

Quo vadis? From Painting to Cinema and Everything in Between

When Walter Parkes, joint head of production at Dreamworks, met with Ridley Scott to ask him to direct *Gladiator* (Dreamworks, 2000), he showed him a copy of a painting called *Pollice Verso* ("Thumbs Down!"), by the nineteenth-century French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme.

*It shows a gladiator standing over his wounded opponent in the Roman Coliseum, while excited spectators vote for a kill. Basically, Ridley looked at the picture and said, "I'm doing the movie," producer Douglas Wick recalls. "Walter knew how to get me," agrees Scott, who studied painting at the Royal College of Art, "because I love to create worlds."*¹

About 87 years before *Gladiator*, *Pollice verso* had already inspired *Quo vadis?* (Cines, 1913), one of the first major epics in film history: there, however, the pictorial inspiration had been "woven" into the texture of the film in a much more literal way. While one can only speculate how many - or how few - of today's viewers recognize the pictorial references in *Gladiator*, the pictorial quotations of *Quo vadis?* were quickly spotted by its first audiences, not least because of the publicity materials around the film.

Living Pictures

The use of pictorial quotations in films continues to produce uneasy feelings among film-makers, film critics and film historians raised within the modernist and auteurist aesthetic. This practice has a long tradition, however, which we cannot ignore when viewing and re-viewing films from all over the world. For it has a great deal to tell us about both the idea of iconic images and the audiences who respond to them. In his article "When History Films (Try To) Become Paintings" (1996), Charles Tashiro shows how historical films which evoke famous paintings and art styles, offer both the gratification of sensuous spectacle and the satisfactions of rec-

ognizing familiar images.² This pleasure derives from the cultural values common to the filmmakers and their audience. In his *European Cinemas, European Societies*, Pierre Sorlin remarks that “Visconti’s *Senso* (1954) enthused its viewers all over Europe since it imitated, deliberately, the Italian painters of the mid-nineteenth century with their vast horizons, their skies ending in the sea and their sunny mornings.”³ In these films the action is slowed down, sometimes even brought to a standstill in order to facilitate pictorial recognition. We can trace this practice back to the earliest years of cinema.

At that time, there was a prolific number of filmed paintings, and it is even possible to speak of a genre. Often they consisted of short narratives, which either ended with a *tableau* depicting a famous painting, or in which the action was delayed or slowed down at the climax of the film. The horizontal line of the story was thus interrupted by the vertical moment of the quotation, rather like an operatic aria. The idea was to ensure that the quotation would be recognizable - though this did tend to produce an odd kind of friction between the various elements of the film. These films were often called Living Pictures, *Lebende Bilder* or *tableaux animés*. The paintings depicted were frequently nineteenth-century works, particularly those considered to represent the official taste; paintings, in other words, which enjoyed public acclaim and had won prizes at the Paris Salons. The genre has several, often overlapping names: academic painting, *art pompier* or bourgeois realism. A work such as Alphonse de Neuville’s *Les Dernières Cartouches* (1873), for instance, which depicts one of the battles of the Franco-Prussian War, was used for no fewer than four different films: one by the Lumière brothers in 1897, one by Méliès in the same year, one by Gaumont from 1898 and one by Pathé, made probably in 1899.⁴ Another good example is *Le Duel après le bal masqué* (1857-59) by Jean-Léon Gérôme, quoted in the Pathé film *Un duel après le bal* (1900).⁵ Here the whole story is no more than a build-up to the depiction of the painting. The action is almost frozen when the film arrives at the moment of the quotation. The Pathé catalogue explicitly mentioned the painting, the painter and the source (the Chantilly museum). The painting itself had already caused such a stir in its own time that the reviewers who speculated on what might have been happening before the depicted scene prompted the appearance of several hastily written stage plays, all ending with the scene as their final *tableau*.⁶ The genre of *tableau animé* occurred elsewhere too. In their recent book on the British Mutoscope & Biograph, Brown and Anthony note that the company produced a series of cinematic *tableaux vivants*, entitled *Living Pictures*. Among them was the film *The Slave Market*, after a popular painting by, again, Gérôme.⁷

The work of Jean-Léon Gérôme also plays an important role in the Italian epic *Quo vadis?* (1913) by Enrico Guazzoni which might be regarded as a sort of a late example of these Living Pictures series. Apart from the pervasive influence of Gérôme’s work on the film’s reconstruction of ancient Rome, Guazzoni literally quotes two of Gérôme’s paintings in the course of the action and in the case of one of them the film adds a static insert to aid the recognition of the quotation. I refer to the paintings *The Christian Martyrs’ Last Prayer* (1863-83) and *Pollice verso* (1874). The publicity stills and graphic design around the film helped to facilitate the recognition by pointing out the comparison with the paintings. A search in the Dutch and British trade press has yielded no direct evidence of this recognition.⁸ However, in *Projecting the Past* (1997) Maria Wyke notes that “audiences are said to have clapped every time they recognized the representation in the filmic medium of such popular neoclassical paintings as these.”⁹ The problem is, however, that Gérôme’s work, which had been popular up to the 1890s, afterwards lost its place in the canon of official taste. While it is understandable that the cinema at the turn of the century should have focused on the established art of the preceding decades, it is not immediately obvious why a film such as *Quo vadis?*, made more than a decade later, should still be drawing upon the same material. We shall see that the representation of antiquity in the film *Quo vadis?* is clearly not only or not simply an archaeological reconstruction, but is just as much indebted to the image of antiquity fos-

tered by nineteenth-century art and disseminated in all sorts of secondary forms by the media of reproduction: engraving, photography, lantern slides, book illustration and early film. That image of ancient Rome and Pompeii, which became one of the great clichés of cinema, is partly located in the artistic imagination. This article, then, deals with the origins and development of that cliché.

The general focus here is the relationship between nineteenth-century painting and the cinema of the early twentieth century, with reference to one film, *Quo vadis?* (Cines 1913). There are three main topics. First, the representation of antiquity and the construction of a cliché. Second, the decline of academic painting in the second half of the nineteenth century, and its preservation by popular commercial cinema, first internationally and later mainly in Hollywood; and third, the contribution of intermedial research to historical understanding.¹⁰ The investigation of pictorial influences on *Quo vadis?* addresses first the general question of how the academic style of representing the ancient world was transmitted, and then examines the particular case of the relationship between Gérôme's paintings and *Quo vadis?*, both as novel and film.

The Painters of Roman Life

First, the general representation of antiquity in nineteenth-century art and its reception by early, and especially Italian cinema. Let us turn to some of the paintings concerned.

