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Ancient Roman Ideals of Heroism and  
Empire, and the Appropriation of  
These Ideals into the Later Texts,  
Shakespeare's Antony And Cleopatra  
and the Film Gladiator

Candidate Number: 11661939

**"The odds is gone and there is nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon"<sup>1</sup>**

Literary and visual mediums provide audiences with insights into the human condition and expose that which is 'remarkable beneath the visiting moon'. Antony and Cleopatra by *William Shakespeare* and Gladiator directed by *Ridley Scott* reveal and explore these insights by focusing on the Roman hero and of Empire. Both texts draw upon historically accepted Roman virtues. Yet their examinations expose the ideals to be merely dreams, a legacy of human folly and impractical in reality. 'A man may die, nations may rise and fall, but an idea lives on'. It is these 'ideas', although unattainable, which link our past, present and future and ensure the longevity and relevance of both texts to present and future generations.

Both *Shakespeare's* Antony and Cleopatra and *Scott's* Gladiator provide contemporary audiences with insights into aspects of the Roman culture and its significant people. Without question both are literary constructs rather than historical accounts. Their view of the world is determined by what are essentially representations and therefore are shadows of their original source. *Ivar Lissner's* exploration of the Roman Caesars in Power and Folly addresses how texts composed in variant cultural and social eras, contribute to the distortion of the original values and events, as "each adds something new to our store of misconceptions". Texts consisting of a context set in a past era are a creation of divergent perspective's and consequently, "the personalities of the past either become pale shadows of what they really were or are inflated far beyond their true importance."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, W. (1985). Antony and Cleopatra. Australia: Sydney University Press. (IV,xv,76-8), p.147. Cleopatra states this in relation to Antony's death.

<sup>2</sup> Lissner, I. (1958). Power and Folly, The Story of the Caesars. Great Britain; Jonathan Cape LTD. p.19.

Antony and Cleopatra and Gladiator are examples of texts which 'add something new' but in so doing contribute to the fragmentation and distortion of those original values which characterised the Roman Empire. In utilising stories of ancient Rome, *Shakespeare* and *Scott's* texts not only provide insights into the Roman world but also expose and comment upon the values of their own society. In Antony and Cleopatra we are exposed to the flaws of the Roman Empire through Antony's struggle to "be himself"<sup>3</sup> while Gladiator upholds Roman ideals but does so within an historical as well as a contemporary American context and culture. The two texts both celebrate and question the Roman ideals by transporting their audience to a distant age where heroes and empires flourish and decay, but leaves as its legacy indelible insights into the human condition.

From the dismantling of the Tarquin sovereigns<sup>4</sup>, to the "golden period" of the five great Emperors<sup>5</sup>, the Roman Empire institutionalised heroic men who validated its utopian ideals. These ideals advocated the Roman virtues of decorum; a society constructed upon rational and logical thinking that aimed at restricting creative and emotional responses. From a contemporary perspective they are the very basis of the human condition.

The utopian Roman ideals are explored in Classical literature which, in part have constructed or established the historically agreed upon Roman virtues. However, later texts have contributed to the distortion of the original ideals. *Freud* believed that the social and cultural values of a society, conditioned its people to move further away from their fundamental self. Similarly, these constructed texts have gradually moved away from their original inspiration. In

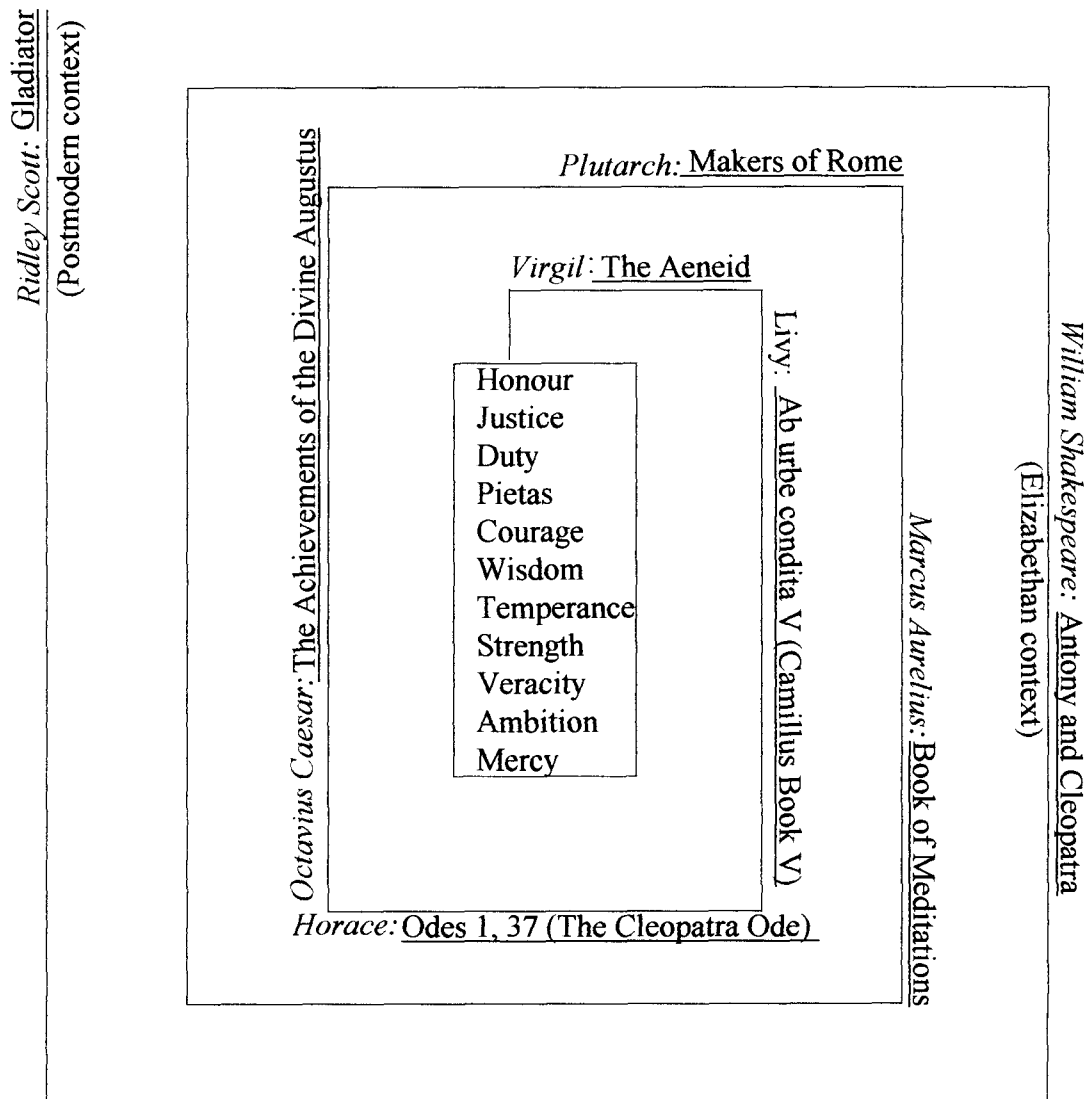
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<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare, W. (1985). Antony and Cleopatra. Australia: Sydney University Press. (I,i,45). p.25.

