought in an arena, a historical fact that is consistent in the film (Sandvick, Whelan and Lembrecht). But even though the film doesn't show what the arena might have looked like for these characters, it does hone in on a detail that other gladiator films ignore: the way that men were divided into different categories of fighting. This is demonstrated in the fight to the death that takes place in Capua, where Spartacus fights with the appropriate attire and weapons for a Thracian while his opponent fights as a *retarius* (armed with a trident and a fishnet) (Ward, 2007).

Few other films do a good job displaying this important element of gladiatorial combat and emphasizes the film's dedication to accuracy in its setting. Including these smaller details help to develop what it was like to be a gladiator, with its many dimensions. Gladiators were not random fighters- they were specifically and intentionally trained to perform in certain types of pre-established contests (Ward, 2007).

Even though we see him portrayed as a trained fighter, however, Spartacus doesn't get the chance to face his enemy in combat like Judah in Ben-Hur or Maximus in Gladiator, and as a result he never gets to prove himself as a true gladiator. This sets him apart from other protagonists in the genre, and some argue that because Spartacus was denied a true opportunity to defeat the antagonist the partial victory he speaks of towards the end of the film is not genuine (Theodorakopoulos, 2010).

Private Gladiator Schools

Gladiator training schools are presented very accurately in the film. Spartacus is brought to a private gladiator academy run by Batiatus, where the men are put through grueling trials and

drills to strengthen them. Within the academy, they are treated like property and kept on a tight leash but are physically provided for and not required to fight to the death (Ward, 2007). When Senator Crassus comes to visit the school and demands a fight to the death, even Batiatus, a gladiator owner reported to have been especially hard on his slaves (Shaw, 2001), is reluctant to comply.

In the same sequence, the male gladiators are also treated as sexual objects, with the women attending Crassus selecting which of them will fight based on appearance and requesting that they be nearly nude. These small details are consistent with history, as gladiators frequently were thought of as sex symbols in the eyes of Roman women (Hopkins and Beard, 2005). In adding these smaller details and creating a rounded, immersive environment, the film seeks to capture a range of ways in which gladiators were seen as investments and how both their owners and the crowds who watched them fight had little regard for their lives or their dignity. The same women who requested that the gladiators be stripped down for the fight were excited about the prospect of a fight to the death, demonstrating how Roman nobles hardly saw these men as real people. According to Theodorakopoulos, the sexual and sadistic undercurrents of these scenes are meant to show how the gladiators were deprived of their masculinity and humanity- both of which Spartacus tries to reclaim by refusing to be publicly intimate with Varinia, the slave girl who later becomes his wife, and by passionately declaring that he is not an animal (2010).

The portrayal of the gladiator school does an excellent job of cementing Spartacus' role as a hero and a moral man while demonizing the Romans so that when he initiates the revolution, the audience is already on his side.

Assessment of *Gladiator* (2000)

Gladiator, a 2000 film starring Russell Crowe, tells the story of Maximus, a Roman general living during the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus in the late Roman Empire. When Marcus Aurelius finds Commodus to be an unfit heir, he seeks to pass the leadership of Rome to Maximus. However, Commodus kills his father before he can make his intentions known and sentences Maximus and his family to death. After being captured in the wilderness, Maximus returns to Rome as a gladiator, where he wins the hearts of the “mob” and faces Commodus again.

A defining moment in Russel Crowe’s career, *Gladiator* won five Academy Awards in the 2001 season including Best Actor and Best Picture (IMDb). While not a smash hit like *Ben-Hur*, it was also very successful in the box office, earning \$311 million adjusted for inflation (Box Office Mojo).

There are several aspects that set *Gladiator* apart from the two films previously discussed. Most significantly and most obviously, *Gladiator* is considered a modern film in comparison to *Ben-Hur* and *Spartacus*. This results in a wide variety of visual differences: sharp editing and frequent close-ups make it feel more like an action drama than a historical epic (Theodorakopoulos, 2010). Subtle costume differences, such as lowering the hem of the men’s tunics and bordering the senators’ togas in black rather than purple also make it look more modern (Theodorakopoulos, 2010). Unlike *Spartacus* and *Ben-Hur*, *Gladiator* is not concerned with the politics of slavery and spends most of its time telling the story of a single character, whose goal is simply to be reunited with his wife and son (Theodorakopoulos, 2010).

