

MODERN RETELLINGS OF ANCIENT MYTHS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FILMS *GLADIATOR* (2000) AND *GLADIATOR 2* (2024)

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Abstract

Ridley Scott's Gladiator (2000) is a cinematic masterpiece that has captivated audiences worldwide. The film, which takes place in ancient Rome, narrates the tale of Maximus, a gallant Roman general who is deceived and made into a gladiator. The film's epic scale, stunning visuals, and compelling performances have solidified its place in cinematic history. The upcoming Gladiator 2 (2024) promises to continue the legacy of its predecessor. This comparative analysis delves into the mythological significance of both films, examining their respective hero's journeys, visual styles and historical accuracy. The hero's journey, a common narrative structure found in mythology and literature, involves a protagonist who embarks on a quest, faces trials and tribulations, and ultimately achieves a significant transformation. In Gladiator, Maximus's journey mirrors the classic hero's journey, as he descends into the underworld of the gladiator arena and rises to become a symbol of hope and rebellion. A comparison of the two films' visual styles and cinematography is a crucial component of this examination. The original Gladiator is renowned for its gritty realism and epic battle sequences. The 2024 sequel is likely to build upon this legacy, utilizing advanced visual effects and innovative storytelling techniques. Through a mythological criticism lens, both films can be interpreted as modern retellings of ancient myths. Maximus, for example, can be seen as a contemporary incarnation of the heroic figure of Achilles. Comparative analysis, plot points, character arcs and visual style, are employed to identify similarities and differences between the two films. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the evolution of historical fiction and the enduring appeal of epic storytelling.

Key words: *Gladiator, Ancient Rome, Cinematic History, Achilles, Maximus*

Introduction

In *Gladiator* (2000), a historical epic transports its viewer to ancient Rome, where a strong Roman general named Maximus is betrayed by the evil Emperor Commodus. Commodus kills Maximus' family and makes him a slave, forcing him to fight other people to the death in a brutal arena.

Maximus wants revenge and misses his family very much. He becomes a very good fighter and the people of Rome start to like him. They see him as a hero who can fight against the cruel emperor. But Commodus gets scared because people like Maximus. He tries to kill Maximus, which leads to a big and exciting battle that will decide who rules Rome.

Gladiator 2 (2024) is a movie set after the first *Gladiator* movie. In this movie, Lucius, who is the son of a powerful woman from the first movie, lives a peaceful life away from Rome. But Roman soldiers attack his home, kill his wife, and capture him.

Lucius is forced to become a gladiator, like the famous hero from the first movie. He learns to fight and gets stronger, hoping to get revenge for his wife's death. As he becomes a better fighter, people start to see him as a symbol of hope against the powerful Roman

Empire. He has to fight hard not only against his enemies but also against his own sadness and the memories of his past. He learns a lot about himself on this journey.

Cinematic Representations of Roman History

Films of various genres have shaped our perceptions of ancient civilizations, including Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Holy Land, Greece, Rome, barbarian Europe, and the Maya (McGeough, 2022). Films, regardless of their genre, play a crucial role in shaping public perception of ancient civilizations. Films set in Ancient Rome have been analyzed for historical accuracy in plot, characters, costumes, and sets, highlighting the challenges faced by filmmakers in bringing the Roman world to life (Aldrete & Sumner, 2023).

Films of various genres have shaped our perceptions of ancient civilizations, instantiating contemporary values as normative and influencing audience thinking about the past (Matz, 2023). The projection can lead audiences to view ancient civilizations through a modern lens, potentially distorting their historical realities. Films can subtly influence the audience's thinking about the past, encouraging them to interpret historical events and figures through the lens of contemporary concern.

Historical Accuracy and Cultural Interpretation in Hollywood's Roman Films

Hollywood has a long history of depicting Ancient Rome, from the silent film era to modern epics. These films often prioritize dramatic storytelling over historical accuracy, with filmmakers taking liberties in plot, character depiction, costumes, and sets to enhance cinematic appeal (Aldrete & Sumner, 2023). The portrayal of iconic figures like Nero, Cleopatra, and Caesar frequently deviates from historical records, as filmmakers aim to create engaging narratives rather than documentaries.

A recurring theme in cinematic representations of Ancient Rome is the eroticization of the slave's body, which reflects broader gender and power dynamics. These films often depict Rome as a place of sexual liberation and dominance, intertwining regimes of pleasure with systems of domination and submission (Unceta Gómez, 2023). By focusing on the eroticization of the slave's body, these films often obscure the complexities of Roman slavery, reducing enslaved individuals to mere objects of desire and obscuring their agency and humanity.