<sup>4</sup> Supposedly at the battle of Lake Regillus, 498 BC.

<sup>5</sup> Ends in 180 AD with the death of Marcus Aurelius and the ascension of Commodus.

classical literature the same ideals are represented but as society has evolved the interpretation of these values has also altered. The diagram below demonstrates texts that are created in periods chronologically distant from the original concepts and contexts, each adding new perspectives and dimensions to the original ideals.



The most prominent ideal that these classical texts reveal is *pietas*<sup>6</sup>, whereby duty towards the gods and state are specifically emphasised. Presented by classical literature as a central concept

<sup>6</sup> Latin for duty towards family, state or gods. As indicated in the Aeneid, Aeneas is provided with a supernatural sign to leave the sacked city of Troy.

the gods dictate the destiny of the heroes. In many cases these signs are used in literature to foreshadow the fate of the hero. Culturally, it was accepted that by showing *pietas* towards the gods individuals would receive omens for guidance. It would also ensure that their *fatum* and *fortuna*<sup>7</sup> would remain favourable. *Livy's Book Five* also explores this concept. The gods dictate Camillus' life and when he chooses to neglect or equal them in status his *fortuna* and *fatum* is changed to be adverse, serving as punishment. Similarly, Plutarch's *Brutus*, Julius Caesar is assassinated for proclaiming himself equivalent to the gods. Occurrences that could not be explained through logic were justified and rationalised to be the pursuits of the gods, echoing the analytic Roman culture.

Central was for the Roman hero to constantly place affairs of state before personal desire. Accomplishments of distinguished men were continually designed for the greatness of Rome. This is clearly shown in *Plutarch's Brutus* where he is willing to sacrifice himself for the glory of Rome; "It would be my duty not to remain silent, but to defend my country and to die for its liberty."<sup>8</sup> His *pietas* is maintained and reinforced in *Shakespeare's Julius Caesar*. "Brutus is noble, wise, valiant, and honest"<sup>9</sup> who leads and encourages the Roman citizens to "all cry 'Peace, freedom and liberty!'"<sup>10</sup> in order to release Rome from Caesar's tyranny. Duty to state is central, and usually valued by societies both past and present. It is clearly reinforced in both *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Gladiator* which have been created in different eras. All of Octavius' actions are justified by *pietas* to state. Those who threaten the states stability through questioning the system such as Lepidus, Pompey and Antony are marginalised. Caesar believes

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<sup>7</sup> Latin for fate and fortune.

<sup>8</sup> Plutarch. (1965). *Makers of Rome*. Great Britain; Penguin Books. p.231.

<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare, W. (1979). *Julius Caesar*. Great Britain; Oxford University Press. (III,i,126). P.47.

<sup>10</sup> Shakespeare, W. (1979). *Julius Caesar*. Great Britain; Oxford University Press. (III,i,110). p.47.

that Antony "hath given his Empire up to a whore, who now are levying the kings o' th' earth for war<sup>11</sup>". As Antony has adopted and acknowledged Eastern cultural values, Caesar portrays him as being an enemy to the state. Maximus chooses to fight further as "there was a dream that was Rome<sup>12</sup>" before Commodus' rule. He tells Lucilla that "I will always serve Rome" and Proximo acknowledges that like Brutus, Maximus "would die for Rome". He clearly cares "about the greatness of Rome" knowing that the sacrifice of achieving this could be his own life.

