

CHAPTER ONE

Who Killed the Legend of Spartacus? Production, Censorship, and Reconstruction of Stanley Kubrick's Epic Film

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Stanley Kubrick's and Kirk Douglas's *Spartacus*, based on a novel by Howard Fast, purports to tell the true story of a gladiator who, 2,000 years earlier, led a mighty slave uprising which almost succeeded in overthrowing the decaying Roman Republic and its ruthless slave empire. The film represents a breakthrough for left-wing themes in Hollywood cinema after a decade of McCarthyism, not only because of its revolutionary political message but also because blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo received credit for the screenplay under his own name. This broke the blacklist which had been in effect in Hollywood for most of the 1950s. Efforts by right-wing columnist Hedda Hopper and the American Legion to promote a boycott of the film failed when newly elected President John F. Kennedy publicly endorsed it after attending a screening in Washington, D.C. *Spartacus* went on to become an international box-office hit, winning four Academy Awards and capturing the Golden Globe Award as the Best Dramatic Film of the year.

1. Kirk Douglas vs. Universal Studios: The Battle for Control of *Spartacus*

Author Howard Fast, however, believed that the film did not do complete justice to his book. In an interview accompanying the Criterion

Collection edition of the restored film, Fast commented that aside from the gladiator fight between Kirk Douglas and Woody Strode nothing in the film could compare in dramatic intensity with the corresponding scenes in the novel. In fact, despite his extensive contributions to the film's screenplay, for which Fast never received the credit he deserves, an enormous gap exists between the vision of Spartacus which emerges from his novel and the one projected by the film. Using the little that is known about Spartacus as a basis, Fast molded the gladiator rebel into a mythic hero, a messianic figure engaged in an epic revolutionary struggle to overthrow Roman power in order to restore a legendary Golden Age of primitive tribal communism said to have existed in some distant epoch prior to the advent of human exploitation. For Fast, strict adherence to the known facts was less important than the timeless moral truth that was implicit in the legend of Spartacus. By contrast, the film followed a more conservative reading of the facts. It reduced Fast's gentle Christ-like character to a brawling animal who slowly develops into a likeable tough and then gradually into a sensitive human being and democratic leader. Instead of Fast's visionary who, through the force of his charismatic personality and military genius, was able to weld an amorphous mass of "slaves, deserters, and riff-raff" into a force which managed to defeat nine of Rome's best-trained armies and nearly toppled the Republic, the film presents us with a good man and capable leader to whom everything seems to come easy but whose revolt founders in an orgy of torture and death almost before it has begun.¹ The escape to freedom of Spartacus' wife and new-born son from the carnage of 6,000 crucifixions offers the audience only a few rays of hope for the future, especially if we consider that Rome became an almost worldwide empire that lasted for another 500 years.

Because of this difference between book and film, some admirers of the latter believed that cuts imposed by Universal Pictures and the Catholic Church's Legion of Decency had severely reduced its image of the legendary Spartacus from giant to midget, as it were. These cuts included some gory shots of arms, legs, and heads being cut off in battle, a lengthy scene of a man being drowned in a pot of soup, a shot of blood spurting onto the Roman aristocrat Crassus' face as he slashes the neck of the dying gladiator Draba, and the subtly bisexual "oysters and snails" seduction scene between Crassus and his slave Antoninus. These cuts,

¹ The quotation is from Applan, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.117; quoted from Applan's *Roman History*, tr. Horace White, rev. E. Hoff Robson, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press / London: Heinemann, 1913), 219.

totaling about five minutes, may also have included at least one battle scene depicting a significant victory for the slave army, whose lack was made evident by numerous lines of dialogue throughout the film which referred directly or indirectly to many such victories. Some lines from Spartacus' speech to the slaves assembled on a beach – "We've traveled a long ways together. We fought many battles, won great victories" – and his lines to his wife Varinia – "But no matter how many times we beat them, they always seem to have another army to send against us. And another." – are two of the most pointed examples.

Thus when it was announced in September 1990 that Universal Pictures was going to release a fully restored version of the film with five minutes of censored footage reinserted, many fans of the film dared to hope that perhaps now, after thirty years, the authentic legendary *Spartacus* might finally appear on screen. An advance press handout ("*Spartacus* Premiere Fact Sheet") by restoration producers Jim Katz and Robert Harris touted their restoration as "a film with an entirely different tone . . . a completely different film [from] the version we're used to" and raised further expectations.

Spartacus already had much going for it: magnificent performances by Laurence Olivier, Charles Laughton, and Oscar winner Peter Ustinov, moving scenes from the pen of Trumbo, spectacular camerawork by Oscar winner Russell Metty, excellent editing by Oscar nominee Robert Lawrence, a stirring musical score by Oscar nominee Alex North, and, of course, the direction by Stanley Kubrick. These elements, combined with Fast's heroic theme of mankind's age-old quest for freedom, make *Spartacus* a powerful and moving historical epic. The meticulous restoration by Robert Harris reinforces the film's impact.

Unfortunately, since Universal had junked almost all the outtakes, trims, and censored scenes of the film in 1975, the restorers could do very little beyond reinserting about five minutes of lost footage to bring *Spartacus* back to its 197-minute pre-censorship version. Thus the restored version is still roughly the same film that audiences saw during its original run in the early 1960s. A few censored scenes have been restored, notably the "oysters and snails" seduction scene, the two quick shots showing the blood and the terror on Crassus' face as he stabs Draba, and a longer version of the scene of devastation after the film's final battle.