Gladiators

Given the title of the film, it comes as no surprise that *Gladiator* has a heavy focus on gladiators and gladiatorial combat. The feature follows one man's journey in the gladiator industry, and while the portrayal is simple and straightforward, it gets some important elements across, most notably how the Roman people viewed gladiators and the games. They were obviously at a social disadvantage, lacking Roman citizenship and generally placed in the same social class as prostitutes and actors (Hopkins and Beard, 2005). Many were also slaves. However, they were also celebrities (Hopkins and Beard, 2005), an important element captured in the film when Maximus is advised to "win the crowd." This is exactly what Maximus does in the film by overcoming the odds, causing the Roman people to favor him even above their own emperor.

Some aspects of the gladiator life that the film fails to adequately represent is the distinct roles men were sorted into- some would be designated challengers, equestrians, net fighters, and so forth (Ward, 2005). This also would have affected the attire worn by gladiators, none of which is accurate in the film but has nonetheless shaped how we picture gladiators today (Ward, 2005). Fights to the death were also not as common as the film would lead us to believe, with many gladiators dying at old ages leaving behind wives and children (Hopkins and Beard, 2005). But as previously mentioned, *Gladiator's* intention is to capture the story of Maximus and communicate what his journey could have looked like if he was a historical figure. Every gladiator's story was different.

The Emperor in the Arena

A unique feature in the film takes place in the climax, where Commodus himself steps in to fight against Maximus. There were regulations against nobles and senators entering the arena as gladiators (Hopkins and Beard, 2005), but Commodus is a notable exception. Commodus succeeded his father as the emperor and had a morbid fascination with violence and the games that took place in the Colosseum, eventually training himself to partake in the games himself- an enormous scandal in the Roman world (Ward, 2005). The film doesn't quite capture how scandalous this would have been, but it is an impressive moment that makes an impact upon viewers and highlights the depth of Commodus' insanity. Gladiators could be either professionals or slaves (Potter, 2012), but the movie tries to present gladiators as men who don't want to be there. Commodus stepping out into the arena emphasizes his morbid obsession with the games and how shocking it would have been to see the emperor fight; however, the film also portrays how the emperor would have had the power to unfairly rig the games in his favor, which he does by injuring Maximus prior to their battle. Emperor Commodus enjoyed a show that made himself appear powerful so this plot twist could have been inspired by true facts; Commodus was known to abuse the disabled during his bouts in the arena (Potter, 2005). In one instance, he reenacted Hercules' defeat of the Earthborn by dressing up as Hercules and attacking defenseless, crippled men in the arena (Potter, 2005). This level of cruelty went too far, even by Roman standards (Altaweel, Sandvick and Lembrecht), and contributed to his unpopularity with the people and the senate.

The historical facts surrounding Emperor Commodus and his passion for the games is fascinating, to the point that the *Gladiator* version almost seems tame in comparison to the real

thing. Commodus is responsible for the death of his sister Lucilla (Cavallini, 2009) and he was obsessed with being compared to Hercules both as a hunter and as a warrior (Potter, 2005). It's possible he killed 100 lions in the course of one day and even held gladiator contests fought completely in the nude (Altaweel, Sandvick and Lembrecht). In comparison, the Commodus portrayed in *Gladiator* is probably preferable to the historical figure.

Gladiator also spends a lot of time emphasizing the grandeur of the Colosseum itself- and much of it is historically accurate. The emperor would have had a separate section for viewing the games (Hopkins and Beard, 2005), and the Colosseum was riddled with trap doors that would release exotic wild animals like the tiger featured in the film (Miller, 2015). It is likely that some of the later productions were even more elaborate than the ones featured in the film- at times, the arena would even be flooded with water for mock naval battles (Auguet, 1972). Consistent with the film's portrayal, historical reenactments were often part of the program, as well as mythological narratives with real lives at stake (Auguet, 1972).

Recent Films Featuring Roman Gladiators

***Pompeii* (2014)**

Pompeii is one of the less successful films dealing with ancient Rome, but is included because it offers more insight into the romantic lives of gladiators. It tells the story of Milo, a gladiator, and Cassia, a wealthy merchant's daughter with whom he falls in love. Their forbidden romance ends tragically when, during a gladiator battle, Mount Vesuvius erupts and engulfs the city with ash.