The Roman heroes in these texts demonstrate that an individual could enhance their status and reputation through battles and wars proving themselves honourable. Consequently, Roman heroes are constantly associated with conquering and taking part in battles. Not only could those ideals be displayed, but throughout the army the ideals were further developed, embraced and perpetuated over generations. Furthermore, through military service an individual had the opportunity to exhibit leadership in politics. This spawned well-known identities who as a result become heroes to the people of the Roman Empire. Hence, there were three activities that shaped a Roman hero. These were conquering for the greatness of Rome which fulfilled the spiritual need, the military that utilised the physical and politics which enhanced mental strength. As *Plutarch* writes "But to these men conquest and supreme power were the acknowledged ends of war.<sup>13</sup>" However, this is ironic as classical literature has also demonstrated that these activities resulted in the downfall of the Roman hero, revealing that the ideals were in reality unachievable. One example of this is the Emperor *Marcus Aurelius* and his Book of Meditations. It is ironic that a man interested in philosophy, culture, knowledge and

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<sup>11</sup>Shakespeare, W. (1985). Antony and Cleopatra. Australia: Sydney University Press. (III,iv,73-5). p.96.

<sup>12</sup>What Maximus states before he dies.

<sup>13</sup>Plutarch. (1965). Makers of Rome. Great Britain; Penguin Books. p.231.

tolerance spent most of his rule engaging in war; justifying it as *Maximus* states "for the glory of Rome" but as Aurelius indicates "I have brought nothing but the sword".

The heroes aim was to free their country from tyranny and restore liberty. Rome was a mighty Empire, but as it neglected the humanity that we value today, it was not, in fact, a civilization. However, what freedom means to a Postmodern culture is an entirely different concept to what the Romans believed. Our culture permits originality and individualism; a profound contrast to what *Marcus Aurelius* writes in his Book of Meditations<sup>14</sup> where the ideal period is stated to be under the dictator Augustus. "Freedom meant order, stability and regularity<sup>15</sup>" and to attain this there needed to be a vigorous leader, even if it developed into what we today call totalitarianism. A civil society and freedom are two major contemporary ideals. To achieve these, the Roman ideals such as justice and veracity apply, making them universal concepts that are sustained throughout time as a result of human nature desiring them. Some of the values identified in the diagram remain a part of our contemporary world. Although there is a multiplicity of value systems in our era, individuals continue to admire these virtues. Our notions of the ideals have changed but the fact that we still believe in them has not.

Historians of antiquity were frequently swayed by the aristocratic and powerful. Events are exaggerated and further glorified to compose more prestigious impressions of the heroes and Empire. This can clearly be seen in The Cleopatra Ode<sup>16</sup> where Octavius' victory over the spontaneous and passionate Cleopatra is favoured extensively. The Ode venerates the ideals to

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<sup>14</sup>Emperor Marcus Aurelius' personal diary written in his later life. Only parts of this book have been preserved.

<sup>15</sup>Brunt, A. (1974). The Journal of Roman Studies. London: The Society For The Promotion of Roman Studies' Office. p.8.

<sup>16</sup>Horace's account on Augustus Caesars capturing the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra in a victorious defeat.

the extent where they are merely visions of splendour used as propaganda. The general public felt compelled to achieving the ideals whilst the aristocracy used them to manipulate and control the masses. As suggested by the title The Achievements of the Divine Augustus, Octavius writes of himself as having acquired the Roman virtues, only to use the book as propaganda. All the ideals mentioned provide a *raison detre* for the Roman hero and Empire aiming at perfection. Yet such writings also result in fragmentation, misconceptions and deceptive glamour associated with the Roman world. Consequently over the centuries the perception of Rome was altered, including both the Elizabethan and Postmodern eras. Texts of these times have borrowed the Roman virtues but also intertwined it with their own social beliefs or context.

Postmodern readers continue to enjoy the Classical genre which provides ceaseless stories of inspiration and hope. The classical genre recognises this by expressing semi-fictional stories of unimaginable events, journeys and achievements to which we relate. Therefore, they make us question our own values and our purpose. As stated in the Aeneid "These happenings are part of the divine purpose.<sup>17</sup>" We also persist in striving for those attributes we do not possess. We are still attempting to reach those original Roman ideals and this is why the Classical genre has survived over the centuries. They have inspired the Renaissance<sup>18</sup> and become part of its conventions. Many artworks attempted to capture those Roman ideals. An example of this is the bronze statue Gattamelata<sup>19</sup> by *Donatello* that is a portrait of the mercenary captain *Gattamelata*. It emulates the antique equestrian statue of *Marcus Aurelius* in Rome<sup>20</sup>; a clear

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<sup>17</sup>Virgil's, The Aeneid, Book II. p.61.

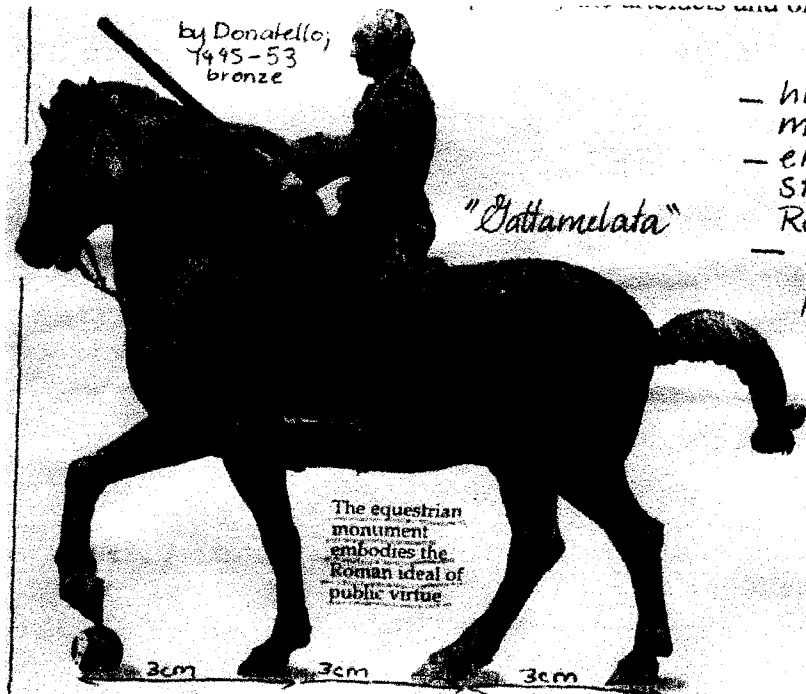
<sup>18</sup>Approximately from 1400 to 1600 AD.