On the other hand, several important scenes between Senator Gracchus, the fictionalized leader of the Roman plebeians, and his protégé, the young Julius Caesar, remain missing despite Harris' dedicated efforts to find them. These deleted scenes defined Gracchus'

political identity through a sometimes funny depiction of his rather corrupt but nevertheless sincere relationship with his constituents, the common citizens of Rome's fourth ward. They also explained the motivation for Caesar's crucial defection to Crassus and the patricians late in the film. This reason was Gracchus' own defection to Spartacus. Reportedly, Laughton, who played Gracchus, was outraged when he realized that several of his scenes were not going to be used in the film and threatened Kirk Douglas with a lawsuit. Laughton was incensed that the studio was keeping his name on the marquee while reducing his role to what might be called a bit-part senator. Nothing came of the lawsuit, but one of these deleted scenes, in which Gracchus explains the secrets of Roman politics to Caesar as they stroll through the back alleys of the slums of Rome, survived in the film until its July, 1960, press screening but was afterwards cut by the studio for reasons of length.

Even more disappointingly, Harris failed to discover any trace of even one lost battle scene that depicted a major slave victory over the Roman legions. Most modern historians would probably agree that during the course of his rebellion Spartacus defeated nine Roman armies ranging from a few thousand raw militia to tens of thousands of veteran legionaries. But viewers today would search in vain for anything like this astounding military accomplishment. Thus both the real and the legendary achievements of Spartacus and his rebels remain as absent from the restored version as they were from the original censored version.

2. The Perils of Breaking the Blacklist

Little if any blame for this travesty of history falls on the shoulders of the film's director. Then thirty-one years old, Kubrick had very little control over the content of the film, for all final decisions were made by Executive Producer Kirk Douglas, although subject to a veto from Universal. So it is not surprising that, despite the support and assistance he provided the restoration, Kubrick never retracted his public disavowal of *Spartacus*, going so far as to suggest that it be removed from his filmography. "I am disappointed in the film," he mused rather wistfully: "It had everything but a good story."²

2 Quoted from Joseph Gelmis, "The Film Director as Superstar: Stanley Kubrick," in *Stanley Kubrick: Interviews*, ed. Gene D. Phillips (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 80–104; quotation at 102. This interview was first published as "Stanley Kubrick," in Joseph Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 293–316.

Evidence indicates that Kubrick himself was only too willing to portray the violence, corruption, and moral degeneracy that inevitably results from a long and bitterly contested class war. Kubrick was responsible for the decision to show the final battle on screen and so turned the film into a full-scale epic. According to James B. Harris, his producer and business partner in the 1950s:

When Stanley read the script, there was no battle scene – it was done in a sort of surrealistic way, with helmets floating down the water with blood stains and battle sounds in the background. Stanley said that you can't make a spectacle movie and not have a battle scene in it. So he talked them into going to the cheapest area, Spain, where he could get all those extras.³

Battle montages showing a series of slave victories, something that Trumbo had fought for from the beginning and through three versions of the screenplay, also appeared for the first time in revised script pages in late March, 1959, a month after Kubrick replaced Anthony Mann, the film's original director. Kubrick may have also hoped to temper ex-communist Trumbo's adulation of the working class and enthusiasm for violent revolution with the irony that revolutions often fail more because of the mistakes, moral weaknesses, and corruption of the revolutionaries themselves than as a result of the supposedly overwhelming strength of their adversaries. Lacking the authority to make final decisions, Kubrick engaged the other members of the film's executive committee – screenwriter Trumbo, executive producer Douglas, and producer Edward Lewis – in a running, sometimes acrimonious, debate through four versions of the script over what final form the film should take.

Nor is Anthony Mann to be blamed. Well respected for his 1950s *films noirs* and westerns, Mann supervised, along with Douglas, the four months of pre-production of *Spartacus* and presumably participated in the complete rewrites of the script that were done in the Fall of 1958. After two weeks of shooting the opening sequence in the mines and some of the early scenes in the gladiator school that are still in the film today, Douglas fired Mann. Mann went on to make such acclaimed epic films as *El Cid* (1961) and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), both of which contain large-scale battle scenes. As producer Lewis remarked in an interview on the Criterion Collection edition of the film: "If it had been up to Tony Mann, we would have used up ten reels for the final battle."

³ Quoted from "Stanley Kubrick: A Cinematic Odyssey," *Premiere* (August, 1999), 85–93 and 98–100, at 86.

As his westerns attest, Mann believed, far more than Kubrick, in mythic heroes as the proper subject for film and was a perfect choice to direct *Spartacus*. Mann was interested in legendary characters: "legend makes the very best cinema. It excites the imagination more . . . legend is a concept of characters greater than life."⁴ His creative philosophy closely fit Fast's conception for *Spartacus* because Mann believed in "the nobility of the human spirit . . . this is what drama is. This is what pictures are all about. I don't believe in anything else."⁵ As for strict historical accuracy, Mann, like Fast, believed that "the most important thing is that you get the feeling of history. The actual facts, very few people know."⁶ He could hardly have had any difficulties presenting this story of a larger-than-life legendary hero of old.

Neither can Trumbo be saddled with the responsibility for the film's failure to live up to the novel's potential. Although altering much of its plot and character development in order to conform to the needs of a cinematic treatment, he insisted, through five versions of the script, on retaining Fast's original conception of *Spartacus*' nearly successful revolutionary challenge to Rome. Nor is Douglas to be blamed. In his autobiography he describes his personal conception of *Spartacus*, based on Fast's novel:

Spartacus was a real man, but if you look him up in the history books, you find only a short paragraph about him. Rome was ashamed; this man had almost destroyed them. They wanted to bury him. I was intrigued with the story of *Spartacus* the slave, dreaming of the death of slavery, driving into the armor of Rome the wedge that would eventually destroy her.⁷

As Douglas's biographer Michael Munn wrote me: "the film was first and foremost Kirk Douglas' vision." Douglas named himself executive producer to "ensure the picture would be made his way."⁸ Recent comments by Tony Curtis have confirmed that Douglas wanted to emphasize the love story at least as much as the slave uprising. Disagreements over this basic concept led to Mann's dismissal two weeks into production. However, in his recent comments Douglas stressed his determination to

⁴ Christopher Wicking and Barrie Pattison, "Interviews with Anthony Mann," *Screen*, 10 no. 4 (1969), 32–54; quotation at 41.