We shall look first at some of Jean-Léon Gérôme's works, in particular the canvases depicting the Roman arenas, the gladiators, the Christians being thrown to the lions and the chariot races. In chronological order these are *Ave Caesar, Morituri Te Salutant* (1859), *The Death of Caesar* (1867) - considered Gérôme's masterpiece by Gerald Ackerman in his monograph -, *Pollice Verso* (1874), *The Christian Martyr's Last Prayer* (1863-83) and *The Chariot Race/Circus Maximus* (1876). Many other painters and paintings could, of course, be mentioned in this context, but my impression is that Gérôme played a central role in the development of nineteenth as well as twentieth-century representation of ancient Roman life.¹¹ To mention just one pertinent detail: before Gérôme historians were never sure whether *pollice verso* meant "thumbs up" or "thumbs down;" since Gérôme we all know for certain that it means "thumbs down."

Within the genre, I think we can say that where a painter such as Lawrence Alma-Tadema focused on the intimate life of the Romans, Gérôme's imagination was directed more towards the Roman public life, although Alma-Tadema too painted some public scenes.¹² There is a big difference between Gérôme's cruel and clinical approach to antiquity, and the sweet, frivolous, sentimental and sensual manner of Alma-Tadema. If Alma-Tadema foregrounded the virtuously enamoured couple, the *dolce far niente* and aesthetic cultivation of the Roman well-to-do, Gérôme's interest was held by the sensational and spectacular aspect of classical Rome, the extremes of good and evil of which both sexes were capable. Both Alma-Tadema and Gérôme went to great lengths to get historically correct details. However, one cannot avoid the impression that Alma-Tadema viewed antiquity through Victorian spectacles that tended to temper both the violence and the sexual license that we now associate so readily with imperial Rome.¹³ Gérôme had to recognize that due to his own misinformation the details of his earliest *tableaux* of ancient Rome, such as *Ave Caesar*, were not entirely correct. The swords were too long, for instance. In his *Chariot Race* all the horses' legs are shown splayed, a traditional mode of depiction, but factually inaccurate. It was due to photography and Eadweard Muybridge's photographic analyses of human and animal motion at Stanford, that artists realized they had been wrong. Muybridge and Stanford, who was his patron, visited Paris in 1881. Gérôme was one of the guests invited to the home of his colleague Meissonnier, where on 26 November 1881 Muybridge projected a series of photographs on rotating discs (his "zoopraxiscope"), which simulated motion.¹⁴ The works of Alma-Tadema and Gérôme are thus just

as much the expression of their own times as they are reconstructions of the past. My impression is that early historical films such as *Quo vadis?* were influenced by both versions of ancient Rome: the Rome of spectacle and violence and the Rome of family intimacy and civilized refinement. Let us now look at the ways in which early Italian filmmakers, or studios such as Cines, could have been aware of these paintings.

Direct Influence

Obviously we can consider the direct communication of paintings through exhibitions and their reviews. Exhibition catalogues, auction catalogues, daily newspapers and the trade press are important sources, but let us not ignore the impact of the paintings themselves. In the case of *Quo vadis?* I am reminded of the catalogues of the Paris Salons that so blatantly mirrored official taste in the nineteenth century, as well as the catalogues of the Venice *Biennale*. Cines, the production company that made *Quo vadis?*, was located in Rome, so that one inevitably recalls the paintings in permanent collections or exhibitions there. There is a problem however. The academic painting of Tadema and Gérôme fell out of official favor around the turn of the century. At the time that the first feature film epics were made, around 1911-1913, their work was not longer exhibited at the Paris Salons. But there was a little more to it than this. The Salons were for living artists and Gérôme was dead by then. Tadema died in 1912, but his last major work was in 1909. When one examines the Salon catalogues for the teens, it is clear that official taste had shifted to the realism of the Barbizon School and to Impressionism. Landscapes and portraits had replaced historicism as the leading genres.¹⁵ So that it is remarkable that precisely at a time when the historical style was out of fashion, even with the conservatories and official arbiters of taste, the new medium should have focused so much on the historical genre. On the other hand, during a period of rising popular nationalism, in which historical painting played an important cultural role, it is perhaps not entirely surprising that these impulses translated themselves into or onto the early historical feature film, which in turn nurtured new audiences in nationalistic pride. In the light of Italian nationalism, therefore, the practice of reverting to a glorious past via historical films is not so peculiar. Equally plausible is the recurrence to key images from paintings that expressed that past, even when they were painted by non-Italians.

Indirect Influence

In addition to the direct impact of paintings upon the filmic imagination, we should consider some of the *indirect* influences since they were probably greater. Let us look first at engravings. A painter like Alma-Tadema took care to follow up the sale of a painting with etchings and engravings.¹⁶ Most people could not afford an original canvas by Alma-Tadema, but they could afford to obtain an engraving. Graphic work became an important source of income for established nineteenth-century painters. Gérôme too secured extensive sales of engravings after his paintings through the art dealer Goupil.¹⁷ The work of academic painters was much in demand with American buyers and a lot of Gérôme's work was acquired by collectors in the United States. However, the technique of photoengraving ensured that his most popular paintings, including *Pollice verso*, remained well known all over Europe and did not disappear from the public mind. The paintings of Gérôme and Alma-Tadema were frequently reproduced in the illustrated magazines, which were quickly becoming part of the late nineteenth-century cultural scene. The first illustrations were engravings but, with the advent of the rotary press, photographs of the original paintings could be published and this greatly increased their popularity. Academic paintings did not just disappear overnight, even though the paintings themselves may no longer

have been in vogue. As recyclable illustrative material they began a second life. Photographic reproductions of paintings by Gérôme and Alma-Tadema appeared everywhere, from manuals of archeology to historical novels, dictionaries, school books and postcards.¹⁸ Archeology was not merely for specialists in the nineteenth century for, as the illustrated magazines show, it had clearly caught the imagination of the average middle class - rather like the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* in our own time. These images must therefore have enjoyed a wide circulation. I shall return below to the illustrations of the novel *Quo vadis?*

Famous painting also appeared on magic lantern slides and the reproduction of antiquities for the *laterna magica* was likewise popular in the nineteenth century. Slides of Gérôme's paintings could be ordered at Goupil & Cie. A series on *Quo Vadis?* was issued by La Bonne Presse, probably in 1909, containing two slides directly inspired by Gérôme's *Pollice verso* and *The Christian Martyr's Last Prayer*.¹⁹

An important source of publicity for paintings depicting ancient Rome or Pompeii was the *tableau vivant* which was popular with the upper bourgeoisie. As Tashiro points out in the case of pictorial quotation in films, the precondition for successful citation was the presence of a culture shared by performers and audience. Both parties had to possess the same frame of reference.²⁰ Alongside its drawing-room version, the *tableau vivant* developed into mass spectacle, with presentations in the open air, on the stage and in music halls and vaudevilles. In the late nineteenth century, for instance, *The Last Days of Pompeii* was staged at Coney Island, and here again we have our modern avatars in the spectacles of the theme parks and even the teemed casinos of turn-of-millennium Las Vegas. The construction of *tableaux* after famous paintings was thus already a well established theatrical tradition before it was appropriated by the cinema.²¹

As I indicated at the beginning, *tableaux vivants* were undoubtedly used because of the cultural cachet they brought to the new medium of film, but there were other reasons too. Both Brown & Anthony and Martin Loiperdinger note that *tableau vivant* movies based on academic paintings offered a way of displaying nudity in the new mass medium. As in the theatre, nudity was permitted provided that the subject remained static, and that the recreated picture itself belonged to the category of painting (mythological, allegorical or historical) in which nudity was allowed. This did not, however, prevent complaints by social and religious groups. The press too had a lot of fun at the expense of these Living Pictures.²²

Guazzoni, Gérôme and the Visual Expression of *Quo vadis?*

Let us now tighten things up a little and be more specific. What indications do we have of a tradition linking *Quo vadis?* to Gérôme's paintings, and how does this relate to Guazzoni?