<sup>19</sup>1445-1453 AD

<sup>20</sup>Made approximately in second century AD.



example of the Roman ideals being incorporated into another context. In relation to the horse the body is perfectly central reflecting their concept of balance, order and control.



The classical genre has upheld and created the myths of Rome but as Marcus Aurelius writes, the true Romans he met daily were "thankless, insolent, treacherous, envious and antisocial men."<sup>21</sup> *William Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra*. while drawing upon the classical tradition examines the flaws Aurelius so eloquently identifies, leaving the audience to question Rome and its heroes.

*Antony and Cleopatra* is filled by vast sadness and yet it is a majestic and inspiring work. One that exhibits compassion for the weakness of mankind as well as admiration for its heroism. We see our central character Antony once a revered General fall below the ideals of the Roman Empire. The play is constructed upon antitheses such as love and duty to state, loyalty versus betrayal, countries and cultures, constancy and changeability. Through the use of antithesis

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<sup>21</sup>Aurelius, M. *Book of Meditations*. (vii,3).

*Shakespeare* reveals to us an alternative value system rather than solely applauding the Roman state. In essence, he explores all the values that can shape a complete human being, thus detouring and deviating away from the core values of what scholars agree characterise the Roman hero and Empire.

*Plutarch*<sup>22</sup> retold the lives of the distinguished Roman heroes. His Lives are based upon comparisons to the set Roman principles; they persuade us to admire or deplore the deeds of the hero. *Shakespeare* develops this further and uses *Plutarch's* accounts of significant personalities not merely for the purpose of informing but additionally reflecting and questioning the social mores of his era and past. Regardless of the time period in which it is performed, Antony and Cleopatra always makes its audience question their values. In *Shakespeare's* version, we are not just reading about our past; we are assessing a case - history attributing praise and blame according to the way the hero meets the various crises of their career and our own values and expectations of the character.

The first scene presents the concerns and issues of Rome. The central interest being Antony descent below the expected Roman behaviour. He is perceived as being a "strumpets fool" for being understanding of other cultures during a period where Rome was considered to be the "civil" society. The opening scene, consisting only of secondary sources, form the audiences initial perceptions of Antony. The Roman values are established at the beginning of the play by what Antony does not exhibit or display. These include the expected ideals of devotion to state, a controlled temper and direct, rational responses. The reality of Antony's situation is exposed when he is shown to have acquired some of the Egyptian values where he is spontaneous and emotive. The conflicting value systems are established, questioning to what extent each system

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<sup>22</sup>Shakespeare's main source.

a true reflection of human nature. Through Roman eyes "Antony will be himself" (I,i,45) when he reverts to displaying those Roman virtues he had exhibited in the past. "When he is not Antony" (I,i,61) he is "stirred", "soft" and "transformed". The repetition of these words emphasises that Antony is not living up to the Roman standards established by the classical texts and his Roman peers.

The greatest antitheses explored in this play is of the individual versus the system. A conversation between Antony and Cleopatra clearly demonstrates the individuals battle with duty to state. Antony's desire for Cleopatra must be postponed for his services to Rome beckons. Antony's reaction to this is

"Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch  
Of the reigned Empire fall! Here is my space  
Kingdoms are clay." (I,i,35)

In his speech Antony declares that the Roman Empire does not interest him and that his world is with Cleopatra. When he states "Kingdoms are clay", it suggests that Antony understands that Rome is a man made construction and therefore merely a vision and not attainable in reality. The relationship between Octavia and Antony also explores the ideal of duty to state as being unrealistic. This marriage is contrived and designed to "cement the differences" of Antony and Caesar. It is created for the purposes of state affairs. Antony even acknowledges this "sway our great designs" (II,ii,172). Menas goes further to say "I think the policy of that purpose made more in the marriage than the love of the parties" (II,vi,139). Straight from discussing marriage, the conversation averts to the problems of the Empire. Through this structure, we see duty of state shadowing individual matters. In Act II Scene IV Antony shows his understanding of the two worlds "And though I make this marriage for my peace, I'th East my pleasure lies" (II,ii,44).

The greatest contrast is that of the two worlds. Rome provides stability where as Egypt is uncertain and spontaneous. This is reflected in the language styles. The Egyptian speeches are poetic and full of imagery. The Roman conversations are direct, no nonsense and to the point. This is clearly shown in Act Two, Scene Two with the juxtaposing descriptions of Cleopatra and Octavia. The imagery of Cleopatra is expressed in a passionate, elaborate and free manner in great length. The bias and dislike against Cleopatra has also limited at by Enobarbus:

Her infinite variety; other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies. For vildest things  
Become themselves in her" (II,iii,272-6)

Cleopatra's "infinite variety" contrasts to Rome's narrow and controlled world. She is described as "vile" through the metaphor of consumption. In contrast, Octavia is described clinically in three words "beauty", "wisdom" and "modesty", the three main virtues of a Roman women. With a serious tone, Octavia has been compared to the Roman ideals. In a contrasting light-hearted tone, Cleopatra is seen to be an individual following no set protocol. Although a Queen Cleopatra fulfils both her individual desires and duty to state. The character Antony suggests to his audience that the human condition longs for a balance of the two worlds. This idea derives from the context that it was written in. The Renaissance had retraced those Roman values but also opened up to a variety of other cultures. As people were questioning social values, *Shakespeare's* play does the same. Hence, his work is a literary construct of the past where ideas have been questioned and distorted to reflect upon the changing times in which he wrote.