Slavery and the trials of being a gladiator are not emphasized in this film nearly as much as the social differences between Milo and Cassia that keep them apart. Although gladiators were

allowed to marry and many had wives and children, Roman citizens were forbidden from marrying prostitutes, actors, and gladiators (Hersch, 2010), making Milo and Cassia's union impossible. Marriage for love was uncommon, especially in the upper class where weddings were typically arranged by the father, who had an enormous amount of power over his family (Hersch, 2010). This is seen in the film when Cassia is betrothed against her will to a powerful senator.

As a modern film, *Pompeii* uses the ever-popular forbidden romance formula to appeal to today's audience, set against the backdrop of Rome and the tragedy of Pompeii. It doesn't have much to say about historical Roman culture apart from the general desire of the enslaved gladiators to be freed and arranged marriage, but it is an entertaining film that helped to visualize the similar romantic story in my creative project.

***Ben-Hur* (2016)**

There have been many retellings of *Ben-Hur* since the publication of the original novel in 1880. It is a timeless story that remains significant even in the modern era. The 2016 remake of *Ben-Hur* was not as popular or as acclaimed as the 1959 version discussed previously and due to its shorter runtime, has many narrative differences. However, the film does include and reinforce many of the same themes as in the 1959 version.

One of the major differences in the 2016 film is the absence of the Roman consul that adopts Judah into his family and trains him as a charioteer. This omission speeds Judah's character development up by several years and somewhat undermines the depth of his desire for vengeance on Messala; instead of allowing his rage to simmer for years, Judah is presented with the opportunity to seek revenge as soon as he is free from the galleys. This also means that the

concept of adoption and manumission is not present in this film. The quick passage of time also makes the film feel like less of an “epic” in the traditional sense of the genre.

The other significant plot change is the survival of Messala. After Judah wins in the chariot race Messala is injured, but he pulls through unlike the 1959 version of the character. While Judah is not satisfied with his victory in either version and both hint at Christ and forgiveness being the true answer, Messala’s survival offers a chance for the audience to see how far Judah’s development has come when they reconcile.

Script Writing Procedure

In my original film script, I hope to tell my own gladiator story including some of the same elements I’ve observed in the most popular films dealing with gladiators and slavery in ancient Rome. Specifically, I wish to examine gladiator training in private schools and enterprises as featured in *Spartacus*. My story centers around a young man named Raenor, a former smuggler sold to a private gladiator trainer similar to the character of Batiatus, called Ivan in my story. Ivan runs a private *ludus* where he trains gladiators to earn him fame and fortune. The film begins with Raenor being brought in and selected by Ivan to be his champion, trained to be taken to the Roman Colosseum. Similar to the *Spartacus* film, the gladiators are treated brutally, but not so much that they are unable to maintain certain standards of health. Like Batiatus, Ivan is protective of his gladiators and unwilling to lose his investments by having them fight to the death; although, if he is required to provide such a display for a Roman consul he would certainly crumble under the same pressures. To demonstrate the inspiration taken from the portrayal of gladiatorial schools in *Spartacus*, I have written a small scene showing Ivan’s *ludus* and how the gladiators train there. Similar to how Spartacus demonstrated Western values that

made him the hero, Raenor is painted as the hero in my film while Ivan is the cruel slave master. Audiences will cheer for Raenor and hope that he is set free.

Isadora, a young slave girl in Ivan's household, will be partially inspired by Varinia, the slave who becomes the wife of Spartacus. In *Spartacus*, slave girls were seen as sexual objects and for Isa it will be similar, but Raenor and Ivan's daughter, Camilla, see her as something much more.

A second crucial aspect of my story will be the Roman Colosseum, where Raenor, Ivan, and the family will travel for the climax of the film. Here, I plan to take more inspiration from *Gladiator*, specifically the measures Maximus takes to win the crowds to his side. No nobles or emperors will fight with Raenor, but I plan to use many of the same techniques to demonstrate that what's happening in the arena is not going Ivan's way. One way I hope to accomplish this is by having Raenor participate in a historical reenactment that does not resolve as intended; a tactic also used in *Pompeii*. *Gladiator* also featured many of the special effects used in the Colosseum, but so far no film has shown the naval battles- epic spectacles in which the Colosseum would be filled with water (Hopkins and Beard, 2005). Because of Raenor's past as a pirate, I feel this kind of reenactment would be appropriate and have included this scene as well.

