

Enrico Guazzoni's 1912 *Quo Vadis* is often described as the first full-length feature film. Based on the 1896 international blockbuster of Henryk Sienkiewicz, it is thus also the first adaptation in of a complete novel. The modern viewer is likely to find the narrative disjointed and hard to follow, and to criticize the film for trying to include too much of the plot. It seems, in the word of this panel's description, "primitive." The American release was shorter than the Italian, although it is not certain where the cuts were (there does not seem to be a surviving copy in viewing condition); and it must have been even harder to follow as narrative. If we are to understand the film's effect as a representation of Neronian Rome, however, we need to consider what the film is trying to do in its own terms.

One intriguing tool is the pamphlet created by the film's American distributor, Georg Kleine. (Kleine left his papers to the Library of Congress, and the copy there is probably the only one extant). The booklet summarizes the film's plot, dividing it into 3 Acts and 8 scenes. It includes stills as illustrations. However, the illustrations do not always correspond to the summary; scenes shown are not always mentioned. The summary itself ignores significant details found in both the novel and the film and, for example, refers to Glaucus' martyrdom without having explained who the character is. Where film and novel differ, it follows the film—it includes Vinicius' manumission of all his slaves, which is an innovation in the film. For example, the summary says that Petronius at his death writes a letter accusing Nero of burning Rome, but not that Petronius calls Nero a bad artist, the main point of his letter in both novel and film. The summary describes Peter and Nazarius as leaving Rome "thinking their work is at an end in Rome," rather than fleeing the persecution.

The booklet would ensure that a viewer who had not read the novel (and it is a long novel, which we know from contemporary sources that more people knew about than actually read) would be able to follow the outline of the action. It is obviously modeled on an opera program, and fits the prestigious yet popular nature of the enterprise (Sienkiewicz won the Nobel Prize in 1905), serving as both aid and souvenir. Its lack of close connection to either text or film, though, suggests that the distributor was not primarily concerned with enabling the spectator to follow the plot completely. Rather, the viewer needs to follow well enough for individual scenes to have their emotional and spectacular impact. While the novel's main strength lies in its characterizations, the film does not seek either to transfer these or to offer an accurate picture of Neronian Rome, but to give its viewers moments of immediate and powerfully felt visual contact with the past.

The 1925 version, however, is quite different in its goals: it is above all a portrait of Nero. It opens with a scene in which Nero has a slave girl thrown into a pool of lampreys, and shows him terrified by an apparition of his mother. Two scenes in which he tries to rape the heroine are additions to the plot. In this film, the novel's Rome is mainly a setting for a study in the psychology of dictatorship, and Emil Janning's Nero is a significant source for Charles Laughton's Nero in *Sign of the Cross* and for Peter Ustinov's in the 1951 *Quo Vadis*. The Roman past is primarily a single character, and the Rome it visualizes seems largely an extension of his sick mind.