⁵ Anthony Mann, "Empire Demolition," in *Hollywood Directors 1941–1976*, ed. Richard Koszarski (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 332–338; quotation at 337–338. Mann's essay first appeared in *Films and Filming*, 10 no. 6 (March, 1964), 7–8.

⁶ Mann, "Empire Demolition," 336.

⁷ Kirk Douglas, *The Ragman's Son* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 304.

⁸ Michael Munn, *Kirk Douglas*, rev. edn. (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), 78.

portray the story of "a slave whose vision of freedom almost overthrew the Roman Empire."⁹ Special consultant Saul Bass, who designed the film's distinctive title sequence, confirmed to me that during the whole time he worked on *Spartacus* there was never any doubt or wavering about this point in the minds of Douglas, Lewis, Trumbo, or any other member of the production company. As the shooting came to a close, the coming-attractions trailer produced for the film was specifically designed to market *Spartacus* with this theme. The trailer opens with a banner rolling up the screen against the backdrop of the Roman Forum and stating:

IN THE YEAR 70 B.C. ROME - COLOSSUS OF THE WORLD - FACED ITS
GRAVEST CHALLENGE

The scene immediately shifts to the inside of a Roman command tent, where Laurence Olivier as Marcus Crassus gravely informs his staff about the seriousness of the situation:

Nine Roman armies have been destroyed - by Spartacus. And our defeat
will mean - the fall of Rome.

All other key promotional materials produced for the film - the thumbnail plot summaries, the comic book, the historical pamphlet, the study guide, the souvenir book, the soundtrack album program notes, the paperback edition of the novel - also told the story of a slave revolt which won victory after victory and all but overthrew Rome herself.

However, the three principal filmmakers had to contend with the interference of Universal, their primary financial backer. Studio head Ed Muhl had some very different ideas, leading to what Trumbo described as "a basic conflict of opinion about the dimensions of *Spartacus* and his struggle, a conflict which has been in evidence from the earliest beginnings of the project."¹⁰ Originally Muhl never conceived of *Spartacus* as a spectacle but as an intimate film that would cost between \$3 and \$4 million. A personal friend of Trumbo's and the man who deserves much credit for breaking the Hollywood blacklist, Muhl, too, wanted to make an exciting but still historically accurate film. Although he was

9 Tony Curtis, taped radio call-in with the author; Marshall Green (assistant director on *Spartacus*), interview with David Chandler, March 25, 1960, 18-19 (for unpublished book *The Year of Spartacus*); audio commentary by Kirk Douglas on Criterion Collection edition of *Spartacus*.

10 Dalton Trumbo, "The Sequence on Vesuvius: Notes", 2.

fascinated by the struggles between liberal and conservative factions in the Roman Senate, transparent analogues to contemporary American politics that Trumbo had inserted into the script, Muhl told me: "Deep ideas are nice to have in a picture. But what counts is audience appeal."

In response to Douglas' concept of *Spartacus* Muhl further remarked to me: "it's understandable that Kirk would want to build up his own part but that's not what the picture was about." He concluded: "We did what was possible under the circumstances . . . You know that phrase, 'the art of the possible'." His attitude probably hardened when late in 1959 persistent rumors of new Hollywood hearings by the House Un-American Activities Committee began to surface and a full-scale right-wing attack on the film began after Walter Winchell revealed that blacklisted writer Trumbo was the author of the screenplay.¹¹ *Spartacus* was the first truly independent production financed by Universal, but in the end Muhl's cautious approach prevailed because he and the studio held the trump card: the legal right to make the final cut.

Although Douglas still claims that *Spartacus* represents the fulfillment of his personal vision, he was ultimately forced to go along with most of Muhl's wishes because, by insisting that Trumbo be given official credit for the screenplay, he had set the film on a perilous collision course with the political right and the Hollywood blacklist. He wrote in his autobiography:

That night it all suddenly became very clear. I knew what name to put on the screen [as the author of the screenplay] . . . The masquerade was over. All my friends told me I was being stupid, throwing my career away. It was a tremendous risk. At first nobody believed me. Dalton did . . . The blacklist was broken.

[Director] Otto Preminger called me from New York . . . He was amazed that I was using Dalton Trumbo's name openly.

Soon after, he held a press conference announcing that Dalton Trumbo would be the writer of [Preminger's film] *Exodus*.

I wasn't thinking of being a hero and breaking the blacklist . . . I was just thinking, how unfair for someone to say, "Put my name on it. Let me get the credit for someone else's work."¹²

Douglas and Trumbo were fully aware of the risks involved if *Spartacus* did not earn back well over the \$12 million that the studio had invested in it. Trumbo wrote in one of his letters that, if the film had failed, "I, for

11 On this see especially *Additional Dialogue: Letters of Dalton Trumbo, 1942-1962*, ed. Helen Manfull (1970; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1972), 493-494.

12 Douglas, *The Ragman's Son*, 323-324.

one, would never have been able to work again, and those who do not yet work openly would have even a slighter chance than I of making it."¹³ Therefore, as he himself acknowledged, in the climate of the late 1950s the characters in *Spartacus* had to espouse ideas far less radical than he would have liked in order to save the film from destruction at the hands of both conservative and liberal anti-communist critics. Trumbo told David Chandler in an interview:

TRUMBO: You see, the bloody fight to express ideas, even mild ones, is really recurrent and it will happen again in a different form, maybe more severely, maybe less severely. The pressure is always on and we writers do discipline ourselves, we do censor ourselves. For example, you know how carefully I have to write a script, particularly if my name is going to be on it.