First, there is the intermediate position of the novel *Quo vadis?* by Henryk Sienkiewicz.

Although novels such as Edward Bullwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* and Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur* were internationally popular, a glance at the *Catalogo dei libri italiani dell'Ottocento* and the *Bolletino delle pubblicazioni italiane* tells us that there were not many Italian translations of Wallace and Bullwer-Lytton at the turn of the century. The exact contrary is true of Sienkiewicz's book and other works by the same author. The Polish writer must have been very popular in Italy, with several translations appearing between 1896 (the year of *Quo vadis?*) and 1913. Only a few of these editions, however, were illustrated.²³

The most interesting of the latter is an edition from 1909 published by Bideri in Naples which contains illustrations of Gérôme's *Pollice verso* and *The Christian Martyrs*, along with works by other academic painters, including Sienkiewicz's compatriot Siemiradzki.²⁴ One might compare *Pollice verso* and *The Christian Martyrs* with the gladiator scene and the lions scene in *Quo vadis?*, and with the publicity stills for the movie, which were also issued as postcards. On the still from *Quo vadis?* the gladiator and his victim raise their arms in exact-

ly the same gesture as the one we see in the painting. A Dutch program brochure for *Quo vadis?* carries a print on its back cover which is a rather rough copy of Gérôme's *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer*. The much-used publicity still from *Quo vadis?* showing the lions in the foreground, emerging from the cellar, and advancing on the martyrs in the background, comes very close to the painting; indeed the resemblance is positively striking. Second, there had been several previous adaptations of *Quo vadis?*, both for theatre and film.²⁵ Bernardini and Martinelli note that a stage version of the novel was performed in Naples in 1900, in which Amleto Novelli, later to play Vinicius in the 1913 movie, appeared as Nero. Another dramatized version was staged in 1910 in Turin. The French composer Jean Nougès composed an opera based on the novel. The first film version of *Quo vadis?* was probably the one made by Pathé in 1901, which Guazzoni might well have seen, as Pathé movies were widely distributed in Italy. The Pathé catalogue contains photographs which include the gladiator scene. The *mise en scène* here is very frontal and completely lacking in the perspectival depth of Gérôme's painting, but the poses of the victorious *mirmillo* and the vanquished *retarius* are copied from Gérôme, though the angle of vision may differ from the original painting and the Cines film. To be added to the sources already mentioned are Gérôme's own sculptures from themes in his paintings. In 1878 he completed a statue of the *mirmillo* and the *retarius*, in exactly the same postures and bearing exactly the same arms as in his celebrated picture. The statue won a prize at the Paris Universal Exhibition of that year. A few years after the Pathé film, the statue became even more familiar to the Paris public, for after Gérôme's death it was incorporated in a monument to him which was placed in the garden of the Louvre in the Rue de Rivoli, where it remained until the works that were done on the Louvre under Malraux. Another French version followed in 1910 entitled *Au temps des premiers chrétiens* and made by Film d'Art, but I have been unable to study this version for pictorial references.²⁶ It would be interesting to view the film to see if the public exhibition of the statue had effected the way in which it was quoted in a film released one year after it had taken up its position in the Louvre garden. Thirdly, there is Guazzoni's own background as painter, poster artist and set designer. Guazzoni studied at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Rome, and, as in any art academy at the turn-of-the-century, he must have been trained in academic drawing and painting and encouraged to read all about his illustrious predecessors. In his memoirs, he professes a love for accurate detail that goes back to his early training as a painter. I would say: his academic training as painter.²⁷ Guazzoni's first film about ancient Rome was *Agrippina* (1911), in which we already encounter the stereotype of Nero as evil and perverse emperor. The Nero of *Quo vadis?* looks quite a lot like him. By then the plumpish man, with his round head and fringe, must have been a familiar image. In 1911 Guazzoni made another historical film entitled *La sposa del Nilo*. With the exception of a scene showing people observing a street parade from above, shot from the sort of angle chosen by Alma-Tadema for his paintings, this movie most resembles a Living Picture. It tells the story of a pair of Egyptian lovers who are torn from each other by cruel external circumstance. In vain the hero tries to prevent the priests from sacrificing his girl's life; in the end she is thrown into the Nile as a prayer to the gods to fertilize the drought-plagued land.²⁸ The film appears to depict a famous painting by Federico Faruffini, *The Virgin of the Nile* which hangs to this day in the *Galleria D'Arte Moderna* in Rome.²⁹ In the painting we see the girl floating on the surface of the river like Millais' *Ophelia*, framed by flowers (a favorite nineteenth-century topos), with the priests and people standing on the bank of the Nile in the distance. In the film, this has been split into two scenes, consisting first of an establishing shot, showing the girl being thrown into the water, then a second scene showing the girl floating on the water, but without the background of onlookers. Guazzoni might very well have seen and used this painting, as a sort of Living Picture not unlike the practice in Pathé's *Le Duel* or the British Biograph *Living Pictures*, of staging the whole film in order to show what happened before the final *tableau*. The use of pictorial references in *Quo vadis?* was therefore nothing new in Guazzoni's career.

