

Ancient Rome in Silent Cinema

Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Monday 28 April 2014, 4.00 – 5.30pm

Conference Room. AD Hope #14 Australian National University

Professor Maria Wyke, University College London



In recent years, Hollywood has released a number of big-budget films set in antiquity, yet cinema has been fascinated with the ancient world and with Roman history in particular ever since it emerged as a new technology more than one hundred years ago. Within a few months of the first public shows of moving images held in 1896, Nero was brought onto the screen trying out poisons on his slaves.

The vast majority of these films remain largely forgotten although they still survive in archives across the world, some of them in multiple prints designed for different types of audience. They range from historical and religious epics, adaptations to screen of theatre, opera and the novel, to comedies, animated cartoons, and travelogues. The persistent presence of ancient Rome in early cinema compels us to ask: why did so modern a medium have so strong an interest in antiquity right from its start? What did ancient Rome *do* for cinema? And what did cinema *do* for ancient Rome?

Bio

Maria Wyke (University College London) Maria Wyke is Chair and Professor of Latin at University College London. She has written extensively on Roman love poetry, on the reception of Julius Caesar, and on ancient Rome in cinema (*Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History*, 1997; ed., with P. Michelakis, *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema*, 2013).

Presented by

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