CHANDLER: I thought you were very bold in *Spartacus*.

TRUMBO: Well, I thought I was very restrained . . . because I realized that a thing which any other writer would say and [that] would never be thought of or analyzed or would never be significant or noticed, when I say it, it becomes highly significant – smuggling in propaganda and doing all sorts of things, so you see I consider this a very mild script.¹⁴

If Trumbo himself saw the necessity of self-censorship in order to break the blacklist, it is easy to understand why Muhl insisted on toning down the film still further at the last moment, even if this meant a serious weakening of its dramatic impact by reducing the legendary stature of its protagonist to run-of-the-mill proportions. In the pithy words of Tony Curtis: "Universal was being so heavy handed about everything including production values . . . *Spartacus* cost \$12 million and was the most expensive picture Universal had ever made. It ended up grossing \$14 or \$15 million but they were scared shitless at the time."¹⁵

3. Trumbo's Struggle for the Large *Spartacus*

Douglas' battle with the studio was only lost at the eleventh hour, when the film was being readied to be shown to the press. That battle had

begun with the very inception of the project, the first drafts of the script. Despite his determination to exercise extreme caution, it was Trumbo, along with Fast, who fought most consistently for a film which would remain faithful to the novel's essential message: man's capacity, in all ages of history, to rise and overthrow tyranny and oppression. From the beginning of his work, Trumbo waged a stubborn campaign to include scenes, or at least a battle montage, which would depict some of *Spartacus*' great victories over the Romans. On Fast's advice he added an enormous five-page montage to his first draft of July 15, 1958. This montage, narrated by Gracchus, traced the whole course of the war and included many of *Spartacus*' most important victories. Similarly, and also on Fast's recommendation, the relatively brief treatment of *Spartacus*' first victory over Glabrus and the garrison of Rome was greatly expanded to a major sequence encompassing four scenes and costing an estimated \$300,000. At the same time the final battle was de-emphasized: the audience was to hear the sounds of battle but not see the action. Following the novel, emphasis would be placed on the bloody aftermath to underscore *Spartacus*' great victories but to downplay his defeat.

Other forces were at work, however, as the film moved towards production. By the third draft, known as the Final Screenplay and dated December 9, 1958, the huge battle montage had disappeared and the battle with Glabrus had been reduced to a narration while plans were under way for a detailed rendition of the final battle. To counterbalance this, the story was now told in flashback and opened with a speech by Crassus to his officers in which he refers to nine Roman armies destroyed by *Spartacus* and warns of the possible fall of Rome.

The filmmakers had to finish the Roman sections of the script first in order to attract the British actors. They then had to rush into production in order to beat another film company which was also preparing a film about *Spartacus*, this one based on Arthur Koestler's novel *The Gladiators*. For these reasons the sections of the script dealing with the slaves were still unfinished and in need of extensive rewriting when shooting began on January 27, 1959. By the end of May, 1959, as the script was again being revised, Trumbo, with Kubrick's approval, was able to insert first one and then four of his proposed battle montages depicting seven or eight slave victories. These montages were calculated to lend credibility to a plot change inspired by Kubrick in which the over-confident slaves abandon their chance to escape on the waiting pirate ships and instead try to overthrow the whole slave system by marching on Rome. Trumbo believed these battle montages were crucial to the success of the film. In a memo he wrote:

13 *Additional Dialogue*, 575.

14 Trumbo-Chandler interview of August 2, 1960 (*The Year of Spartacus*, 56–57).

15 Tony Curtis and Barry Paris, *Tony Curtis: The Autobiography* (New York: Maserow, 1993), 180 and 185.

And this brings us down to a basic conflict of opinion about the dimensions of Spartacus and his struggle: a conflict which has been in evidence from the earliest beginnings of the project. Through three versions of the script I have fought against the idea of diminishing the scope of Spartacus' activities, against shortening to the point of absurdity the length of time in which he held the field, against the idea that he was a mere escapee who won a few encounters against provincial garrisons instead of a great military leader who for four years running defeated the finest legions and the greatest armies Rome could put in the field against him. You cannot have a Roman story in which Spartacus motivates the actions of the most powerful men in Rome and shakes Roman society to its very foundations, and then go to a Spartacus story in which Spartacus is merely the head of a large gang of runaway convicts. Thus far the larger concept of Spartacus' power and ability, and of the scope of his military ventures, has won through; not I feel because I really convinced anyone of the dramatic necessities of my view, but rather because it takes nine months to make a baby and a man who has to stay in the field for nine months obviously has to be doing something.¹⁶

Trumbo was still blacklisted, but his work on the screenplay of *Spartacus* was the worst-kept secret in Hollywood. Still, the pretense had to be maintained that Edward Lewis was writing the script. Trumbo was banned from the lot, unable to be present on the set when Douglas and Kubrick made last-minute changes to the script and, generally speaking, removed from the decision-making process. In another memo he complained bitterly about the script changes that had been forced upon him while production was under way:

It is almost a year now since I began to write this script. Since then I have turned out hundreds upon hundreds of pages and well over 200,000 words. In its more primitive stages, before the underlying theory of the script was challenged, before an unremitting attack on the political meaning and the intellectual content of every scene was begun, the script was able to attract five top stars, several millions of dollars from a studio, and even to generate a little excitement, a certain enthusiasm.

Since that time I have written ceaselessly to try to make the script as good as at least a few people thought it was in those first remote days of its conception . . . Many scenes have been improved. Other scenes, I regret to say, have been diminished . . .