Antony makes the distinction between his past reputation by stating:

"things that are past are done with me." (I,i,100)

The past tense suggests that he has changed and wishes to move on but Rome continues to draw him back. An oath has been made by every Roman hero to unceasingly serve Rome. Caesar proclaims to Antony that you have "broken the article of your oath." This oath illuminates the virtues; worth, truth, nobility, honour, honesty and mercy. At this point of time Antony falls short of his oath.

However, by Act Four Antony has his status elevated and dignity restored in the eyes of his peers and a contemporary audience. "Oh my fortunes have corrupted honest men" (IV,ii,21) is where we see him blaming himself; this is where he regains our admiration and dignity. Enobarbus elevates Antony's character as well, restoring his dignity: "Oh Antony, nobler than my revolt is infamous". The imagery of the sword powerfully conveys this restoration of ideals in Antony; "Declined sword against sword" and "again a sword". A sword is used to win battles which establishes a hero's status and defends the Roman Empire. This imagery continues until the death of Antony where he dies an honourable death by falling on his sword, restoring his dignity and reputation.

The "Gods be just, they shall assist the deed of justest men" reinforces the idea that fortune will come to the noblest person. As Octavius wins the battle of Actium his reputation and right to rule are further enhanced. The constant repetition of the Gods involvement, in particular Jupiter and Mars shows their strong beliefs in fate and fortune. It also shows the individuals need to believe in a greater force and being part of a larger plan. This reinforces *pietas* as being one of the central Roman values.

In Act Three Caesar is portrayed as the epitome of both Empire and hero. The Soothsayer warns Antony "Thy lustre thickens when he shines by" (II,ii,31). When the trimvir are agreeing on a treaty with Pompey, Caesar makes all the vital decisions. Once the treaty is signed, they are invited to Pompey's ship for a celebration. The enemies socialising on Pompey's boat puts down the cause. The voice of reason Caesar, is elevated in Roman character when he decides to take no further part in socialising. The constant juxtaposition of Caesar and Antony shows the difference in the men's behaviour. The rational actions of Caesar contrasts with those of chaotic nature of Antony's. There is constant repetition of the word "full" or "whole" for Caesar, but for Antony it is "falling." Act Four contains of sequence of scenes dealing with the battle. What emerges is a clear contrast of leadership styles. Maecenas informs Caesar that "When one so great begins to rage, he's hunted even to falling" (IV,I,7-8). Antony's leadership is that of rage and viciousness which *Shakespeare* uses to symbolise his decline. Caesar feels confident and in control as he looks after his troops "And feast the army, we have stored to do't" (IV,i,17), and believes "the time of universal peace is near" (IV,vi,5). When segments of the battle are shown Caesar logically commands the navy "To the vales, and hold our best advantage" (IV,xi,30-1). Positive words such as "best" and "advantage" highlight his dominance. Antony is left in confusion as the navy "are not join'd", not following his command. When he concedes that the Egyptians have betrayed him, a short, poignant response "all is lost" (IV,xii,11) captures the decayed state of his name and reputation.

Despite this Caesar praises and acknowledges Antony as being one of the greatest Romans. The fact that it is an enemy praising him, makes Antony even more admirable. The sword was covered "with his most noble blood" (V,i,30). The sword again is present, a symbol of the actions that he had built his reputation with and ironically what he dies with. However, it is a

Roman practice to forget all the flawed actions and glorify only the ideal achievements when someone significant has died.

What the last Act demonstrates is the growth and maturity of Caesar. His speech on Antony is not political but a real tribute. He then continues on to deal with the "business" that is Egypt, showing his duty to state. "For Caesar cannot live to be ungentle" (V,i,70) is where we see him becoming the embodiment of the ideal. Through him, it is shown that there needs to be a balance of time and place for certain behaviours. When Caesar, Agrippa and Maecenas are notified that Antony has committed suicide they lament his death. The validation of the human condition is stated by Agrippa in the last Act as a tribute to Antony:

"A rare spirit never  
Did steer humanity but you gods will give us  
Some faults to make us men." (V,i,40-1)

Conversely, motion pictures have focused on the stereotypical immortal image of the Roman Empire and its heroes. After a hiatus of more than forty years the classical epic genre returns to our screens with Scott's Gladiator. It continues the tradition of demonstrating the Empires might in warfare but sheds new light on Rome by revealing the flaws and hypocrisy subsiding in its value system. Through Maximus' attempts at sustaining the Roman ideals and the Post-modern creators manipulation of the same, "the greatness of Rome<sup>23</sup>" was revealed as a vision.

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<sup>23</sup> Lucilla responds with "They care about the greatness of Rome." to Commodus question "What is so great about victories?"