Slavery will also be a recurring theme in the film, especially in the cases of Castor and Isa, two slaves within Ivan's household longing to be set free. Castor is somewhat of an antihero, a young man hardened by oppression and longing to be accepted into Ivan's family. Castor's story draws on *Ben-Hur*: a young man betrayed and condemned to a life of slavery, out for vengeance no matter the cost. In the end, it is Castor who will confront Ivan and go through the similar struggle of vengeance vs. forgiveness.

The final element present in my film is forbidden romance between a gladiator and an affluent young woman, like the romance in *Pompeii*.

Script Treatment

Scene 1: Gladiator Training

Ivan has just purchased a new selection of slaves from a dealer and transported them back to his home, where he runs a gladiator school. Ivan assesses them one by one, digging into their pasts. He is especially intrigued by Raenor and threatens him, slapping him a couple times to get a rise, but Raenor maintains his composure impressively.

Intrigued, Ivan orders the men to be sent back to their cells while Raenor is outfitted for battle, calling forth his current champion. He means to see if Raenor is a stronger fighter, or if he's all talk.

Meanwhile, Camilla is watching the training with great interest. Raenor takes notice of her but does not visibly react. Titania eventually comes and leads Camilla away, telling her that the school is no place for a young woman.

Scene 2: Isadora

The night after Raenor's victory in the local tournament, Atticus, the gladiator trainer leads Isa down to the cells where the gladiators are kept, directly to Raenor's cell. Atticus informs Raenor that his performance is being rewarded with the company of a woman and Isa is to spend the night with him. The slave girl is shoved inside the cell, the door is locked behind her, and Atticus departs.

At first, there is an awkward silence between Isa and Raenor. Finally, Raenor announces that he has no intentions of forcing himself upon her- and he would prefer if she didn't do the same. There's some playful banter between the two, but they realize that they're stuck in the cell together for the night so they might as well get to know one another. They tell each other of their pasts and Isa brings up her friendship with Camilla.

As the conversation dwindles, Raenor offers Isa his bed since she has been deprived of her own, and he sleeps on the ground until morning, when Atticus comes to fetch Isa and return her to her regular duties.

Scene 3: Colosseum Naval Battle

In the climax of the film, Raenor will be involved in a large-scale naval battle in the Colosseum, meant to be a reenactment of the recent Roman crackdown on pirates and smugglers. Because of Raenor's history, he is selected to be part of this battle, much to Ivan's disdain. Two ships sit in the arena, and they begin to float as the water flows in. Camilla, Titania, and Ivan sit together in a section of the Colosseum reserved for nobles.

The ships are populated with two separate teams- the pirates, which are made up of gladiator slaves including Raenor, and the Roman navy made up of trained Roman soldiers. The fight is rigged, with the pirates being ill-equipped and the Romans having more sophisticated weapons and higher numbers. Ivan is furious.

Raenor immediately realizes that he and the other gladiators will have to be creative to get out of this situation alive. Raenor assumes leadership, easily falling into his previous role. He divides the men into teams and assigns them to certain sections of the boat. It's working, but he's ultimately thrown overboard by one of the soldiers. His survival is uncertain.

Scene 4: Castor Confronts Ivan

Castor realizes his mother is dying; it's the last straw, and he can't remain silent any longer. As usual, he finds Ivan near the arena watching the gladiators train under the instruction of Atticus. He confronts Ivan, demanding that he get a doctor for his mother. Ivan is indignant, his rank insulted by being confronted in such a manner, but Castor is persistent. He reminds Ivan, in full earshot of the entire household, that he is Ivan's son, his flesh and blood to whom he has a responsibility. He demands that Ivan care properly for his mother or else set them free. Ivan is silent at first, but then he calmly denies any relation and declares that Castor should be killed for the claims he's made.

Finally done with his desire for vengeance, Castor wants to see his mother healed. He offers his life in exchange for his mother's treatment and freedom. Ivan is ready to make the deal when Camilla speaks up, wanting to know if it is true. Ivan denies it again but when Camilla sees the resemblance, she acknowledges him as her brother. The validation is almost too much for Castor to bear and he embraces Camilla as brother and sister.