For the past three months the script has been written by a committee rather than by a writer. Everything has been thrown at me: hostile

Koestlerian ideas derived from quite another book; rhetorical speeches and character gems from the newly discovered Fast script which should have been read months and months ago; psychiatric observations which I have found to be of immense value; the rival opinions of actors; the director's opinion (possibly correct) that the words don't matter anyhow so long as they're simple, and that any attempt with speech to provoke thought or illuminate intellectual, political, or moral concepts simply confuses the audience; a widespread conviction that complexity has no place on the screen, and that simplicity is best brought out by action alone; every possible attempt at swift and easy solutions to the problem of a script which is essentially complex and therefore is bound to have a certain complexity of motives (as you have discovered in ten versions of the climax) . . .

I have gone through a process of inquisition on this script that rivals any torment devised by a committee of Congress. The difference is that one can tell the committee to go fuck itself and stop the ordeal, whereas considerations of friendship, mutual respect, professional obligation, and . . . artistic commitment and devotion, prevent such an escape from present circumstances.

I am prepared to admit that democratically the votes of a full-time actor, a full-time director, and a full-time producer are worth three times the dissent of a full-time writer. They are also worth three times the vote of a competent secretary, which is what I have lately become.

[However], there are moments in the history of the drama when the vote of one full-time writer outweighs and outnumbers the votes of any three who are so fully occupied in other professions that they are for the present, unable themselves to do the writing . . . if there is no better method, let us go back to the old fashioned idea that by and large the best man to invent a story and write a script is a writer.¹⁷

Trumbo was finally smuggled onto the studio lot to view the film's first rough cut. What he saw provoked in him such a negative reaction that over the next seventy-two hours he wrote an eighty-page "Report on *Spartacus*" in three parts. In it he summarized what he called "The Two Conflicting Points of View on Spartacus," which had underscored the entire debate over the last year. Then, in a lengthy section entitled "Scene-by-Scene Run-Through," he analyzed all the film's weaknesses caused by innumerable on-set rewrites done without his knowledge or consent. He pleaded to be allowed to write a series of retakes that he said would either make or break the film.

16 Trumbo, "The Sequence on Vesuvius Notes", 2.

17 Trumbo, "Last General Notes on Spartacus," 1-2 and 5.

For want of a better term, Trumbo labeled the two conflicting views of Spartacus as "The Large Spartacus" and "The Small Spartacus." The premise of the Large Spartacus was that Spartacus' revolt was a major rebellion which shook the Roman Republic to its foundations, involved a series of brilliant military campaigns and the defeat of the best soldiers Rome could put in the field, and was finally put down by the overwhelming might of three Roman armies. The premise of the Small Spartacus was that the revolt was more on the scale of a jail-break and subsequent dash to the sea, that there were no important slave victories, and that the rebellion was put down by only one Roman army.

Trumbo then listed an entire series of other conflicting conceptions about the film and its main character that flowed from these basic premises. He made it clear that he believed only one of these conceptions could be right and that the right choice was the Large Spartacus. With considerable justification he asserted that the conscious intention of the executive committee through all three preliminary drafts of the screenplay had been to construct a film around the concept of the Large Spartacus. In his view, the basic problem with the film was a slow turn toward the Small Spartacus through the endless rewrites of the final screenplay after shooting had begun. He pleaded with the committee to embrace the Large Spartacus "without any reservations . . . otherwise we shall be utterly lost."¹⁸

After reading the Report, Douglas was asked by Kubrick how Trumbo had liked the film's first rough cut and replied: "He didn't like it! And he's right."¹⁹ Douglas still refers to Trumbo's Report as "the most brilliant analysis of movie-making that I have ever read."²⁰ Much to Kubrick's chagrin, Douglas and Lewis decided significantly to revise the film even though this would entail a considerable additional expense. The key players' contracts were extended and a large number of revised or new scenes containing Large-Spartacus dialogue were shot starting in November, 1959. These included the two scenes with the pirate envoy Tigranes Levantus, Spartacus' speech to the rebels after their return to the gladiator school, his speech to the assembled slaves on the beach near Brundisium, and the last dialogue and confrontation between Spartacus, Antoninus, and Crassus.

On the question of the battle montages, however, Trumbo apparently failed fully to persuade Douglas and Universal. At this time, in August of

18 Trumbo, *Report on Spartacus*, section I: "The Two Conflicting Points of View on Spartacus," 6-7.

19 Quoted from Bruce Cook, *Dolton Trumbo* (New York: Scribner, 1977), 272.

20 Douglas, *The Ragman's Son*, 325.

1959, more money had been obtained from Universal for battle scenes, and it had been decided to move the production to Spain to shoot the final battle and a number of other scenes with the help of the Spanish army. The question was whether or not the battle montages showing the slave army's victories were also going to be shot. As editor Robert Lawrence told me: "the idea [of shooting full-blown additional battle scenes] was discussed, but it was never actually done" because the money was not forthcoming from Universal. As part of an agreement between Douglas's company, Bryna Productions, and Universal Studios, six days of scenes with slave victories were to be filmed in Spain as part of a total of twelve days of battle scenes, at an estimated cost of half a million dollars. However, when Douglas came back with Trumbo's proposals from his Report for a large number of additional scenes, the deal was renegotiated. The new agreement called for a total of twenty-two days of shooting in Spain at an estimated cost of nearly a million dollars, although the number of shooting days for battle scenes was cut down to six, enough to accommodate the final battle but not the early slave victories. The studio argued that if the slaves' victory scenes were too good they could detract from the impact of the final battle, but if they were lackluster they would detract from the quality of the film as a whole. Douglas had to fall back on the idea of a brief animated battle map to dramatize these slave victories. The studio was opposed even to this minimal reference to Spartacus' series of victories and wanted to opt for a map without any battles.²¹ Saul Bass was commissioned to design this alternate map and produced several different versions which, he told me, were "very elaborate at first, then later much simpler." Bass was told that his map was to be cut into segments to be used as inserts for a big montage containing marching and dialogue but no battles. As editor Lawrence told me: "We had maps with battles and maps without battles because some people wanted one kind and some people wanted the other."