The films opening sequence provide the historical background and context. It immediately conveys the Empire's power and might through its geographical dominance "stretching from the Deserts of Africa to the Borders of northern England". Rome's ideals of conquering and the desire "for promise of peace throughout the Empire", are the two cultural values presented. The audience is left with an insight into the notion of the Roman Empire which permits them to justify the importance of the battle that is to follow and Maximus' duty to continue to fight for "the glory of Rome".

The war against Germania is where the Roman ideals are reflected and the different cultural values exposed. The Roman army is controlled, composed and rational in their actions. This highlights their belief that logic, controlled emotions, teamwork, advanced strategies and equipment were what made a civil society. The wide shots of the battleground allows the viewer to distinguish the contrasting cultural values of the Germanic tribes. Unlike the Romans, they are spontaneous in their behaviour, emotional and carrying inferior weapons. The rhythmic movement of the Roman *testudo*<sup>24</sup> formation contrasts with the unorganised and out numbered Germanic tribes. The strategy of coming from behind displays Maximus' leadership and courage. Maximus specifically highlights the two Roman ideals of "strength and honour"<sup>25</sup>. His strength, or that of Rome is portrayed both physically and mentally. Further, honour is his commemoration of Empire and emulation and praise of past heroes or ancestors. Although the slow motion emphasises the General's strength and courage, it also exposes the tragedy of the battle. Hence, it demonstrates that realistically the Roman ideals could not compensate for humanity and that their actions were just as barbaric as the Germanians.

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<sup>24</sup>Latin for tortoise; this military strategy looked like a tight shell with shields covering the top as well as sides.

<sup>25</sup>This is repeated by Maximus and his followers as their motto, before a battle or conflicting situation. As the Empire is devoid of the ideals, it is Maximus who maintains and promotes them.



After Maximus announces "*Roma Victor*<sup>26</sup>" there is a juxtaposition of scenes. Commodus and Lucilla travel in luxury where the young heir incessantly speaks of politics and schemes. As he leaves for the battle scene it is evident that the soldiers and servants bow to him through duty. This contrasts with an earlier scene where as Maximus walks past the rows of soldiers, they kneel before him as a mark of respect. He has gained the respect of the people and consequently become a hero through demonstrating the ideals in his leadership whereas Commodus has acquired his superior position through birth. The Emperor Marcus Aurelius further highlights this when he states to Maximus "you have proved your valour yet again" and asks him "How could I reward Rome's greatest General?" As it is the most influential figure praising Maximus with "yet again" and "greatest", he has been shown to be a figure who consistently has proved his heroic status.

Furthermore, the film suggests that the ideals were duties and forced rather than instinctive. This has been validated when the Emperor lists the ideals which he has expected his son to acquire. He boldly and stoically states to Commodus: "wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance" knowing that it is Maximus who has come the closest to achieving these. Aurelius' list of ideals are a distortion from the historical texts which emphasis duty to state and pietas as being the primary ideals. His four ideals are a closer reflection of what a Postmodern society desires as being the focal values. However, the historical texts and Aurelius' primary values are what Maximus consistently demonstrates in his pursuit of a just and civil world. Commodus knowing he has not acquired those ideals, lists to his father his values of "ambition, resourcefulness, courage and devotion to family". It is ironic that although Commodus demonstrates these values they become his downfall. This shows that an individuals perception of the ideals central meaning is altered by human nature. Aurelius makes it clear that

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<sup>26</sup>Latin for Roman victory.

"Commodus is an immoral man". The values Commodus has listed are used for his personal gain and reflect his inaccurate notion that his will benefits the Roman state. This reveals that human nature whether positive or negative will change the original intent of a value to correspond with an individual's agenda.

The discussion between the Emperor and Maximus is where we are orientated to believe that the Empire has begun to disintegrate. The content of their discussion contrasts with the portrayal of the Germanic battle shown earlier, causing the audience to question how close Rome realistically came to achieving its ideals and how much was propaganda and image. When the most powerful figure, the Emperor of Rome begins to reveal the flaws of the system to Maximus it emphasises the point that the ideals did not provide the ideal lifestyle. Using a cynical tone Aurelius states "So much for the glory of Rome" and "I bought the sword, nothing more". His statements argue against the ideal of conquering for the glory of Rome. Maximus immediately justifies Aurelius' conduct by classifying it as duty to state: "They fought for you and for Rome". When the Emperor asks Maximus "What is Rome?" he attempts to describe it by what it isn't "the rest of the world is brutal and cruel, and dark. Rome is the light". Maximus has never been to Rome and is originally from Spain, yet, he continues to favour Rome and believes in its illusionary image. The audience is informed that Maximus' description is not a true reflection of Rome when Aurelius states "There was once a dream that was Rome. You could only whisper it. Anything more than a whisper and it would vanish. It was so fragile". The use of past tense suggests that the "dream" was never realised. He reaffirms his statement when he wants "to give power back to the people of Rome and end the corruption that has crippled it". The hypocrisy is revealed that whilst citizens like Maximus believed Rome was civil and the light of the Empire, in reality it was clouded with barbarism.

It is Maximus' persistence in living by the Roman principles that make him a national hero and as Lucius reveals "I'm Maximus the saviour of Rome". Specifically, through duty to state and *pietas* towards the gods, Maximus frees Rome of what we call tyranny and seeks justice. Contemporary audiences are repulsed by the killing of his family, yet this is ironic as we still continue to acknowledge Rome as being a civil world.

