

Reading Sample

with excerpts from various chapters,

each with descriptive text of the situation

1. *an event in the estate of a young roman*
2. *the sale of gladiators in Rome*
3. *an old veteran, as a guard in the gladiatorschool
in Capua*
4. *Cilician Pirates*
5. *Marcus Licinius Crassus, first battle against
the ›Thracians‹*

Prolog

„.....some are marked out for subjection...

he, who is by nature not his own but another's man, is by nature a slave; and he may be said to be another's man who, being a human being, is also a possession..."

Aristoteles 384 v. Chr.; † 322 v. Chr. Politics, 1254b16–21.

Year 73 B.C.

Nothing indicates to a insurrection when a small group of gladiators manages to escape from the school in Capua. Rapidly a conflagration develops that spreads across the whole country.

Under the leadership of the Thracian Spartacus, they defeated the roman armies, victorious all over the world, time and time again. For almost three years, they mastered the italian peninsula and the centre of the then world power, Rome.

1. (sample feature: An event in a estate of a young roman. In the lower vaults of the house, slave girls are 'kept ready'. Two adolescents from the family descend to them.)

Funny, she thinks I am, it burrows into his brain. He quickly tries for a smirk, but feels his face like a tough mask and fears Valeria might notice his discomfort when Leandros, his old house slave, releases him from the situation.

»Forgive my interruption. Cato Livius Sargon has just arrived.«

»I will receive him myself«, and tells the slaves to set off.

»Excuse me, my dear«, he turns to Valeria, »I have to fulfill my duties as host«, he pauses for a moment, waiting for a reaction, but it remains with a brief gesture of her hand to signify that she has understood.

While Flavius makes his way through the left side wing, Leandros chooses a different direction. He has the same destination, but there are separate paths for slaves, beyond the terraces and verandas crowded with guests. Carefully, he descends the spiral staircase, passing through path-breaking round arches that lead past brightly lit baths and spas.

Purposefully he goes on, cursing the age that has sapped the strength from his arms and turned his fingers into useless stumps. He hears their voices again, voices of two adolescents from Flavius' annexe. *They're still busy with her, still*, he thinks.

»Do you like her?«, he hears the older one say.

»Yes«, he hears the younger ones reply.

»Come on, don't be so cowardly. You wanted it so bad!«
Silence for a moment, then the older boy continues: »See the

opening there, between her thighs? That's where you have to put it in. Wait, first take your finger and rub that spot, they like that. It makes them wet.«

Silence again for a moment.

»I don't know, - is it already wet - like...?«

»No. Reach for her breasts.«

Leandros listens, unnoticed. The older of the two is known to him. A raw, cold-hearted youth. Kept in the belief by family structures that he knows the opposite sex. Compelled to present himself in the guise of one who knows. The falseness that oozes out everywhere, fading the guise, must be buried. So he comes here to instruct a younger, to show him 'how to do it'.

Leandros remains praying. Praying to Isis, Zeus, the gods or whatever may be there, to give the girl the power to free herself in spirit until these unleashed creatures get their hoped-for result and let go of her.

2 (sample Feature: *Lentulus Batiatus*, head of the gladiator school in Capua, has gone to Rome to sell gladiators of his school. Access to the city was denied to him, at first.)

Before the wagons with the gladiators are opened, they have to put their hands through the bars, each shackle is checked once again. Finally, they are led into the underground vaults of the arena. Batiatus is greeted by the Aedile in the usual

manner, he is asked to take a seat and offered wine. In the light of torches the gladiators are examined.

Batiatus looks around. Besides him, another merchant is present with slaves of the 'delicate selection'. Humans, locked individually in bulky cages to force a crippled growth, for the satisfaction of freakish sexual inclinations. The price for such an 'outlandish being' can far exceed that of a gladiator.

Shuddering, he turns away and examines the arsenal of weapons, more out of embarrassment than curiosity. As usual, all types are represented. Shields, swords and helmets for Samnites and Thracians make up the largest portion, followed by nets and tridents for Numidians.