In an appendix to an "Outline of the scenes to be shot in Spain," Trumbo made a final plea for the shooting of full-scale battle montages:

During the march from Luceria to Metapontum a dozen important battles were won by Spartacus and the slaves. I understand that a map is to be used, with some pictorial device superimposed to indicate the sequence of victories. Not knowing exactly how it is to be done, I have not indicated battle montage or explosive physical scenes to indicate these victories [in

21 "Spartacus: Present Edited Continuity of Completed Picture" (October 2, 1959), Seq. No. 54; Appendix ST [Studio], ST-15: "Spartacus: Revised Music Notes" (November 5, 1959), 12, Reel 16.

this outline]. These are left to the invention of the director. But I think they should be taken into serious consideration, for we should let our audience know that a sequence of victories rather than two battles produced the slave threat to Rome.²²

In December, 1959, a significant amount of battle footage became available for additional battle scenes. Kubrick returned from Spain with film of the final battle. Studio executives were awed by what Douglas called "incredible footage of the [final] battle, so wide that he'd had to shoot from almost half a mile away."²³ These scenes, shot from 100-foot-high towers, depict the Roman army deploying into battle formations and the slave army charging down a bluff into them. But the filmmakers never used additional footage of the slave army's charge that was shot from another ground-level camera located a short distance from the base of this bluff. So this footage was available as a master shot for another major battle scene. Furthermore, the studio rejected the accompanying close-in fighting scenes that involved nearly five hundred extras as "boring and conventional" and ordered a series of retakes with gory shots of severed arms, legs, and heads. Thus by refusing to use the nearly one minute of close-in Spanish fighting scenes in the final battle, they made them available for possible use in a battle montage or another major battle sequence.²⁴

Still more footage became available in early February, 1960, when second-unit director Yakima Canutt finished directing five days of these retakes that included the slave army rolling its flaming logs into the Romans and numerous other light scenes featuring Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis, John Ireland (Crixus), and Nicholas Dennis (Dionysius). After viewing the rushes, Douglas expressed his disappointment with his own scenes to Canutt. They were, he said, "not too good. I should have had scenes like the ones you shot with Curtis and Ireland. They looked

22 Trumbo, "Spartacus: Material to be Shot in Spain," 31.

23 Douglas, *The Ragman's Son*, 326.

24 Sources: "Outline for Battle Sequence" (August 13, 1959); "Spartacus: Present Edited Continuity of Completed Picture" (October 2, 1959), Seq. No. 73; Appendix SP [Spain], SP-12; "Continuity Breakdown" (October 15, 1959), "Added Scenes-Spain," 51-55 (Scenes 1-38); "Spartacus: Music Notes, Revised II" (January 21, 1960) by Kubrick (Reel 22, Ft. No. 000-441); "Spartacus: Daily Production Report" (November 25 and December 14, 1959); letter from Fred Banker to Charles Block of Globe Photos on Bill Nunley's *Spartacus* layout (March 10, 1960), containing promotional profile of propman-armorer Nunley; "Proposed List of Gory Shots Tying to Battle Sequence As Outlined by S. Kubrick" (January 4, 1960); *Spartacus* Teaser Trailer; my interviews with Melville Tucker, Saul Bass, Robert Lawrence.

great."²⁵ To round out the final battle and remedy Douglas's problem, two more days of battle scenes were shot in mid-March, including several retakes with him. Editor Lawrence told me: "We had hundreds of feet of [additional] battle scenes. But some people wanted it in the picture and some people didn't."

4. The Battle Over the Editing

Evidence I have collected over several years strongly suggests that Trumbo and Douglas were determined to build their film around the Large Spartacus but that Universal deliberately censored this concept during and after the editing process in order to keep *Spartacus* within acceptable and long-established limits of the country's political climate. Despite vigorous objections by Trumbo, Douglas, and Kubrick, Universal's attitude resulted in the elimination of nearly a dozen dialogue and action sequences that would have indicated that Spartacus' rebellion might actually have succeeded in destroying Rome. These cuts included such slave victory scenes as the "Battle of Luceria," the "Battle Map Metapontum," and the lengthier "Battle of Metapontum." Four additional sequences were slated for elimination but later restored thanks to the determined resistance of the filmmakers and the fortuitous opposition of the Catholic Legion of Decency. Unlike conventional cuts imposed by studio censors for language, sex, violence, and nudity, these political excisions were intended wholly to eliminate Trumbo's concept of the Large Spartacus and replace it with the Small or, at best, a "Medium" Spartacus.

With millions of dollars, inflated egos, and dearly held political convictions at stake, every big-budget film is a compromise among writer, director, producer, and studio. In the case of *Spartacus*, the struggle between Douglas and studio boss Ed Muhl over the final content of the film became so bitter that even thirty years later Muhl agreed to speak with me only on the condition that we would not discuss conflicts between the personalities involved. For his part, Douglas complained bitterly in his autobiography about studio interference in several films his production company, Bryna Productions, produced with Universal's financial backing and distribution. More than a quarter century after *Spartacus* Douglas was still so frustrated with the studio censors'

25 Yakima Canutt and Oliver Drake, *Stuntman: The Autobiography of Yakima Canutt* (1979; rpt. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 194.

elimination of the "oysters and snails" scene that he reproduced it in its entirety in the chapter on the making of the film in his autobiography.²⁶