Proximo's observes in regard to Maximus "I know that you would die for honour. You would die for Rome. You would die for the memory of your ancestors<sup>27</sup>" is realised in the death of Maximus. Before the last battle Commodus reports to him "The general who became a slave who became a gladiator, the gladiator who defied an Emperor." It reinforces the idea that status in Rome was irrelevant, Maximus power was through maintaining the Roman principles which lead him to becoming a hero. Unfortunately, the advertising of the film has mistakenly used "the gladiator who defied an Empire<sup>28</sup>" as its main phrase. Maximus by defying the emperor and maintaining the ideals *restores* the Empire. Before he dies he gives power back to the Senate, "Senator Gracchus is to be reinstated. "There was dream that was Rome. It shall be realised." The fact that the people of Rome were unhappy under Commodus' rule encourages them to remember and desire the ideals of the past. Lucilla's tribute to Maximus is similar to that of Octavius' (Antony and Cleopatra) tribute to Antony. Both remember the good and account for the services they gave to Rome.

As used in Antony and Cleopatra, the sword is a reoccurring image in *Gladiator* to symbolise the values of Rome. The first focal shot is of Maximus' sword horizontally lodged in the tree. He used it to demonstrate the values of conquering, courage and strength in the battle.

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<sup>27</sup>This quote supports Maximus living up to the notions of "strength and honour" as he shows *pietas* towards the gods and state.

<sup>28</sup>Used on posters and cover of video.

However, the second time we see it is when Commodus is practicing his skills in warfare. He uses the sword to literally cause the disintegration of Rome. We see this again when he twirls his sword at the government's meeting in an attempt to ignore the speakers, and threatens to kill one of Rome's greatest Senators, Gracchus. His only method to solve a problem is to kill. This is what Aurelius saw when he stated "I brought the sword, nothing more". Aurelius also used the *Arudius*<sup>29</sup> as a sign a gladiator had been freed. Like Maximus he was attempting to restore those original ideals and exercising the sword for purpose and cause. When Maximus refuses to fight with Haken to establish his fighting skills, he shows dignity. He does not lower himself to Zuccabar's value system but always uses the sword to uphold the Roman ideals.

The film creates layers of meaning through its use of intertextuality. The film originally was inspired by *Jean-Leon Gerome's* oil painting Pollice Verso<sup>30</sup> Like Maximus, a triumphant gladiator standing next to his defeated opponent looks up into the crowd to receive the verdict that will decide his fate. Maximus does not kill Titus of Gaul but demonstrates the Roman ideal of mercy. In this scene light floods over Maximus head creating a religious image. Although Rome is shown to believe in pagan gods Postmodern viewers can easily identify with the Christ figure as Christianity is a dominant religion today. Proximo's death is an allusion to Julius Caesar's assassination of being stabbed by daggers. Julius Caesar was also a figure who invited the values of the East<sup>31</sup> into Rome adding to the degeneration of the original Roman values. Dialogue and allusions are also made to classical literature. When Maximus is speaking to Commodus before their final confrontation Maximus' dialogue is directly from Marcus Aurelius' Book of Meditations. This gives his statement more credibility and further elevates his character above the son of Marcus Aurelius. Commodus also refers to the story of "uncle

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<sup>29</sup>Wooden sword.

<sup>30</sup>Thumbs Down

<sup>31</sup>His intimate relationship with Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt.

Claudius" and Antony and Cleopatra. Claudius' story parallels the actions of Lucilla who conspires against her brother. Commodus reference to tragic Roman events suggests that Rome has never been close to the ideals. When Commodus states he would make a good emperor because he has ambition, he is standing in front of a bust of Plato who wrote In the Republic "that the unwilling would make the best rulers". This comparison between the past and present highlights how Rome has over time moved away from the original ideals.

Gladiator is a literary construct that also reflects our cultural and social issues. The film has used a historical time period<sup>32</sup> and remained close to its cultural and social values. However, the events are created and not a reflection of history; Marcus Aurelius chose his son Commodus to be the next Emperor. The circumstances explored in Rome are similar to our society but in our context. When Commodus tells Maximus that they should "save Rome from the politicians<sup>33</sup>" it is cynicism towards today's politicians. The corrupt situation of the Empires leaders is a reflection of administration in some of today's role model countries. Rome's rule over various nations is similar to that of England's imperialistic attitude. They used their heroes and victories as propaganda reinforcing the glory of their system. England used this method in the World Wars. In Gladiator, the Gladiatorial games are an reenactment of past victorious battles such as the battle of Carthage<sup>34</sup>. This propaganda would perpetuate through a mixed Roman audience in the Coliseum causing any social and cultural values exposed to them to be validated. The character Lucilla is a modern representation of a strong female character. It would be unlikely for Aurelius to have said "if you were a man, what a Caesar you would have been". This fragmentation of women's role in Rome can be seen by the contrasting role of Octavia in Antony and Cleopatra. She has no influential impact but is used between Antony and

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<sup>32</sup>The last of the "five great Emperors" in 180 AD.

<sup>33</sup>This is also ironic as Commodus is the politician Rome needs to be saved from.

<sup>34</sup>Lead by the Roman hero Scipio Africanus.

Octavius to "cement their differences". The film has used our postmodern social values to give an interpretation of Rome; adding to the distortion of what Rome really idealised. When Commodus returns to Rome to meet the senators there is an Hitleresque allusion. The shot passes an eagle zooming over the crowd of millions awaiting Commodus. His character is established to be similar to that of Hitler, bringing our connotations of a dictatorial leadership. We label the Emperors rule as being a dictatorship but to the Romans it would have been an ideal style as it provided stability. By our standards Rome is portrayed as being uncivil and flawed, the reversal of what they perceived themselves as representing. However, this Postmodern interpretation is a more realistic outlook of how close the Romans were to the ideals. By imposing changing values upon the original ideals, they have been distorted and fragmented over time.