Scene 5: Raenor and Camilla

After returning home, Castor and Isa help Camilla meet Raenor in secret. Camilla promises to plead with her father for his freedom, but since he was not victorious at the Colosseum Raenor doesn't think it's of any use. With Camilla recently becoming betrothed to the son of a senator while in Rome, their romance also seems doomed.

Together, they imagine what their life could have been like if they were to elope together. Raenor thinks it to be impossible and hates the idea of one or both being killed for their stupidity. Just as they're both about to resign to their fate and give up on their relationship, Isa

rushes to the cell and informs them that something has happened to Ivan and Camilla needs to come right away. They leave the door unlocked, giving Raenor an opportunity to escape.

EXT. TRAINING COURTYARD - DAY

ATTICUS, a middle-aged gladiator trainer, leads six new GLADIATORS of varying physical fitness into the courtyard. All six are CHAINED TOGETHER.

One of the gladiators is RAENOR, a muscular man in his late twenties with long hair and many tattoos.

Ivan stands on the balcony, observing as Atticus forms the men into a straight line. Slowly, he descends to the arena.

IVAN

Is this truly the best we could afford, Atticus?

ATTICUS

They're all criminals, Master Ivan-skilled in one way or another.

IVAN

Then why were they caught?

On the balcony, Camilla comes to watch. Raenor notices her, glancing up and allowing his composure to lapse.

Ivan notices and follows his gaze to Camilla before turning back, standing directly in front of the gladiator.

Ivan SLAPS him.

IVAN (CONT'D)

You dare to lay eyes on my daughter, slave?

Raenor FLINCHES, but bounces back quickly.

RAENOR

I am no slave. I will look where I please.

Ivan SLAPS him again.

IVAN

Atticus?

ATTICUS

Raenor. A pirate from Sicily.

RAENOR

Not a pirate. A smuggler.

IVAN

Hold your tongue!

Raenor's gaze is DEADLY, but Ivan isn't intimidated.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Return them to their cells and prepare them for training. All but this one.

ATTICUS

Master?

IVAN

(to Raenor)

Are you trained with a blade?

RAENOR

I could gut you like a pig.

Ivan stares Raenor down, then SMILES.

IVAN

Send for my champion. We shall see whether or not there's merit to the pirate's claims. Have him outfitted for head to head combat.

ATTICUS

Yes, sir.

Atticus leads the gladiators back inside. On the balcony, Titania approaches Camilla. Isa is at her side.

TITANIA

Come, Camilla. The training grounds are no place for you.

CAMILLA

But one of the new ones is going to fight father's champion! He's very handsome.

TITANIA

Camilla. I will not ask again.

Camilla groans and follows after her mother, falling into step alongside Isa. Before leaving, she casts one more glance at the training grounds, where Ivan is waiting.

INT. RAENOR'S CELL - NIGHT

Raenor sits with his back against the wall, staring into space. The scrape across his chest has been patched up with linen and he appears clean, though not rested.

He looks up, hearing FOOTSTEPS in the hall.

Atticus suddenly appears at the door alongside Isadora, fumbling with his KEYS to unlock the door. Isa is troubled.

RAENOR
What's going on?

Atticus grins and opens the cell gate, **SHOVING** Isa inside before **SLAMMING** the gate behind her.

ATTICUS
Your reward.

RAENOR
Reward?

Raenor makes uncertain eye contact with Isa.

ATTICUS
Come now, smuggler. Even you aren't above desiring the company of a woman. I'll be back for her in the morning...she's the mistress's handmaiden, so be gentle.
(to Isa)
Behave yourself, girl.

After **LOCKING** the cell, Atticus marches off and leaves the two in **UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCE**.

Raenor moves over, making room for her on the small bed.

RAENOR
You can sit down.

ISA
I'd rather not.

RAENOR
Relax.

Raenor stands and moves to the other side of the cell, sliding down to sit on the floor.

RAENOR (CONT'D)
I'm not going to touch you.

Isa looks at him in surprise.

ISA
You're not?

RAENOR
No. Sit.

Reluctantly, Isa sits down.

