

# Gladiator!

## STARRING RUSSELL CROWE

Story by David Franzoni

Screenplay by David Franzoni,

John Logan, William Nicholson

Directed by Ridley Scott

*Reviewed by Dr. Mark Greene*

We love to watch war, or so it would seem, especially when the action takes place in the intimate territory of our primary relationships. *Gladiator* presents the audience with a feast of archetypal conflicts aching for resolution, and, appropriately, a copious amount of blood emphasizing the fact that unresolved conflicts in the archetypal realm result in people and things dying in our own.

‘Who is my father?’ For Abraham, David, Jesus and Mohamed - and us three billion descendents - the answer is a direct one: Dad, or Yaweh, lives upstairs. He used to suffer from wrathful fits but has since become a bit more compassionate. For the Romans of 180, C.E., an entire pantheon of male gods served, perhaps, as father figures, but not necessarily ours. Although the gods generate offspring, these tend to complicate matters greatly. Propitiation is required, and so sacrifices are made.

In *Gladiator*, Marcus Aurelius, the dying emperor of Rome (played by Richard Harris), requests that his general, Maximus (Russell Crowe), make such a sacrifice. Not in the domain of beef roasting, however. Maximus, the good son, is asked to put the longevity of the Roman Republic above his personal plans. In dramatic contrast to his already proven loyalty to Rome are the deliciously depicted images of his wife and son. Maximus longs for a striking Iberian-looking woman with



*Russell Crowe*

long, flowing black hair, who is accompanied in scenes of rural bliss by a stringy looking boy of nine or ten years (who, oddly enough, speaks perfect modern Italian). Whether inhabiting Iberia or the Elysian Fields, these apparitions give Maximus strength, and in the end, resolve to fight a personal holy war of revenge.

Threatening the status quo is Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix), the bad son, who is portrayed as never having received, deservedly or not, the love and affection required for the formation of a wholesome character. In synch with today's popular psychology, the filmmakers resort to the notion that such lack of love, perceived or real, is the cause of this child's malaise. Hammering this point home is the litany of character traits ascribed to Commodus that make him the object of scorn in the film, or what C. G. Jung would call the object of our shadow projections. Not only is he portrayed as having a strong predilection for sex with his sister, Lucilla (Connie Nielsen), Commodus is also shown resorting to patricide in the home stretch of his pathological quest for love . . . from anybody!

The modern mytheme of the hero who is asked to choose between corporate living and sustainable farming coupled with its cinematographic variant, the "Die Hard/Mad Max-I'm-going-to-save-my-butt-and-vanquish-the-evil-ones-in-the-process" blend deliciously with utterances such as "Rome is the mob," or 'you may think your life is a struggle in the name of something, when actually, the preservation of city, state and corporate identity are really a sham by which the rich get richer and the poor are bribed into political neutrality by spectacle.' Is Ridley Scott referring here to modern America and television? You bet he is.

The archetypalist will note that no mention is made in the film of the then still much maligned early Christians who often found themselves massacred in arenas such as



the ones seen in Gladiator. The film's sub-text, then, reads like a catechism: the 'good' hero eventually joins with beatific images of mother (Mary) and son (Jesus) while the 'bad' hero is vanquished by modus operandi such as patricide (Saturn, Jupiter) and sexual coupling with siblings (Jupiter, Ceres, Juno, Mars, Venus, etc . . .). So, once again, 'Out with the old gods and in with the new one.'

Want to fight about it?

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