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Gattamelata, Donatello, 1445- 53. Bronze Statue.

Pollice Verso (Thumbs Down), 1872. Oil on Canvas, 38in 58in. Phoenix Art Museum.

## The Reflection Statement

The Classical genre is represented in various mediums which explore the ideals of the Roman hero and Empire. Through studying a large selection of Classical texts the ideals have been identified and further discussed in relation to *Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra* and *Scott's Gladiator*. By reading a variety of Classical works and closely studying the two central texts, this initial intent evolved in discussing how the texts added their cultural and social context to the original notions of the ideals. The exposition has been limited to the prominent ideals of "duty to state" and "pietas" and focuses on how the texts have adopted, distorted and questioned the original Roman ideals.

The exposition requires a variety of arguments associated with the focal concept which ends with a decisive conclusion. Discussion styles are analytical and composed in formal language. The structure is flexible whereby it can be written in essay form or chapters. The work begins with a preface which states the exposition's intentions and arguments. Originally the structure was to be in three chapters with supporting quotes following each heading. Chapter one titled "Rome Was Not Built In A Day" reflects the classical texts constructing the notions of Roman hero and Empire. "When in Rome, do as Romans do" echoes Rome's intolerance of other cultures and how *Antony and Cleopatra* challenges the Roman values. *Gladiator* imposes Postmodern values onto the original ideals, hence shedding "A New Light on Rome". Structurally, this exposition looks at the texts in chronological order, clearly demonstrating how the different eras have added their social and cultural values to the Roman ideals. Tables and pictures can be incorporated as another method of communicating an argument. As the piece is analytical and critical the tone should be serious

and direct. The audience is aimed at scholars who are involved in the discussion of Postmodernism and its values. Discussion on the Classical genre has also been re-ignited with the release of Gladiator. Hence, the exposition subject matter matches one of the topics being discussed by scholars now.

During the process of composition concepts have been developed. The Roman hero and Empire are intertwined as they are part of a “system”. This “system” consists of the citizens fighting for the state, which has originally instituted the ideals in the people. The two central texts not only reveal this, but question and challenge this “system”. Actions of individuals are not enough to enhance their status. To accomplish this, an ideal appearance is required to be generated. This is achieved through numerous texts such as Gladiator and Antony and Cleopatra constructing a perception of the individuals greatness. For example, Octavius’ autobiography serves as propaganda to enhance his status. Along with the Renaissance art that emulates him, the Postmodern reader is lead to identify him as a leading Roman hero. Literary constructions determine to what extent an Empire or hero has reached these ideals; a notion that continues to exist in the media today. Hence, these literary constructs distort, inflate or fragment the virtues to reflect the social context in which they are created in. By incorporating how the cultural and social context of a specific era influence the representation of the Roman ideals, the Extension one and two outcomes are achieved.

As part of the developing major work, issues explored in Antony and Cleopatra and Gladiator have been related to the Postmodern world explaining why the Roman values have continued to perpetuate over time. Some of these issues include: the conflicting cultural values of Eastern and Western countries, duty to state is similar to finding a balance between work and family, negative campaigning and corruption of politicians and those in power and the

continuation of wars where heroes are founded. An example is *General Cosgrove* being awarded Australian of the year for his leadership in East Timor. Nelson's article Putin hailed as the messiah but shows no signs of working a miracle<sup>1</sup> is an example of how the Roman ideals reside in a Postmodern context. It explores how the hero (President) Vladimir Putin intends to restore the Russian Empire through the virtues. An "exhibition called our Putin, with portraits depicting him in a host of heroic poses" reflects Octavius Caesar's use of the arts to create and maintain his ideal image. His goals are to "restore the rule of law and end corruption", a "democratic country" and to "restore discipline" an echo of the Roman empire's ideals. Specifically, Putin desires to "reinstate some order" and "strengthen the Russian state system"; these being the aims of Octavius Caesar which lead him to being one of Rome's greatest heroes. These similarities suggest that the Postmodern values consist of the Roman ideals. The newspaper genre is also part of identifying and reinforcing these specific values and therefore creating one view on this topic.

Furthermore, the two central texts from our perspective reveal that the ideals were flawed. Both Antony and Maximus wish to leave their Roman duties. These Elizabethan and Postmodern leanings suggest that the ideals did not offer everything, motivating the individuals to find other alternatives. Through irony and antithesis they demonstrate what the Romans accepted as well as exposing the flaws of the ideals. These values were institutionalised but realistically in action unachievable. This is as they aimed at reducing flaws in character to attain perfection.

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson, C. (2001). Putin hailed as the messiah but shows no signs of working a miracle. The Daily Telegraph. 27th March 2001.

The investigation branched out by looking at a variety of opinions being offered on the Classical genre such as reviews and articles. These views have contributed to the conclusions formed in the final product. For example, Gladiator has been criticised for its shortage of historical accounts. The documentary Gladiators<sup>2</sup> provides a turning point in the investigation where it uses the film Gladiator as evidence for its presentation highlighting the texts value. Many concepts were explored but the world limit contributed to the final product being specific and only the main ideas being discussed. Editing of the work was a major factor in making the exposition concise, clear and detailed. Hence, the final product has a clear argument incorporating those concepts explored as part of the investigation into an unified work.

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<sup>2</sup> Historical Lives. Gladiators. (2000). London: BBC. May, [video:VHS].