The portrayal of Roman figures, particularly Julius Caesar, often relies on stereotypes and stock characters. These characters are typically depicted using formulaic visual and linguistic features, such as casting British actors with posh accents as Roman tyrants in post-war Hollywood epics (Ranzato, (2023). While these portrayals can reinforce stereotypes, deviations from these norms can offer fresh perspectives and highlight recurring themes in Roman narratives.

How Gladiator Shaped Our Understanding of Ancient Rome

The tradition of gladiatorial fights in Thyateira may date back to the 1st century BC, with the city's early Roman presence and the presence of the Imperial cult contributing to their spread and social life (Aytaçlar & Özenir, 2024). Gladiators' place in Roman society was complex, involving social isolation and admiration for fighting skills, while also creating their social structures and hierarchies within the barracks (Hope, 2021). The Romans valued gladiatorial combat, and Spartacus led Rome's III Slave Revolt, which had a significant impact on the Roman Republic (Abbas, 2024).

Gladiator successfully transferred history to the screen, reflecting archaeological facts correctly and combining elements of Peplás, such as Rome, gladiators, arenas, slaves, and cruel rulers (GÜRÁL, 2021). The film accurately depicts aspects of Roman life, including the architecture of Rome, the design of the Colosseum, the presence of gladiators, the role of slaves, and the tyrannical nature of certain Roman emperors.

Exploring the Unique Appeal of Roman-Era Films

Hollywood films often depicted the Roman Empire as a brutal and oppressive force, emphasizing slavery, crucifixion, and moral decay. These portrayals were influenced by mid-20th-century anxieties about fascism and social change. Roman rule brought certain advantages, it also involved exploitation and oppression, such films encourages a more nuanced understanding of Roman imperialism, moving beyond simplistic portrayals of good versus evil (Strong, 2018).

Films from the socialist era continue to administer the distant national past through cinema, explaining the reasons behind this situation and its cultural ramifications. It considers how the rerun process counteracts the charge that these films are Communist propaganda, which a significant portion of Romania's post-socialist cultural elite has attached to them (Parvulescu & Turcuș, 2021).

Mythological Criticism

Mythological criticism is a literary approach that analyzes texts through the lens of myths and archetypes, focusing on universal themes and symbols found in literature across cultures (Aliyeva, 2013). Its key concepts include; archetypes, collective unconscious and myths.

Archetypes: These are recurring symbols, images, characters, or patterns that appear in myths, literature, and even dreams across different cultures and time periods.

Collective Unconscious: A concept proposed by Carl Jung, it suggests that humans share a collective unconscious mind containing universal archetypes inherited from our ancestors (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998).

Myths: Traditional stories that explain the origins of the world, the nature of humanity, and the relationship between humans and the divine. Myths often embody cultural values, beliefs, and anxieties (Smith et al., 2024).

Comparative Analysis:

Comparative analysis is a systematic method used to examine and evaluate two or more things to identify their similarities and differences (Morin et al., 2021). The researcher gains deeper understanding by comparing and contrasting subjects, make informed decisions by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of different options, identify patterns and trends by comparing data sets or phenomena, and also improve critical thinking skills.

This analysis process includes; identify the subjects-determine what to compare, establish criteria-Determine the criteria to compare the subjects, gather information-collect relevant data and information about each subject, analyze and compare-systematically compare the subjects based on the established criteria, and finally Draw conclusions based on analysis. A comparative analysis reveals both the unique strengths of each subject and the underlying principles that connect them.

Findings

Gladiator films, while often depicting brutal spectacles, consistently explore the enduring human qualities of hope and courage in the face of overwhelming odds. In gladiator 1, Maximus Decimus Meridius is a skilled and respected Roman general who becomes a gladiator after being betrayed by Commodus. Maximus is driven by a desire for revenge and justice, and his character arc is centered around his quest for redemption. In Gladiator 2,

Lucius Verus is the son of Maximus and a skilled warrior in his own right. Lucius is driven by a desire for revenge against Macrinus, who killed his mother and betrayed his family.

In gladiator 1, Commodus is a power-hungry and ruthless Roman emperor who betrays Maximus and kills his family. Commodus is a complex and nuanced character, driven by a desire for power and control. In gladiator 2, Macrinus is a power-hungry and ruthless Roman general who kills Lucius's mother and betrays his family. Macrinus is a more straightforward antagonist, driven by a desire for power and revenge. In both films, both antagonists are power-hungry and ruthless, but Commodus is more complex and nuanced.