According to Muhl, Universal watched *Spartacus* closely "because it needed watching." The studio appointed Marshall Green as assistant director to keep a close eye on Kubrick while Muhl's right-hand man, Universal's creative director Mel Tucker, viewed all the dailies, worked closely with producer Lewis, conferred frequently with Muhl himself, and even accompanied Kubrick to Spain to keep the young director within budget. As Muhl told me, when necessary he himself directly intervened to assert his ultimate authority. *Spartacus* underwent sweeping changes during the editing process, particularly in the section between the beginning of the slaves' trek across Italy and the end of their victorious march at the seaport of Brundisium. According to supervising editor Irving Lerner, the struggle over the final content of the film became so intense that Universal executives, in an unprecedented move, periodically came into the editing room and ordered him to reinstate or delete individual scenes, thereby overriding Douglas's instructions. As a result, a number of scenes, particularly those featuring Charles Laughton, went in and out several times. The process of arriving at a final cut on which Lerner, Douglas, Kubrick, and Muhl could even temporarily agree dragged on for so long that Lerner was finally forced to quit *Spartacus* in order to begin directing, as scheduled, a film of his own.²⁷

In January, 1960, the filmmakers made their opening move. They inserted a six-second battle scene, the "Battle of Luceria" that depicted Spartacus' first great victory over the Roman army, into the film after the first big slave march from Mt. Vesuvius to Luceria.²⁸ At the same time they decided to include the Battle Map, using the rejected battle footage from Spain as well as titles naming the sites of a series of great slave victories.²⁹ To this end they inserted a ten-second sequence, probably containing more Spanish battle scenes, titled "Battle Map Metapontum" that followed the slaves' second march from Luceria to Metapontum.³⁰

There is also some evidence to suggest that following Canutt's five days of shooting in early February, the filmmakers decided to use a much

26 Douglas, *The Ragman's Son*, 303–334 ("The Wars of Spartacus").

27 Irving Lerner, uncredited supervising editor on *Spartacus*, in June 29, 1960, interview with David Chandler (*The Year of Spartacus*, 3 and 17).

28 "Spartacus: Music Notes, Revised II," (Reel 18, Ft. No. 000–009).

29 "Spartacus: Revised Final Screenplay" (January 16, 1959, with revisions through March 27, 1959), Scene 248-E.

30 "Spartacus: Music Notes, Revised II" (Reel 18, Ft. No. 521–536).

longer battle-map montage in place of the Battle of Luceria and the Battle Map Metapontum. In a post-production scheduling memorandum dated February 12, 1960, to Muhl, Universal's creative head Mel Tucker, producer Lewis, and editor Lawrence, Universal Editorial Department Chief Sid Lund requested: "the number, design and timing of the map inserts for the battle sequences should be finalized as soon as possible." Lund does not specifically remember this memorandum but, as he told me, if it made such a reference, "then the facts at the time had to support it." However, some time over the next two months Kubrick seems to have developed doubts about using Trumbo's concept of battle montages with map inserts to dramatize Spartacus' series of victories over the Romans. This device had been employed in quite a number of historical films. Kubrick, who had successfully campaigned for a full-scale rendition of the final battle, probably concluded that using the available battle footage in a full-blown version of Spartacus' great victory at Metapontum and combining it with the original ten-second battle map would be a far more effective way to engage the audience in the slave army's struggles against the Roman legions.

The post-editing music notes of April 13, 1960, drafted right after the edited version of the film had been shown to the Universal executives from New York, reveal that the six-second Battle of Luceria had by then been dropped from the film, the ten-second Battle Map Metapontum had been reinstated, and a new scene depicting the Battle of Metapontum had been slated to be inserted as part of a series of major changes between the beginning of the slaves' victorious campaign at Mt. Vesuvius and their arrival at the sea. This new battle sequence, for which composer North wrote a pencil sketch score entitled "Battle of Metapontum," is cited by its cue without the usual description of the accompanying action but with the annotation "Not in as yet." The march into Metapontum features scenes of thousands of slave soldiers parading through the town. Later, in the existing scene at the Roman baths, several senators express their shock and incredulity when they learn of the loss of 19,000 men at Metapontum. To be used in conjunction with this dialogue and action, the Battle of Metapontum had to have been on a grand scale.³¹

Over the next six weeks a number of cut scenes and sequences were reinstated, and the revised film was screened again for the top Universal

31 "Spartacus: Music Notes" (April 13, 1960), Reels 16B and 17B; interviews with North's collaborator Mark McCarty and orchestrators Henry Brandt and Sid Raiman. McCarty immediately recognized the music cue title "Battle of Metapontum" and commented that "it was a whole lot longer than eight seconds."

publicity people. These reinserted sequences included the crucial Balcony Scene, in which Gracchus permanently alienates Caesar by suggesting that, to judge from his unprecedented record of success, Spartacus might well defeat Crassus and perhaps take Rome itself, a prospect he prefers to the death of the Republic at the hands of Crassus. But by the end of April, the Battle of Metapontum had been eliminated from the film.

At the filmmakers' insistence, an eight-second version of the Battle Map Metapontum was completed in time for June previews. This version included Saul Bass's map and a series of titles superimposed over scenes from the film, possibly those from the deleted six-second Battle of Luceria. Production assistant Stan Margulies, who oversaw the production of the new battle map, could not recall whether these scenes consisted of marching or of battle sequences, although a battle map without battles is a bit of a contradiction. As he told me, his inclination is that the titles represented the sites of Spartacus' important victories.³²