Batiatus reaches for the cup, glancing briefly at the Aedile. He looks at him disparagingly, with half-closed eyes, his long face tilted back.

»Why was I denied entry to the city yesterday?«, he asks him.

»There was a murder of a well-known city prefect«, the Aedile answers, putting pauses between the words, as if he wanted to start a new sentence after each one, to finally pronouncing the word ›city-pre-fect‹.

Batiatus understands the meaning of the answer only too well. ›Look, I'm a Roman, I'm an Aedile, I don't have to speak to you, I only do it out of pity. I'll buy your slaves, but we have nothing in common.‹

He struggles with himself, doesn't want to show anything, but it's harder than usual. Never before has he had to camp outside the city because he was refused entry.

Remaining polite, he goes on to ask: »What does the murder of a prefect have to do with my business?«

»The prefect was stabbed in his sleep by one of his slaves. Therefore, all slaves owned by him must be condemned.

There are about four hundred, a large proportion women and children.«

»Did they try to prevent me from possibly buying them?«

»There is nothing to buy, they were crucified. There was concern about the many slaves in the city. Your creatures there pose an unnecessary risk, so I arranged to deny you entry to the city, 'till the execution was complete. But it went more swiftly than I thought.«

Batiatus reaches for the cup once more and briefly examines the Aedile, who has barely moved during the conversation. A sneer settles over his wooden face, his head still slightly laid back, one hand braiding around his pointed chin, he leaves no doubt about the farce of having him camped outside the city upon arrival. He has a preference for boys and girls, it is said.

Batiatus wants to end the subject and get down to business.

»Most of the men are very young - thirty thousand sesterces.« The Aedile gestures to one of the men in the background. »Here're twenty-five thousand, that's all I'll pay - and now leave us.« Another sneer on the wooden face.

Without hesitation, Batiatus takes the leather pouch and sets off on his way back. He imagined it differently. But instinctively he refrains from arguing with the Aedile. Four hundred slaves were crucified. At such events, the nobility reacts extremely irritated and sensitive to any form of slavery.

When he gets back to his people, he informs them that he will remain in Rome for another day or two, that they should set off without him, and: »During my absence, you will be under the authority of Apuleius.«

Apulejus, a tall man of sixty, was once wealthy himself. As a slave trader in Delos, he sold hundreds of slaves a day.

To whom or where, was indifferent to him. Noble princes from the Parthian Empire came to his banquets at night, even kings dined at his table. For two years he has been in the service of Lentulus Batiatus. He performs his duties satisfactorily, but despises them deeply. Always tormenting himself with the question of whether it was drunkenness or superstition that drove him to ruin and made him a Lanista's servant. Sleepless his nights. He, who knew no scruples, now haunted by images of desperate families as the stillness and darkness of the night spreads, with its endless hours, during which he often reaches for his dagger to pierce his veins.

»Apulejus«, he hears someone calling. And then louder again: »Apulejus.«

He raises his head. Staring from deep eye sockets, he examines the man. »We can leave«, the latter lets him know.

Hesitantly, almost sighing, he answers, »Good.« Then, fully back from lethargy, he gives the signal to leave.

The roman guards open the gate. As the procession passes, Apulejus stays with the guards, hands over the pass and then hurries after his men. He lets the horse go at a light trot, since the guards are already closing the gate, he barely gets through, but yanks the animal back by the reins then.

Full of horror, with wide eyes he stares at the presented sight. Moaning and groaning, writhing in agony, the bodies of women and children hang tied to wooden crosses. Endlessly, the road before him seems to be a path of suffering. »They are only slaves«, it comes pleadingly from his mouth, »only slaves.« But the voice of conscience is not content with that. Whipping his horse, he dashes forward along the train. »Cover 'em up!«, he calls out in a trembling voice as he passes the

gladiator wagons. »By all the gods, cover them up!«
Haltingly the train stops. Hastily, the wagons are covered with linen cloth, then driven forward again. Wildly waving his riding stick, surrounded on both sides by those dying on the cross, Apulejus drives the convoy, *if only this road would soon be over..*

3. (sample feature: Gladiators school of Lentulus Batiatus in Capua: At the urging of an Aedile from Rome, Batiatus accepted an old veteran into the guard duty of his school..)