But why would Guazzoni use these paintings as his frame of reference? There is of course, the richness of their detail, which intensifies the feeling of a revived past. But also the correctness of that detail. In his own day, Gérôme was known for his faithful and archeologically correct reconstructions (the armour worn by the *mirmillo* in *Pollice verso* for instance, was copied from a genuine set of ancient armour in the Naples archeological museum), but how much of this was familiar to Guazzoni and the Cines people? We do not have precise answers to this question, but Ackerman's discussion of Gérôme's work may be of some use.³⁰ Ackerman perceives two distinct directions or tendencies within bourgeois realist art. One concentrates on objective realism, embracing scientific technique, perspective and photography and is concerned with an exhaustively accurate historical reconstruction of objects and their surroundings. The other, which Ackerman calls the subjective tendency, privileges interpretation over the methodically exact reproduction of detail. Gérôme was rather fixated on exact detail and did a great deal of archaeological and ethnographical research: clothing, architecture, theories about light and atmosphere - all contributed to the correctness and accuracy of his reconstructions of history. He did not hesitate to represent the gladiator in *Pollice verso* as a not too young and not too slender man, as somebody who has won only because of longer experience and superior technique. As Aleksa Čelebonović remarks in his book on bourgeois realism:

He is a professional; his work, however repellent, is nonetheless dealt with in a business-like manner. Similarly, neither the crowds on the terraces [...] nor the group of women in the box on Caesar's left [the Vestals] express the dignified and noble poise that the supporters of Neoclassicism liked to visualize in the Romans of both sexes.³¹

Looking at the detail of *Quo vadis?*, what do we see in the film, that reminds us of Gérôme's paintings?³² Let us consider the three sequences involving the chariot race, the gladiators and the lions attacking the Christian martyrs. The chariot race is viewed from a single perspective: to the left is a [clearly fake] wall with two large columns behind it, with the stands containing the spectators occupying the background. The same angle and the same set return in the scene with the lions and the martyrs, and the scene is clearly copied from Gérôme's *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer*. After the chariot race, we see shots of the entry of the gladiators, their salutes to the emperor and their fights. A long take shows the *retarius* and *mirmillo* in combat. When the *retarius* finally strikes the *mirmillo* down, the take is followed by a short, static and almost photographic insert, showing the gladiator fighting and beating the *retarius*, with both figures in the exact poses of the painting *Pollice verso*. To the left of the imperial loge sits a group of women dressed in white. They are the Vestals and in the painting they are placed on the emperor's right. In both representations the Vestals are responding heatedly and aggressively to the spectacle in the arena.

Where Pathé copied only the central composition of the two men in its 1901 version, Guazzoni takes the quotation much further by recreating the picture's spatial surroundings, adopting the same angle and the same set, with the arena wall to the left and the imperial balcony to the right, and finally by recreating for the film audience the same sensation of being *in* the arena with the gladiators. The same feeling of directness and latent physical threat is again present in the scene copied from *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer*, the only difference being Guazzoni's addition, using what we now call analytical editing, of several scenes of his own. There are for instance cut-ins to the terrified martyrs, and to the lions devouring what we take to be the remains of Christians. Alongside the shots showing the perspective from the arena, Guazzoni inserts a view from the stands, so that we get the point of view of both the attackers and the spectators. The point of view of the victims is emblematically absent, and here Guazzoni comes close to the harshness that is so evident in Gérôme's paintings.

Gérôme's public scenes appealed to filmmakers seeking to recreate the cruel and spectacular aspect of Roman life. This is as true of Hollywood as of the early Italian cinema. Americans could easily have seen the original

Gérôme paintings. They may have been getting more and more out of fashion, but rich Americans had been busily buying up Gérôme's paintings in the nineteenth century, and their reception by the public had been prepared by reviewers such as Henry James.³³

Although there has often been speculation in the past about the influence of Alma-Tadema's work on Hollywood epic cinema (writers, such as Vern Swanson, raise the topic but they do not develop it further), one cannot help suspecting that Gérôme was just as important as, and possibly even more important than, Alma-Tadema as a source of the visual vocabulary of antiquity in the cinema, and above all of the great clichés of the arena: the circus and the chariot race, the gladiators and the lions versus the Christians, - in short of the standard image of Roman public life that has come to us through the movies and the Asterix comics.

Our inquiry into pictorial influences in a film like *Quo vadis?* reveals not only the vigorous afterlife of certain nineteenth-century paintings - their dissemination in, and reappropriation by, popular cultural forms such as book illustration, theatre and film - but also the importance of exploring the intermediate phases of the passage from painting to cinema. In order to make sensible inferences about pictorial influences on film we need to explore the gaps between the borders of the histories of painting and cinema. If we ignore the forms and phases of historical transition and transmission when comparing painting and cinema, we risk simply projecting our own limited contemporary perspective onto the past that is represented. In other words: we end up speaking about *our* influences rather than the influences at work in the film. By exploring the spaces between paintings and pictorial quotations we can trace the ways in which images turn into icons and clichés, thereby acquiring a second life. We are also able to improve our understanding of how intermediality functions in practice. This kind of approach reveals how certain images function as cultural icons of veracity, creating a canonical view of the past that corresponds to the expectations of the audiences of the new medium: expectations of authenticity, certainly, but also of legitimacy and cultural register.

Illustrations

1. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pollice Verso* (1874). Phoenix Art Gallery, Phoenix.
2. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer* (1863-83). Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.
3. Frontispice of the novel *Quo vadis?* by Henryk Sienkiewicz, 1909 edition by Bideri, Naples. Collection Ivo Blom.
4. Illustration from the 1909 Bideri edition of the novel *Quo vadis?*. Collection Ivo Blom.
5. Publicity still from the film *Quo vadis?* (Cines, 1913), issued as postcard. Collection Ivo Blom.
6. Backside of a Dutch programme booklet of the film *Quo vadis?* (Cines, 1913). Collection Ivo Blom.
7. Publicity still from the film *Quo vadis?* (Cines, 1913). Collection Stichting Mecano.
8. Federico Faruffini, *The Virgin of the Nile* (1865). Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome.

Notes

¹ A. Lewin, "Rome Wasn't Filmed in a Day," *Première*, vol. 13, no. 8 (May 2000), p. 44.

² Ch. Tashiro, "When History Films (Try to) Become Paintings," *Cinema Journal*, no. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 19-33.

³ P. Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies 1939-1990* (London-New York: Routledge, 1994-1991), p. 174.

⁴ J. Bay, "Vers une approche intégrée de la notion d'identification. Le cas de l'IIIc745/12 ou du PX20282," in J.A. Gili, M. Lagny, M. Marie, V. Pinel (sous la dir. de), *Les Vingt Premières Années du cinéma français* (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle/AFRCH, 1995), pp. 281-290.

⁵ For *Un duel après le bal*, see H. Bousquet, *Catalogue Pathé des années 1896 à 1914. 1896-1906* (Bures-sur-Yvette: Henri Bousquet, 1996), p. 857. I saw a copy of this supplied by Gosfilmofond at the 1995 Riga Summer School on performance in silent cinema.

