



“A Hero Will Endure”

Essays at the Twentieth Anniversary of *Gladiator*

Edited by

Rachel L. Carazo

St. Thomas University

Series in Cinema and Culture



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Acknowledgments

I thank my family – and especially my parents – for accepting my *Gladiator* fandom and supporting it for over twenty years. While you all enjoyed the film each time that you watched it, I am still grateful that you embraced the tradition of watching it twice a year, finding your own sense of joy in it.

I extend my gratitude to all my history, writing, and pop cultural professors over the many years that I have been in college. I improved my writing and editing skills through the work that I did in your classes, and I hope to successfully combine my knowledge in this volume as well as in future volumes.

I also thank my high school advisor. I always liked history, and you permitted me to take the senior-level World History class when I was a sophomore. Your faith and encouragement gave me the confidence to major in history later on.

I appreciate the role that colleague and fellow contributor, Stefano Rozzoni, played in the development of this collection. Not only did you assist with translations, but you also offered constructive feedback on my own chapter as well as on the introduction, for it is always easier to edit other writers' works than one's own.

Thanks to my representatives at Vernon Press. This volume faced challenges from the pandemic most of all. Yet your support of the project has remained invaluable.

Last and not least, I thank all the cast and crew involved with *Gladiator*. The film resonated with so many people because you all worked so diligently at your crafts. The film served as an inspiration for this particular volume in terms of subject matter, but many of the film's maxims and themes will continue to inspire my future projects.

Virtūs et Honos – “Strength and Honor”

Introduction: On Comets, Cakes, and Toys – Marking '*Gladiator* Days' for (More than) Two Decades

Rachel L. Carazo
St. Thomas University

Reflections on May 5, 2020: *Gladiator's* Twentieth Anniversary

Film anniversaries often come and go without much fanfare. However, in May 2020, few major news outlets and media platforms forgot that it was the twentieth anniversary of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*. *Variety* provided an online interview of Arthur Max, *Gladiator's* production designer, who reviewed the strategies that he, Scott, and their team members used to create the Colosseum, the Zucchabar arena, and the imperial palace.¹ *People* offered a focus on Crowe's activities preceding the anniversary, including his appearance in Rome with Connie Nielsen for the eighteenth anniversary as well as Crowe's sale of his movie-memorabilia, which contained

the death armor worn by Crowe in *Gladiator*, which was sold for \$125,000. Other pieces from the movie also earned big bucks, including an aluminum prop sword and spare blade combo (\$70,000), a Roman chariot replica (\$65,000), a pair of black leather wrist cuffs (\$32,000), a wooden training sword (\$20,000) [sic], and two life-size prop horses (\$5,500 each).²

Even Chris Nashawaty (with *Esquire*) commented that "I'd argue that it's one of the rare popular blockbusters of the past 20 years that also happens to be

¹ Jazz Tangcay, "Gladiator's 20th Anniversary: Production Designer Recalls Recreating Ancient Rome," *Variety.com*, May 7, 2020, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://variety.com/2020/artisans/production/ridley-scott-gladiator-production-design-1234599922/>.

² Ale Russian, "Russell Crowe Celebrates *Gladiator's* 20th Anniversary: 'Strength and Honour'," May 5, 2020, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://people.com/movies/russell-crowe-gladiator-20-anniversary/>.

capital-A Art”, thus standing against critics of “hokey” anniversary spiels for films and television series.³

Moreover, the actors and production team involved with the film could not overlook the occasion either. On May 4, 2020, Russell Crowe’s official Twitter account posted, “20 years ago today *Gladiator* was released in cinemas in the United States...Strength and Honour...”⁴ Then, a year later, Crowe’s account retweeted a post from Films and Stuffz that reminded social media users of the film’s accomplishments on its twenty-first anniversary. It reads, “Directed by Ridley Scott, the film made \$457 million in the box office worldwide. Winner – Best Picture, Actor, Costume Design, Sound and VFX out of 12 noms. Winner – 4 BAFTA/14 noms. Winner – 2 Golden Globes/5 noms.”⁵ From such an enthusiastic reminder on an ‘off-year’ when it comes to noteworthy anniversaries, *Gladiator*’s success and continuing popularity still deserve mentions.