Slowly Nicodemus walks through the corridors, all quiet. He has been back in regular pay for a month, at the gladiatorial school of Lentulus Batiatus in Capua. Ten years ago, he was one of the veterans in Sulla's army. Today, at almost sixty, it is enough for dull guard duty. But he does not dislike it. Here, among the torch-lit corridors, he has enough leisure to indulge in the memories of days gone by.

Carefully he goes down the stairs, to a block whose cells are kept so low that even a small person like him could not stand up. If one wants to keep his body upright - only sitting, if one wants to stretch it - only lying down.

Slowly he passes the cells. Contrary to the rule, he glances only fleetingly through the small bars in the doors. Because his vivid imagination works already again and forces him to feel every possible sensation of this torture.

The tightness, the unbearable tightness. Fear of fire or water. Everything timeless, everything endless. He stops, looks back and forward again. »Here's the middle«, he says

silently to himself, »now I'm already over the middle«, He walks on slowly. His fantasies are mixed with memories of prisoners of war, telling of this torture during his time in Sulla's army: »How much longer? What if they never let you out of here? The cell seems to be shrinking. Impossible. And if it does, is it shrinking in height too? Straighten up quickly, no, it's not shrinking.... I'm no longer here... my body is dissolving...I am no longer here.... No weight, I have no more

weight...the body dissolves. Is that how being dead is, is that how it is when you're dead....« Nicodemus walks faster, almost running. Then drags himself up the steps until the view down into the block is closed by the curvature of the staircase. He sits down on the steep steps of the stairway to rest for a moment. He reaches for the scabbard, wants to pull out the sword in order to place it on his knuckles to cool them, because they hurt, as so often, but his hand reaches into nothing. He gasps, feels his heart beating under his chest. »Oh Gods«, he whimpers softly to himself, »don't do this to me.«

In the semi-darkness, he feels his way down the steps. Thick beads of sweat run down his forehead. In pain, he hurries back up the steps, trying hard to remember. *Where did I last use it, where did I leave it, where did I forget it.* Always tormented by the knowledge that he should actually sound the alarm, for Maecenas has already warned him: »If anything else happens,

In case of further incidents, no matter what kind, you are you're fired« And there, sickness, poverty, death await. *No, no,* he thinks, *I have to find it.* Suddenly it comes back to him, yet too late. The blade hits him in the heart.

4. (sample feature: second year of the uprising, Cilician pirates approach the Italian Adriatic coast)

The man takes a few steps to the bow and stands at the railing. He glances into the night sky, as he often does at this hour. The air goes calm, smooth the endless sea, sliced by the ship's keel. Darkly, on the horizon, can be seen the coast. There, somewhere beyond the darkness, the rebels are waiting, for them, the Cilicians.

»They say the insurgent army has split up, while advancing north.«

The man on the railing turns around, slightly frightened by the sudden voice, for no one but him was on deck. He waits for the man to emerge from the shadow of the sail, and turns his gaze back to the sea. The other one places himself next to him.

»Why?«, the man standing on the railing asks after a while. The other does not respond immediately, perhaps out of partiality before the events, perhaps out of awe of darkness and silence.

»Supply, time«, he answers half-loudly. »They want to cross the Alps, they say, before the onset of winter. One of the consuls. . . «

»One of?«

»Rome sent both Gellius and Lentulus, - after Praetor Varinius was defeated. They met the part that was marching further west. They say they're all dead. They were mainly Teutons and Gauls, and the leader, Crixus, a friend of the Thracian, was also said to have fallen.«

Both keep their eyes straight out to sea, occasionally glancing up in the night sky as if there were something new to see.