⁶ G.M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme* (London: Sotheby Publications, 1986), p. 40. Gérôme painted three almost identical versions between 1857 and 1859, the first is nowadays in the museum of Chantilly, the second in the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg and the third is held by the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

⁷ R. Brown, B. Anthony, *A Victorian Enterprise: The History of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company* (Wiltshire: Flicks Books, 1999), p. 218

⁸ I examined trade papers such as the British magazine *Bioscope* and the Dutch magazines *De Bioscoop-Courant* and *De Kinematograaf*. For the European reception of *Quo vadis?* see V. Martinelli (a cura di), *Cinema italiano in Europa 1907-1929. I*, and F. Bono (a cura di), *Cinema italiano in Europa 1907-1929. II* (Roma: AIRSC, 1995). In volume II, M. Hendrykowska discusses the reception of the film in Poland. Sienkiewicz attended the première of the film in Cracow and was applauded there. Hendrykowska also mentions that, at the Italian première, Sienkiewicz's portrait appeared on the screen and the Polish national anthem was played before the film started. Naturally the audience rose to its feet. M. Hendrykowska, "Il cinema italiano in Polonia 1909-1939," in Bono, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-58.

⁹ M. Wyke, *Projecting the Past. Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (London-New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 120. On p. 118-122, Wyke discusses the pictorial references of *Pollice verso* and *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer* for the 1913 film version of *Quo vadis?* She also mentions on p. 119, that the end of the film *Nerone* (Ambrosio, 1909) also contains a citation of *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer*, when Nero at the end of his life imagines the sufferings of the Christians in the arena. This could mean that this film, along with all the other intertextual and intermedial influences mentioned in my article, also influenced Guazzoni. N.B.: a year before the Ambrosio film, an Edison version entitled *Nero and the Burning of Rome* (Edison 1908) was released, which might in turn, have influenced the Italian film.

¹⁰ A. Gaudreault, *Du littéraire au filmique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1999). J.E. Müller, "Geschichtsbilder im Kino. Perspektiven einer Semiohistorische der Audiovisionen," *Medienwissenschaft*, no. 4 (1998), pp. 406-423. See also Müller's book *Intermedialität. Formen moderner kultureller Kommunikation* (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 1996). I do not entirely share Müller's historical pragmatism, but I find his ideas very fruitful when combined with empirical and contextual research.

¹¹ The paintings of the Polish artist Henryk Siemiradzki are important, particularly *Nero's Torches* (1876, also called *Christian Sacrifice*) and *A Christian Dirce* (date unknown). The story of Nero's torches, mentioned by Tacitus, was absorbed into the novel *Quo vadis?* by Siemiradzki's compatriot Sienkiewicz. It is possible that Sienkiewicz's novel was inspired by both Siemiradzki's and Tacitus. Furthermore, Alexander von Wagner's *The Chariot Races* (1893) supplies one of the central images of all chariot race scenes: the horses storming towards the spectator. It was used for instance for the poster of Klaw and Erlanger stage version of *Ben Hur* in 1901. See D. Mayer, *Playing Out the Empire. Ben-Hur and Other Toga Plays and Films, 1883-1908. A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 201-202.

¹² For Alma-Tadema, see: E. Becker et al. (eds.), *Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1996). See also: V. Swanson, *The Biography and Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London: Garton & Co./Scolar Press, 1990).

¹³ This is not to say Alma-Tadema painted an a-sexual image of Antiquity. Some of his paintings “became virtual catalogues of late-Victorian fantasies about the nature of feminine sexuality.” B. Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity. Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 248.

¹⁴ Ackerman, *op. cit.*, p. 74. From 1878 on, articles on Muybridge’s experiments appeared in French magazines, exciting considerable interest. The first of these articles appeared on 14 December 1878 in the magazine *La Nature*, no. 289, p. 23-26. Gérôme had thus probably heard of Muybridge before the latter came to Europe.

¹⁵ An exception is the academic realist painter of history pictures, Jean-Paul Laurens (1838-1921), who continued to show at the Salon des Artistes Françaises until 1912 and again in 1920.

¹⁶ R. Verhoogt, “En nu nog een paar woorden business.’ Reproducties naar het werk van Alma Tadema,” *Jong Holland*, no. 4 (1996), pp. 22-33.

¹⁷ H. Lafont-Couturier, “La Maison Goupil ou la notion d’oeuvre originale remise en question,” *Revue de l’Art*, vol. 113, no. 2 (1996), pp. 59-66. See also Lafont-Couturier’s book *Gérôme* (Paris: Herscher, 1998).

¹⁸ *Pollice verso* was reproduced in the *Petit Larousse illustré* well into this century. It was also often used as an illustration to Latin textbooks.

¹⁹ The ancient world in general was a fruitful source of inspiration to lanternists, even without the inputs from academic painting. The eruption of Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii had been an extremely popular theme from the late eighteenth century onwards, probably in connection with the beginnings of modern excavation and the rise of the sciences of archaeology and historiography. A series on *Ben Hur* appeared in the late nineteenth century, followed in the early twentieth century by a series entitled *Pompeii Past and Present*. For the 1894 *Ben Hur* version by Frank F. Weeks, see: *The New Magic Lantern Journal*, vol. 5, 1, January 1987, pp. 2-5. Only one of the slides depicts the famous chariot race. It is vaguely reminiscent of Gérôme’s *Chariot Race* but also of Alexander von Wagner’s version. *Pompeii Past and Present*, a series consisting of partly painted and partly photographic images, is quoted in the 1906 catalogue of Wood’s, London. A magic lantern series based on Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* was also released around the turn-of-the-century. Although one picture is reminiscent of Von Wagner’s and Gérôme’s *Chariot Races*, the series does not seem to contain any direct pictorial quotations. A contemporary film version, the 1908 Vitagraph production *Julius Caesar*, does contain such a quotation. The climax of the film was directly copied from Gérôme’s *Death of Caesar*. See: W. Uricchio, R. Pearson, *Reframing Culture. The Case of the Vitagraph Quality Films* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 6-7, 66-68, 87-95.

²⁰ The Dutch novelist Louis Couperus begins his first novel *Eline Vere* (1890) with the description of the staging of such a *tableau vivant*, in this case *The Death of Cleopatra*, possibly the one by Hans Makart: “In the white glow of light, old Egypt seemed to be recreated. Among luxurious draperies, one vaguely saw something like an oasis, a blue sky, a few pyramids, and a group of palm trees. On her sofa, supported by sphinxes, Cleopatra reclined, a flood of locks waving around her, approaching death, while a viper coiled itself around her arm. Two female slaves twisted themselves at her feet in despair. The colorful dream of oriental beauty of just a few seconds, the poetry of antiquity was briefly revived, under the gazes of a modern soirée.” *Ibid.*, p. 10; the translation from the Dutch is my own.