The plot of gladiator 1 follows Maximus's quest for revenge against Commodus, who betrayed him and killed his family. The story is centered around Maximus's journey from a respected Roman general to a gladiator, and his ultimate showdown with Commodus in the Colosseum. On the other hand, the plot of gladiator 2 follows Lucius's quest for revenge against Macrinus, who killed his mother and betrayed his family.

The first part of the film explores themes of honor, loyalty, revenge, and redemption. Maximus's character arc is centered around his quest for redemption, and it ultimately concludes with a sense of closure and new beginnings. While Gladiator 2 explores themes of identity, legacy, justice, and power. Lucius's character arc is centered around his identity crisis, and the film ultimately concludes with a sense of uncertainty and possibility.

Gladiator movies revolves around the roman era. The first par is set in ancient Rome, 180 AD. The setting is meticulously recreated, with attention to detail and historical accuracy. The second part is set in ancient Rome, 196 AD. The setting is also meticulously recreated, but with a greater emphasis on the personal and emotional journey of the protagonist. The setting of Gladiator 2 is more intimate and personal, while the setting of Gladiator 1 is more epic and grandiose.

The climax of the gladiator 1 features an epic showdown between Maximus and Commodus in the Colosseum. The climax of the gladiator 2 features a showdown between Lucius and Macrinus in the Colosseum. The scene is also intense and suspenseful, but with a greater emphasis on Lucius's personal journey and emotional stakes.

The Gladiator 1 concludes with Maximus's death, but his legacy lives on. The ending is poignant and emotional, with a sense of closure and new beginnings. On the other hand Gladiator 2 concludes with Lucius emerging victorious, grappling with his newfound identity and responsibility. The ending is more open-ended and uncertain, leaving room for interpretation and reflection.

Both "Gladiator" and "Gladiator II" explore the enduring themes of hope, courage, and the corrupting influence of power within the Roman Empire. While "Gladiator" focuses on Maximus's personal quest for revenge against a tyrannical emperor, "Gladiator II" shifts the focus to Lucius, exploring his journey of self-discovery and his struggle to overcome adversity and restore honor to his family's legacy. Both films utilize the spectacle of the Colosseum to examine the human condition, showcasing the resilience of the human spirit in the face of oppression and the enduring fight for justice and freedom.

Comparison of gladiator 1 and gladiator 2 with categories

Category	Gladiator 1	Gladiator 2	Analysis
Protagonist	Maximus Decimus Meridius	Lucius Verus	Both protagonists are skilled warriors driven by a desire for justice and revenge
Antagonist	Commodus	Macrinus	Both antagonists are power-

Plot	Maximus seeks revenge against Commodus for killing his family and betraying him	Lucius seeks revenge against Macrinus for killing his mother and betraying his family.	hungry and ruthless, but Commodus is more complex and nuanced. Both plots involve a hero's quest for revenge and justice, but Gladiator 2 adds a new layer of complexity with Lucius's identity crisis.
Themes	Honor, loyalty, revenge, redemption	Identity, legacy, justice, power	Both films explore themes of honor, loyalty, and revenge, but Gladiator 2 delves deeper into the complexities of identity and legacy.
Setting	Ancient Rome, 180 AD	Ancient Rome, 196 AD	Both films are set in ancient Rome, but Gladiator 2 takes place 16 years after the events of the first film.x
Climax	Maximus vs. Commodus in the Colosseum	Lucius vs. Macrinus in the Colosseum	Both films feature an epic showdown between the protagonist and antagonist in the Colosseum.
Ending	Maximus dies, but his legacy lives on.	Lucius emerges victorious, but grapples with his newfound identity and responsibility.	Both films conclude with a sense of closure and new beginnings, but Gladiator 2 leaves room for a potential sequel.

Conclusion

Both Gladiator 1 and Gladiator 2 serve as powerful cinematic explorations of Roman history, albeit with varying degrees of historical accuracy. Utilizes the archetypal hero's journey: Both films follow the classic hero's journey, with protagonists facing trials, overcoming obstacles, and ultimately achieving a form of redemption or victory. Films explore universal themes: delve into universal themes of hope, courage, revenge, justice, and the corrupting influence of power, themes that resonate with audiences beyond the specific historical context of ancient Rome.

Gladiator films offer distinct perspectives on Roman society: While both films portray the brutality and opulence of Roman society, Gladiator 1 focuses more on the political intrigue and the struggle against tyranny, while Gladiator 2 delves deeper into the personal and emotional impact of war and the complexities of family and identity. The Colosseum serves as a powerful symbol in both films, representing not only the brutality of Roman entertainment but also the potential for rebellion, resistance, and the triumph of the human spirit. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that both films take significant liberties with historical accuracy. They prioritize dramatic storytelling and cinematic spectacle over strict adherence to historical facts.

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