

The Sword and The Sandal: The Power of Objects in the Ancient World Onscreen

This paper will explore the role of objects in the sword and sandal genre in the twenty-first century, examining the point at which “things” move from being objects to subjects with narrative agency. In cultural studies, the role of objects has been well studied, in particular with the development of thing theory (e.g., Brown 2001 and 2004; Miller 2009), but has not been well examined with respect to the sword and sandal genre (with notable exceptions, such as Milnor 2008). In cinema, objects have varied roles, from part of a created ambiance to iconic status symbol of the movie to character marker. This paper will focus on how objects function in recent recreations of the ancient world onscreen. It will argue that since 2000 there exists a greater narrative focus on objects in the sword and sandal genre, coinciding with an increasing focus on materiality in society and popular culture.

After a general overview of the role of objects in cinema, the paper will turn to case studies from the sword and sandal genre, demonstrating how our readings of the films can be deepened by taking note of these objects. The first set of objects (such as the household god figurines of Maximus in *Gladiator* (2000) and the piece of cloth from Sura’s dress in Starz’ *Spartacus* (2010-13) will be more “obvious” examples, objects which viewers are clearly supposed to recognize as being important to onscreen development. The second set of objects will be more easily overlooked objects (such as chairs, game boards, and coins). The paper will very briefly conclude with a methodological point on why Classicists are particularly well poised to perform readings such as the one this paper offers.

WORKS CITED

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