ISA
You're not like the other gladiators.

RAENOR
(grins)
Thank you.

Isa rolls her eyes.

ISA
Don't let it go to your head.

Silence.

RAENOR
You're Camilla's handmaiden? I've
seen you with her.

ISA
Had your eye on Camilla, have you?

RAENOR
She stands out. She's kind.

ISA
She is.

Isadora sighs and leans her head back against the wall.

ISA (CONT'D)
I'm not Camilla's handmaiden, I'm
Titania's. Camilla just likes to
steal me away when she can. I'm not
complaining...she's the kindest of
all of them. How she's related to
Ivan and Titania, I'll never know.

Silence.

ISA (CONT'D)
I've seen you looking at her.

Raenor SMIRKS and glances away, shaking his head.

RAENOR
I beg your pardon, but I've seen
you looking at her.

Isa BLUSHES.

ISA
You're very observant.

RAENOR
It's the only reason I've lived
this long.

ISA
Hm, yes. They call you the pirate.

RAENOR
Smuggler. And yes, I was.

Isa sighs dreamily.

ISA
What's it like? Beyond Rome.

RAENOR
Big...free. You've never been
outside of Rome?

Isa shakes her head NO, then HESITATES.

ISA
Well, yes. I was born in Numidia.
My parents and I were taken as
prisoners of war when the legions
came. I was three.

RAENOR
Where are your parents now?

ISA
My mother died, ten years ago. My
father was sold to a different
master- I don't know where he is.
If he's still alive.

RAENOR
...I'm sorry.

Isa shakes her head.

ISA
Save your pity. What about you,
where are your parents?

RAENOR
...I don't know.
(pause)
My mother would drop dead if she
saw me now.

Isa smiles.

ISA
You fought well today. You might
even stand a chance in the Rome.

RAENOR
Ivan has promised me freedom. If I
win at the Colosseum.

Isa sits up straighter.

ISA
You believe him?

RAENOR
What choice do I have?

ISA
Mark my words, Raenor, that man
will never set you free. Never.
(pause)
You must be exhausted. Here.

Isa stands and offers Raenor his bed back. Raenor shakes his head, declining.

RAENOR
You're my guest. I insist.

ISA
Oh, he's a gentleman?

Raenor shakes his head and lays down on the floor, staring up at the ceiling.

RAENOR
I'm hardly a gentleman. But you're
here against your will- I won't
have you sleep on the ground.

Quietly, Isa settles into bed and looks up at the ceiling.

ISA
Raenor? Thank you.

EXT. COLOSSEUM ARENA - DAY

The Colosseum is packed with ROMAN CITIZENS, loudly cheering and conversing.

Ivan, Titania and Camilla sit above the crowd in a private section with several other NOBLES and WEALTHY CITIZENS. Camilla is visibly anxious, and Ivan is angry.

In the center of the dry arena are two SHIPS.

IVAN
This is an insult. They are making
a mockery of us.

TITANIA
Your champion will be fine,
dearest. He's only participating
because he-

IVAN

He's a pirate, I know! But
champions shouldn't fight in these
spectacles- it'll be a massacre.

Worried, Camilla looks over to her father.

CAMILLA

A massacre?

Pipes in the Colosseum open and it begins to FLOOD with
rushing water. The crowd CHEERS loudly as the ships slowly
begin to rise.

Camilla is amazed.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

They mean to fight on the ships?

TITANIA

Yes, the Romans against the
pirates.

CAMILLA

And Raenor is a...?

IVAN

Pirate.

Camilla takes a deep breath and nods, understanding.

When the ships are afloat, hatches open and TWO SETS OF
FIGHTERS climb out: The PIRATES, poorly-equipped gladiators
with little to no armor, and the ROMANS, trained soldiers
with weapons and heavy protection.

The crowd's energy spikes.

Raenor and Felix are among the pirates. He looks around and
takes in the situation, immediately recognizing the danger.

RAENOR

They mean to murder us.

He's right. The Roman soldiers begin to fire short-range
cannons at the other ship and shoot with bows and arrows,
killing several gladiators instantly.

Felix and Raenor take cover.

FELIX

What are we going to do?

RAENOR

Stay alive. I have a plan.