So far, then, it is evident how *Gladiator* continues to “endure,” as the poster tagline has posited about its hero since 2000. Images, dialogue, and symbols from the film have, in fact, spread into new forms of media – music, memes, and toys – all of which have allowed it to survive past its second decade. And the media with which Crowe and many other actors and fans celebrated this anniversary – social media – has emerged as one of the biggest tools that will facilitate *Gladiator*’s continued relevance. Surely, the film serves as a primary source that can be enjoyed, evaluated, and preserved over time. Yet its appearance in different media as well as its growing significance as an area of academic study have ensured that *Gladiator* will become more than just a film in the global imagination: it will serve as a critical cultural lens through which important social issues can be considered and evaluated. This volume therefore attempts to add to this scholarly value and emphasize the endless potentials of the film as a critical cultural perspective. Moreover, as the chapters of this volume – as well as a meme study⁶ that will be published separately, albeit in conjunction with this edited collection – demonstrate, it is primarily

³ Chris Nashawaty, “Sorry, Haters: *Gladiator* Is One of the Greatest Best Picture Winners Since 2000,” *Esquire.com*, May 8, 2020, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/movies/a32406856/gladiator-movie-ridley-scott-20th-anniversary-essay/>.

⁴ “Russell Crowe,” Twitter, May 4, 2020, accessed August 10, 2021, <https://twitter.com/russellcrowe/>.

⁵ “Russell Crowe,” Twitter.

⁶ Rachel L. Carazo and Stefano Rozzoni, “At My Signal, Unleash Memes”: A Transdisciplinary Study on Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* through “Are you not entertained” Memes (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2023).

through pop cultural and digital media outlets that *Gladiator* is likely to endure as it moves toward its thirtieth anniversary and beyond.

A Fandom Leading toward Scholarship: The Personal Narrative

While I am aware that academic collections do not generally include a personal narrative, this one does for two specific reasons. First, without my background as a *Gladiator* fan, it is unlikely that the specific trajectories in this collection would have been pursued. Second, the contemporary and pop cultural foci that underline the chapters reveal a ‘mixing’ of personal and scholarly perspectives through many contexts, for, in reality, cultural studies about films, fandoms, and perceptions of heroism cannot easily untangle these interrelationships. As a result, the beginnings of this collection can, in fact, be attributed to my own story, which not only spans a fandom that has endured for over twenty years, but which also comprises over two decades of university studies⁷ and research concerning (pop) culture and history,⁸ making the experiences inseparable in many ways.

Thus, the background of this edited collection begins with the story of a teenage moviegoer whose long-term loyalty to one film caused her parents to consider transforming the *Gladiator* poster’s maxim “A Hero will Rise” into “A Fandom will Rise.”

Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* was released on May 5, 2000. However, because I was in high school, Fridays were not the best day of the week for my family and me to go to the theater. Yet before going to school that day, I was standing in their room and trying, quite ineffectively, to contain my exuberance over the film’s opening day as news reports and a constant appearance of television trailers emphasized its theatrical release. My parents knew that I loved historical films, and nothing with a classical subject could be kept from me for long. I had been scouring the printed television guides in the Sunday newspaper for months, and for my efforts, I had been able to watch *Julius Caesar* (1953), *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), and *Cleopatra* (1963) for the first time.

⁷ I have completed undergraduate degrees in History (2007), French (2011), English (2011), and Sport Management (2022). Attached to these are minors in German, Italian, Latin, Francophone and Creole Ethnic Studies, and Philosophy. I have also completed a graduate degree in English (M.A., 2017). I am currently earning an undergraduate degree in Asian Studies and graduate degrees in Library and Information Science, and Ancient Worlds.

⁸ I have published chapters on *Downton Abbey*, *Holes*, *Water for Elephants*, *Life of Pi*, Tui T. Sutherland’s *The Lost Heir* (a dragon story), sea monsters in literature and film, and memes, among other topics.

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honorable mention in a writing contest for *Bottom Shelf Whiskey* magazine. More of her writing can be found at: ashleyweaverauthor.com.

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