»Are you worried that they might not come?«

»They will.«

»How many meetings have there been - with them?«

»Three, today the fourth. - After the first, no one believed there would be a second.«

The man standing at the railing reaches for a wood carving from last night, left unfinished between the ropes.

»What's on the list?«, he asks the other as he draws the dagger and attempts a few cuts. The other briefly watches on the nervous, carving fingers, trying to complete the work.

»Three hundred talents are required. In return they get helmets, armor, lances, also ores and tools, - everything needed to manufacture weapons.«

The other puts the carving back between the ropes, as he doesn't want to succeed after all. »Maybe the last time we deliver them war equipment?«

»Possible. They are still fighting with the two consuls.«

»Still fighting?«

»Gauls and Teutons who marched further west were not the largest part, perhaps twenty thousand, they say. Then, after the first battle against the Thracians, the consuls fled almost as far as Rome. He pursued them, then swerved east, toward the Adriatic coast, and then north again. The consuls probably guessed what he was up to, took good passes over the Apennines, cut off his path, - the rest is still too imprecise. There were several battles. Some say he followed the Romans too far, led by grief, pain, vindictiveness, because of the fallen

Gaul, the Crixus. And thus lost the chance to reach the Alps in time.«

»Good for us. If they beat the consuls and do not come over the Alps, they will turn back. And who but we could supply them.« He glances up in the night sky again and sees what he has been waiting for hours. »Today, it has to be quick. They have the enemy in close proximity, - at least probably. We shall not set up camp for the night either, - back to sea as soon as possible« With these words he turns away, for they are approaching the coast.

The oars hit evenly into the water, the shore clearly visible. The Cilicians have the moon in front of them, they must already be clearly visible to the insurgents, while they only see shadows moving slowly along the shore, to get to the bay where the boats will stop. The pirates estimate their number at five to six hundred, plus another two hundred on horseback. Some are making bets as to which of the Thracians will be there. Yet no one believes they will get to see him. »Why should he make himself known at such meetings?«

The boats stop in a long line along the embankment. The captain communicates briefly with one of the men on the bank, everything else is routine. The boats are quickly unloaded. Hardly anyone speaks. The air breathes distrust, on both sides. After two hours the boats are unloaded and the insurgents are on their way back, as are the pirates.

5. (**sample feature**: Marcus Licinius Crassus, first battle with the ›Thracian‹)

Crassus has shouted his voice hoarse, riding along behind the lines as fast as the terrain allows. Over there, one of the legates appears. »Cavalry bound«, he shouts at the top of his lungs, yet barely audible, up the slope.

Crassus hesitates, gazes the centre again, with the veterans he already led under Sulla as they desperately try to hold off the attacks, then exchanges a glance with his commanders and gives the signal to retreat. A terrible howl floods the battle as the encircled legions realize they are given doomed.

Then the retreat, the retreat of the rest, – fails. Driven by panic many units lose contact with the main force and fall victim to the enemy cavalry.

Some words about the making of the novel

»History Antiquity«, that or something like it, were the names of the library sections where I spent most of my time as a teenager. Always hoping to find something new about the uprising, about this Thracian. But it remained, with few exceptions (Sallust-Fragment) with Plutarch and Appian, whose reports I read again and again anew. Probably because these reports of the uprising had a special resonance, a special tension in them. They allowed to witness, but always from the perspective of Rome. Not factually, but 'generated' by these texts, which thus made the Thracian the unknown, the incomprehensible, the impossible. Which was probably the main reason of the form, the type, the way the story is written in this book. To let the plot approach the Thracian without illuminating him. To leave him unknown, but not inhuman.

About the Translation

The novel was originally written in german language. The translation was done by me, some friends, and people I met on my travels. There is no preference between british and american English, it was decided by: How common, how well known, the chosen form appears, (for example: „centre“ not „center“ or „behaviour“ not „behavior“).

*T. G. a german-israeli author, writes in broken german language.
Perhaps, without knowing it, I wouldn't have done it this way.*