Raenor gives up his cover and runs towards the panicking gladiators. Cannons rock the ship and arrows are fired.

RAENOR (CONT'D)

I need three men on the deck to man the cannons. We have to fire back!

GLADIATOR #1

They'll kill us!

RAENOR

They will if we don't fight! One team take the starboard side. Split up, keep moving. Without bows our only option is to sink the ship or get in range.

FELIX

What does it matter if the ship is damaged? It's an arena!

RAENOR

It will still weaken their attack. Help me!

Raenor spots several loose WOODEN PLANKS on the ship. He picks one up and Felix grabs another.

On the balcony, Camilla and Ivan are increasingly anxious, leaning forward. From their seats, they can see Raenor.

CAMILLA

He's mobilizing them.

IVAN

...I see.

The gladiators fire cannons at the other ship, blowing off bits of wood until both ships are considerably damaged.

Meanwhile, archers are still taking gladiators down while Raenor and Felix work to create a bridge from their ship to the other.

RAENOR

Hold it down.

FELIX

They'll shoot you before you can cross!

RAENOR

They won't. Hold it steady.

Felix holds the plank still and Raenor, armed with a SPEAR, begins to run across, dodging arrows as a soldier races towards the other end of the bridge.

An arrow PIERCES RAENOR'S ARM, but he TEARS IT OUT and keeps going until he's at the other side.

Raenor KILLS the Roman who meant to stop him and begins attacking, taking out as many archers as possible. It's going well until he's confronted with a SWARM of soldiers.

ROMAN SOLDIER

Not today, pirate.

Raenor fights back valiantly and succeeds in injuring several soldiers. He kills a few, but there are too many. He's pushed to the ledge of the ship and forcefully THROWN OVERBOARD.

CAMILLA (O.C.)

Raenor!

Raenor COLLIDES with the water.

EXT. TRAINING COURTYARD - DAY

Ivan stands above the courtyard, watching a NEW GROUP OF GLADIATORS train with Atticus. His face is twisted in displeasure as he sips on a GOBLET OF WINE.

Castor storms into the training grounds, making a beeline for Ivan. Before Ivan realizes what's happening, Castor comes face to face with him.

CASTOR

Call a physician.

Ivan stares Castor down unpleasantly, shocked at the slave's bold demand.

IVAN

...How dare you make demands of me, boy. Away with you!

CASTOR

No. My mother is dying- call a physican. Now.

Ivan HUFFS.

IVAN

Your mother is a slave. I could replace her with-

Castor SMACKS the goblet from Ivan's hand, causing wine to splash everywhere.

The gladiator training stops suddenly as everyone turns to watch the confrontation.

Ivan's face turns red with RAGE.

IVAN (CONT'D)

You bastard! How dare you speak to your master that way- twenty lashes ought to teach you a-

CASTOR

Bastard? That's right, I'm a bastard. You know that all too well, don't you?

IVAN

Watch your tongue, boy. You know nothing of what you speak.

CASTOR

I know everything! I know you're my father, I know you abandoned my mother, I know how you manipulated her and condemned us! Now she's dying, she needs medicine, and you can't be bothered to lift a finger to help her!

Other SLAVES have begun to gather around, keeping a safe distance.

IVAN

I should have you killed for that.

CASTOR

Then kill me. But save her, please. She loved you, you know she did! And you loved her.

Ivan LUNGES at Castor, knocking him to the ground and PUNCHING him. Castor PUNCHES BACK.

Titania and Camilla push through the slaves.

TITANIA

Ivan!

Titania reaches for Ivan, pulling him off of Castor. Camilla tries to drag Castor away.

TITANIA (CONT'D)

My darling, what's going on?

Titania looks up and realizes Castor was the one fighting back. Her eyes widen in understanding.

Confused, Camilla looks back and forth between them all as Castor moves aside, stumbling back to his feet.

CAMILLA
What's happening?

CASTOR
Your father is unwilling to
acknowledge his own flesh and
blood.

CAMILLA
What? I don't understand.

Camilla looks at Titania, then at Ivan.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)
Father?

IVAN
He's a slave, Camilla. He'll say
anything to get what he wants.

TITANIA
Go inside, Camilla.

Atticus and the other TRAINERS have cleared out the arena and moved to the balcony, taking hold of Castor and roughly holding his arms behind his back.