²¹ For the *tableaux vivants* on the stage, see: F. Haskell's essay "The Sad Clown: Some Notes on a Nineteenth Century Myth," in his *Past and Present of Art and Taste. Selected Essays* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 117-128. For the Coney Island pyrodrama of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, staged by James Pain, see: D. Mayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-97. The Italian actress Hesperia, later on one of the Italian divas, started out in 1910 as a vaudeville and theatre artist with an act, called *Riproduzioni di capolavori d'arte* (Reproductions of masterpieces of art). Most of the names of the painters and sculptors whose works she imitated are now long forgotten, apart from Canova. She received general praise from the press for her faithful reproduction of these masterpieces. T. Simoncelli, *Hesperia, stella del varietà e diva del muto* (s.l.: Vespignani, 1995), pp. 25-31

²² The enterprising Oskar Messter put his actors on a rotating platform, creating movement all the same. The Pathé catalogue mentions one of the "scènes grivoises," *Flagrant délit d'adultère* (c. 1896-1900), as an adaptation of the painting *Flagrant délit* (after 1876) by Jules-Arsène Garnier, a pupil of Gérôme. Another "scène grivoise," *Le Jugement de Phryné* (c. 1896-1899), could have been inspired by a famous painting of that name by Gérôme (1861). See: Bousquet, *op. cit.*, p. 854.

²³ Translations of *Quo vadis?* include versions by F. Verdinois (Napoli: De Hun & Rocholl, 1899 and 1900), F. Bideri (Napoli: Bideri, 1909), P. Valera (Sonzogno, 1900), K. Nagel (Milano: Treves 1900 and 1911) and C. Collini (Firenze: Nerbini 1908). The Verdinois version was probably the first, and had already made its appearance in 1897 in the features pages of *Il Corriere di Napoli*. The 1899 edition of Verdinois's translation calls itself the fourth authorized Italian edition, so that there must have been earlier editions not referred to by the catalogues. The 1911 edition, published by Treves, was already the seventeenth edition by that publisher. This edition, which according to the catalogues was the most recent edition at the time Guazzoni began his film, could well have inspired him - Guazzoni states in his memoirs (see note 27), that he himself selected the novel to be filmed - or the Cines studio. Treves offered five different versions at the time, including one octavo with fifty-four drawings by A. Minardi.

²⁴ The novel also contains illustrations of Siemiradzki's *Nero's Torches* plus a few images that I have not been able to identify (a century separates us from them now). They are reminiscent of Alma-Tadema, however, notably the figure called Eunice (Petronius's slave, who dies together with him) which recalls Tadema's paintings of reclining women in pensive moods.

²⁵ A. Bernardini, V. Martinelli, *Il cinema muto italiano, 1913. I film degli anni d'oro II* (Roma: Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, 1994), pp. 182-183. See also: Bernardini, *Cinema muto italiano. Arte, divismo e mercato 1910-1914* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1982), pp. 146-154. Later film versions followed in 1924 and 1951, an Italian television series was made by RAI television in 1985.

²⁶ No copy of the film is available in the French film archives.

²⁷ After Guazzoni left the academy, he did all kinds of odd jobs including poster designs for theatres. The Burcardo theatre museum in Rome holds copies of the posters he designed for the vaudeville shows of the actor Eduardo Scarpetta. Together with the poster designer Ballester, who later became famous, Guazzoni painted the ceiling for the new cinema Moderno: a sort of neo-nineteenth-century version of an eighteenth-century world of figures from rococo allegory, with Light occupying the central position. See for this: *Multisala*, no. 1 (January 1998), pp. 2-4. Guazzoni next worked as a set designer for a theatre company and finally started out in the film business. In his memoirs he recalls how he was forced to shoot comedies, and how he only began to develop as a director after he was allowed to shoot historical films. He then erroneously styles himself as the man who single handedly developed the feature film and the epic film, with their enormous masses of extras, studiously

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overlooking the competition that was coming from other feature films with huge casts of extras, such as *La Caduta di Troia* (1911) and *L'Inferno* (1911). Cines itself had already made a feature film in 1911, even if it was a comedy: *Pinocchio*. Guazzoni's memoirs of his early film career were published in *Film*, no. 23 (7 June 1941), pp. 13-14, no. 24 (14 June 1941), p. 9, and no. 26 (28 June) 1941, p. 5. Unfortunately, after no. 26 the memoirs were discontinued, so that Guazzoni's memories of the making of *Quo vadis?* remained unpublished.

²⁸ The descriptions of *La sposa del Nilo* and *Agrippina* are taken from viewings of copies in the Desmet Collection of the Netherlands Film Museum.

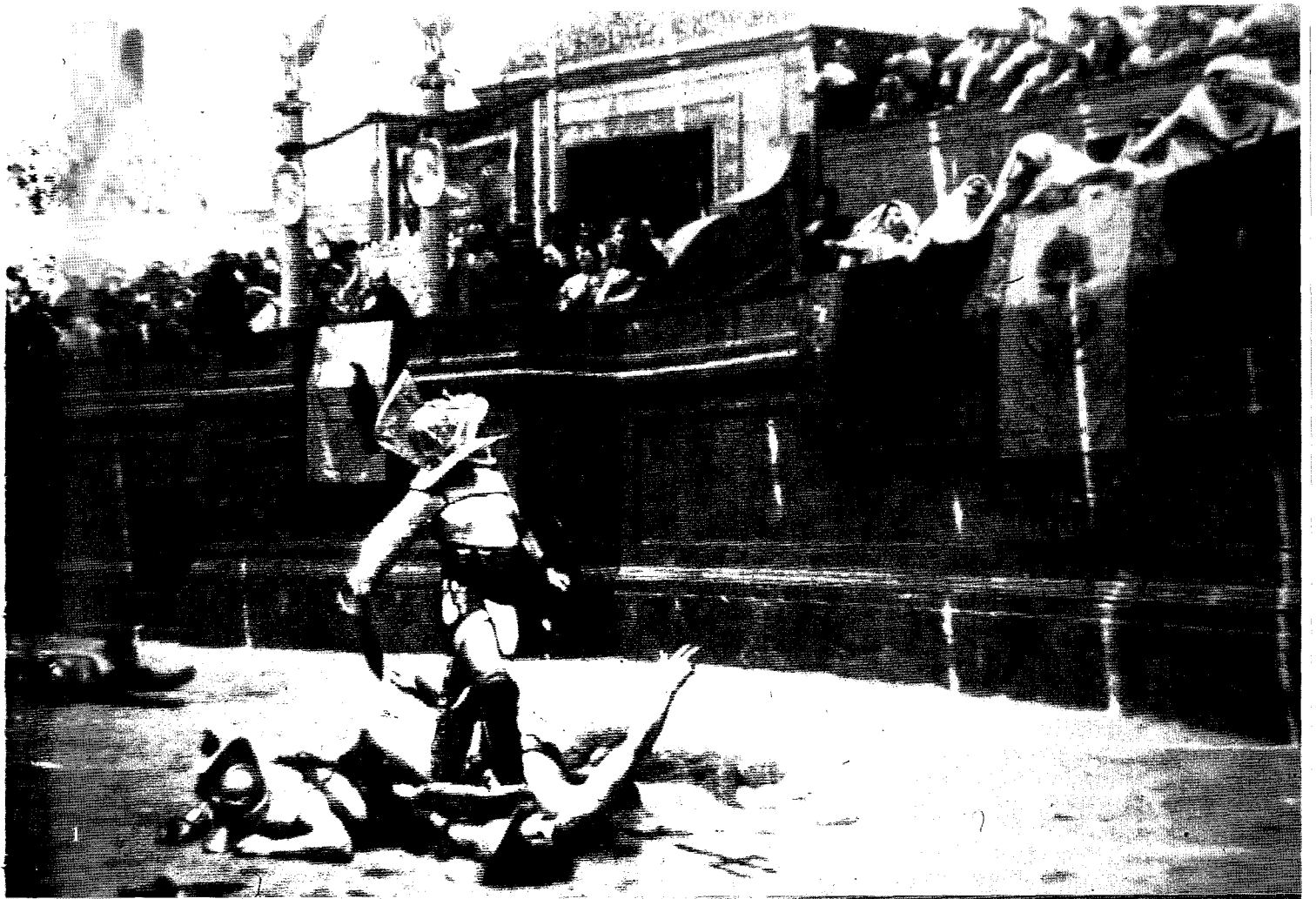
²⁹ P. Bucarelli, *La Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna: Roma - Valle Giulia* (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1976 [1951]), pp. 153, 204. See also: F. Bellonzi, *Architettura, pittura, scultura dal Neoclassicismo al Liberty* (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 1978), p. 82. In Bellonzi's book, the painting is called *Sacrificio al Nilo*. Bellonzi considers *The Virgin of the Nile* to be Faruffini's finest piece of historical painting. A sketch of the painting is shown on p. 483.

³⁰ Ackerman, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

³¹ A. Čelebonovič, *The Heyday of Salon Painting. Masterpieces of Bourgeois Realism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), p. 77.

³² The copy used for this description is the version restored by the Netherlands Film Museum, using various existing copies from film archives in Milan, Rome, Amsterdam and London, but based primarily on the London copy.

³³ In his book *Artistes Pompiers*, James Harding states that from the 1870s on several rich Americans bought Gérôme's work. William Walters bought *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer* as well as a version of *The Duel After the Masked Ball*. Together with *The Death of Caesar*, they later ended up in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. Department store magnate A.T. Stewart bought Gérôme's *Chariot Race*, which is in the Chicago Art Institute Museum now. Finally, *Pollice verso* was bought by Stewart too and ended up in the Phoenix Art Gallery. J. Harding, *Artistes Pompiers. French Academic Art in the 19th Century* (London: Academy Editions, 1979), pp. 23-29.



ENRICO SIENKIEWICZ

QUO VADIS?

Versione italiana di FERDINANDO BIDERI

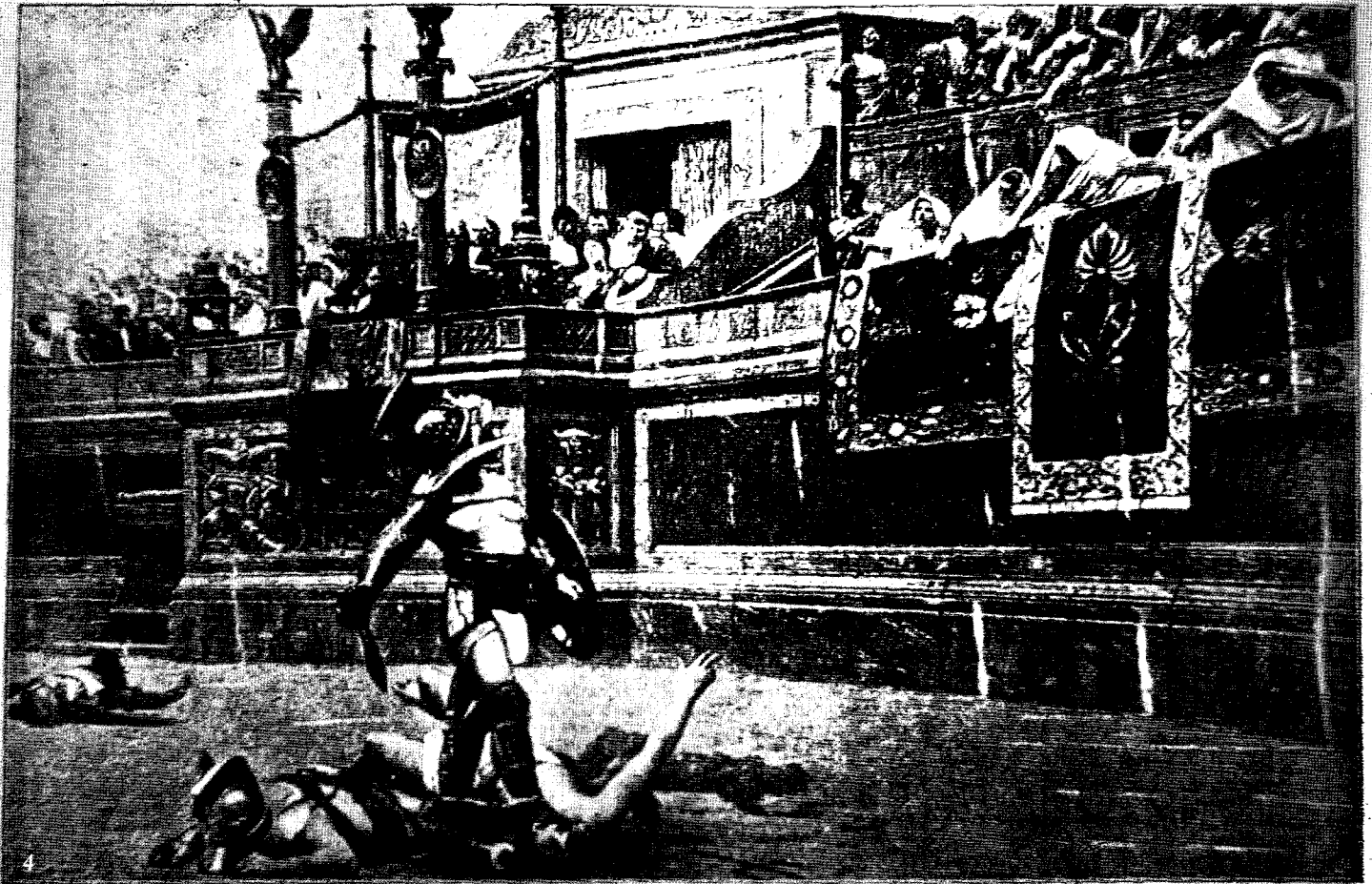
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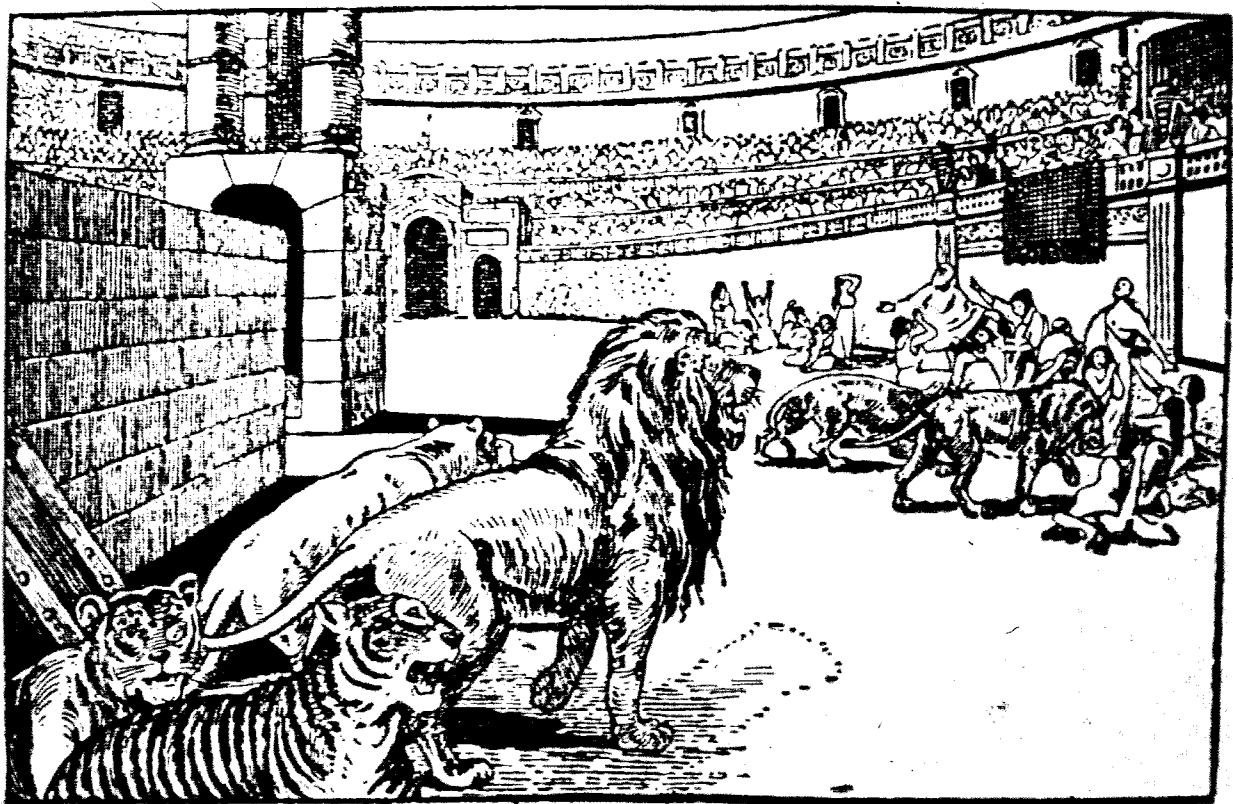
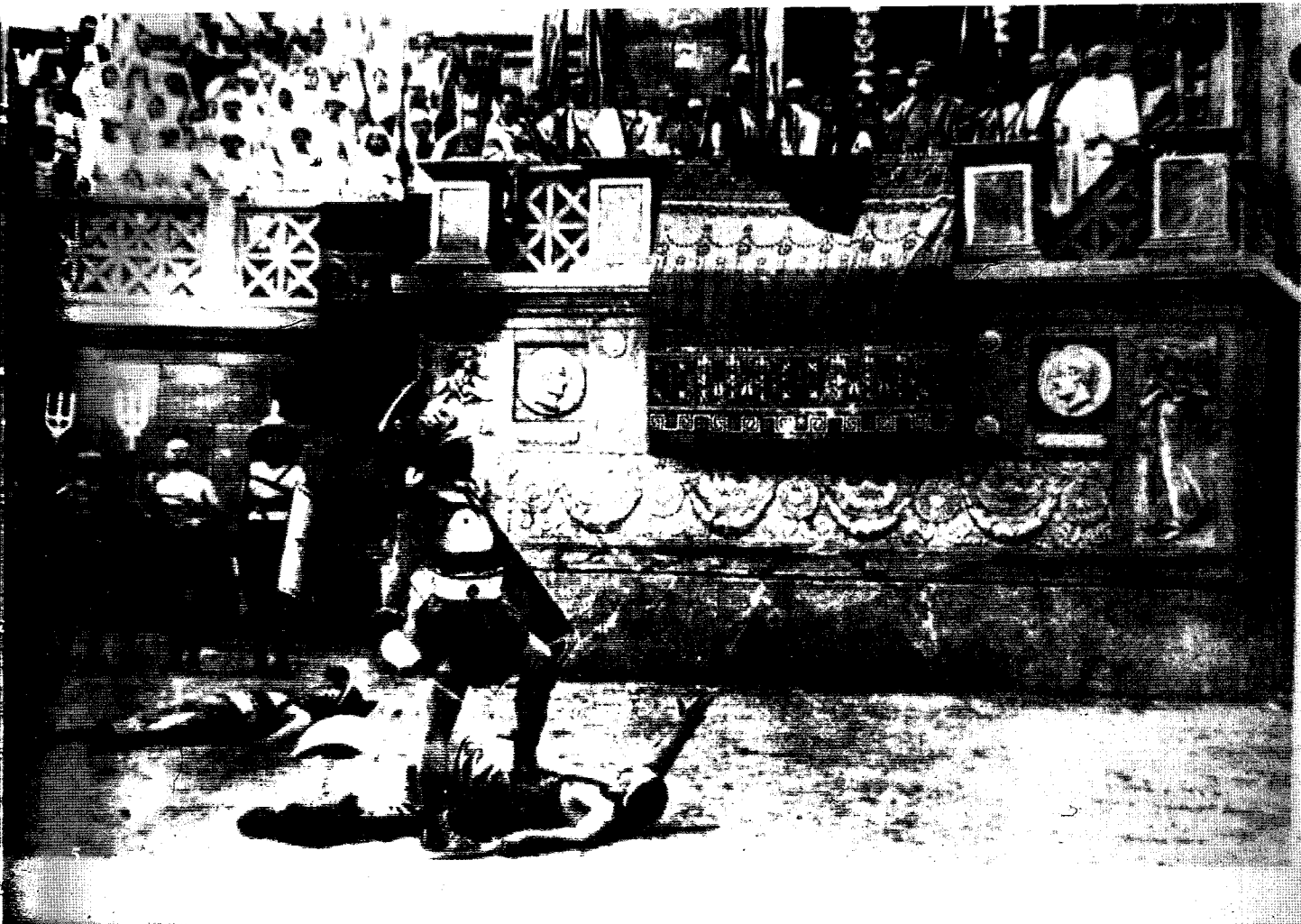


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