CAMILLA
Wait!

Camilla stands and faces Castor, looking into his eyes.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)
You're my brother?

Castor NODS.

CASTOR
Half-brother. I know you won't
believe me, but-

CAMILLA
I believe you.

CASTOR
...What?

Ivan stumbles forward and wipes blood from his face onto his white toga.

IVAN
How many lashes will it take to
kill you, boy? Fifty? A hundred?

Camilla steps between Ivan and Castor.

CAMILLA

No!

Ivan SHOVES her aside.

IVAN

Stay out of this, Camilla. He's lying.

CAMILLA

No. He's not. Unhand him!

The men holding back Castor exchange uncertain glances.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

I said unhand him!

Camilla reaches forward and tears Castor from their grasp.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

Father. You would not abandon your own son.

IVAN

Away from him or I'll cast you out too!

CAMILLA

Fail to help him and I'll tell the entire city what you and Mother have done!

Ivan and Titania freeze.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

You think I didn't know. That I'm just a stupid, silly girl. But I see things. I know you conspired to murder Senator Titus, I know you-

IVAN

Silence, Camilla!

Camilla turns to Castor and hugs him.

CAMILLA

I think I always knew you were my brother.

At first Castor is stiff, but when he realizes that Titania and Ivan aren't going to do anything about it, he relaxes and hugs her back tightly.

INT. RAENOR'S CELL - NIGHT

Raenor sits on his bed, still wounded from his defeat at the Colosseum. Everything is QUIET until he hears quiet FOOTSTEPS down the hall.

Castor and Isa appear at the door, with Camilla between them. Raenor STANDS immediately and approaches them, grasping Camilla's hands through the bars.

RAENOR
Camilla. Why are you here?

Camilla smiles.

CAMILLA
You know why.

Castor gently pushes Camilla aside and presents the KEYS.

CASTOR
Out of the way, lovebirds.

Castor unlocks the door and Camilla steps inside. Raenor captures her in a passionate EMBRACE.

ISA
Remember what we said. Keep quiet,
lock the gate when you leave.

Castor passes the key to Camilla and she nods.

CAMILLA
Thank you.

RAENOR
Wait-

Castor and Isa don't listen, departing down the hall.

RAENOR (CONT'D)
Why did you come? It's not safe.

CAMILLA
Castor has some influence now, and
Isa created a diversion for the
guards.

RAENOR
A diversion?

CAMILLA
Food and wine.

Raenor laughs and holds Camilla close.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

How are you?

She pulls away and examines his wounds.

RAENOR

Better. And you?

CAMILLA

What do you mean?

Raenor gives her a meaningful look and Camilla sighs.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

I dare not antagonize my father more by refusing to marry- I fear he'll disown me. But I'm going to request your freedom.

RAENOR

My freedom was conditional, remember? I failed.

CAMILLA

You can't spend the rest of your life in a cage. I won't allow it.

Raenor leans forward and KISSES her. Camilla deepens the kiss but holds him too tight, causing Raenor to GASP and jerk away. Camilla helps him to the bed and they sit down, Raenor clutching his side.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. Let me look.

She attempts to pry his hand off the wound.

RAENOR

No. Just...just stay a while.

Camilla nods and settles in, leaning her head on Raenor's shoulder.

CAMILLA

Do you think it ever would have worked between us?

RAENOR

Maybe in another life.

Camilla smiles and sits up.

CAMILLA

Castor has a key. What's stopping us from running away? We could both be free, just think of it.

RAENOR
Camilla, don't.

CAMILLA
Why not? I know you don't have any
gold, I'm okay with it.

Raenor chuckles.

RAENOR
How very charitable. But if we were
caught, I would be killed. You
would be disgraced. And with all
your father's resources, we'd never
make it out of Rome.

Camilla is solemn, realizing that he's right.

CAMILLA
...I love you anyways.

RAENOR
I love you, too.

They sit in silence for several moments, sitting up only when
they hear FOOTSTEPS again.

Isa appears at the gate.

ISA
Camilla! Something's happened. It's
your father.

Camilla sits up, eyes wide. She glances at Raenor, who nods.

RAENOR
Go.

Camilla dashes out of the cell with Isa. They run off,
leaving the cell UNLOCKED.

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