Significantly, the Final Shooting Script of September 14, 1959, composed after principal shooting had been completed, the Revised Music Notes (April 13, 1960), the Continuity for the Final Preview on June 20, and the Continuity for the version shown to the press on July 26, all indicate that the two legions sent against the slaves were ordered to intercept and destroy them, in the words of Senator Gracchus, "at the city of Luceria," the site of the second slave camp scene and of the bathing scene in which Varinia informs Spartacus that she is pregnant. In the version of September 14, 1959, Gracchus' speech to the senate was combined with an earlier senate scene and came before the Luceria camp scene. It tied in directly with the Battle of Luceria sequence which was inserted immediately before that scene in January, 1960. But in the later versions the Battle of Luceria was deleted and Gracchus' speech was split off from the earlier senate scene and inserted shortly after the Luceria camp scene. But Luceria represented the starting point of the march south that the Battle Map Metapontum illustrated. Similarly, both the music notes and the continuity later referred to a major Roman defeat at Metapontum, over a hundred miles south of Luceria and on the slaves' way to Brundisium. Clearly the filmmakers intended the Metapontum map to dramatize a series of slave victories in just the way that Trumbo had indicated in his Revised Final Script of March 27, 1959, leading up

32 Letter from James Pollak, National Screen Service, to Stan Margulies (May 27, 1960), as told me by Margulies.

to the climactic Battle of Metapontum.³³ Composer North devoted the first six seconds of his cue entitled "Metapontum Triumph" to four crescendos that probably corresponded to titles flashed on the screen that named the sites of slave victories. These comprise the music for the Battle Map and can still be heard as the opening bars of the film's overture.³⁴

After the Final Previews the film was handed over to Universal. Before the press screening on July 26, 1960, the studio unilaterally eliminated the Metapontum Map and the Balcony Scene as part of a series of forty-two wide-ranging cuts and trims, made, as Muhl told me, "for content, not for length."³⁵ Some time after the press screening, Gracchus' words to the senate about sending two legions to intercept Spartacus "at the city of Luceria" were overdubbed by another actor to become "the city of Metapontum." This change reduced the slave army's series of four or five victories to one, which was itself never shown. With the cutting of the Battle Map Metapontum and the Battle of Metapontum, the entire triumphal march into Metapontum that followed was rendered meaningless and the last vestige of the true magnitude of Spartacus' achievements was eliminated.

The studio cuts might have met with more determined resistance if all the filmmakers, except for Douglas, had not departed for new projects and were probably unaware of what was taking place. Still, editor Lawrence sensed that *Spartacus* was long even for first-run theaters and might be cut by the studio. He was horrified at what he discovered later: "all my notes, all the script notes: Gone. Gone. They were just thrown out. All the trims, all the should-we-or-shouldn't-we stuff, all the 'Stanley says hold onto it but Kirk doesn't like it.' All that kind of stuff, beautifully labeled and ready: Gone."³⁶ Composer North was still on the scene and protested against the damage the cuts were doing to a number of his

33 "Spartacus: Final Shooting Script" (September 14, 1959; this is actually a cutter's continuity in the form of a script), Scene 248-Z: "Spartacus: Music Notes" (April 13, 1960), Reel 17A; "Combined Continuity on *Spartacus*" (June 20, 1960), Reel 9A, page 3 no. 19; "Continuity and Dialogue on *Spartacus*" (July 26, 1960), Reel 8B, page 3 no. 20.

34 According to Gordon Thiel, director of the UCLA Music Library, in interview with me; Alex North Manuscripts, UCLA Music Library; *Spartacus*, Orchestrated Score for "Metapontum Triumph" music cue; Overture on Criterion Collection edition.

35 Cf. "Spartacus: Music Notes" (April 13, 1960), Reel 17B; "Post-Final Preview Cutting Sheet," item 32; "Combined Continuity on *Spartacus*" (June 20, 1960), Reel 9A, page 3 no. 19 (25 ft. = 16 2/3 seconds); "Continuity and Dialogue on *Spartacus*" (July 26, 1960), Reel 8B, page 3 no. 20 (13 1/2 ft. = 9 seconds); cut = 11 1/2 ft. = 7 2/3 seconds.

36 Quoted from Henry Sheehan, "The Fall and Rise of *Spartacus*," *Film Comment*, 27 no. 2 (March-April, 1991), 37-58, 60, and 63; quotations at 60.

music cues. When he learned that additional cuts were being made he dictated the following scathing telephone message to producer Lewis:

Since we spoke there have been additional cuts in Kitchen No. One, Forest Meeting and Luceria Camp [scenes]. This complete disregard and disrespect for me and for my contribution by persons not qualified in any artistic levels [are] an insult to my abilities. The illogical piecemeal cuts force me to suggest you hire a butcher and remove my name from screen credits. With my background and reputation I do not intend to participate in amateur night.³⁷

Ten days after the press screening and following eight months of deliberation, the studio, encouraged by a favorable ruling from the Screenwriters Guild, announced that Trumbo would receive credit as the sole author of the screenplay. Universal thus became the first major studio openly and, as events would prove, successfully to challenge the blacklist.

5. Covert Censorship of *Spartacus*

At the same time that almost all of *Spartacus*' historically significant actions were being eliminated, almost all the reactions to them were eliminated as well. These cuts not only reduced the film's dramatic impact but in some cases also seriously damaged its internal logic, as the following examples demonstrate.

Spartacus Bargains with the Pirate Tigranes after the Battle of Luceria

This added scene, written by Trumbo as part of the retakes and originally inserted after the first big slave march from Vesuvius to Luceria, contained the following lines, addressed by Tigranes to Spartacus:

Of course it pleases Roman vanity to think you're noble. They shrink from the idea that a slave can beat them. Keep on winning and they'll elevate you to the rank of a prince! . . . The party of Gracchus is in difficulty because the Senate can find no one to defeat you. Therefore the party of Crassus delights in every victory you win . . . But you – you can't actually believe you're going to win? With the endless armies Rome can muster

³⁷ Quoted from North's typed telephone message to Lewis.

against you? . . . Surely you understand you're going to lose. You have no chance. The world is too small for you. Every power on earth will fight you. Even the enemies of Rome will turn against you if you show promise of success . . . They'll butcher you to the last man, woman and child."³⁸

A few days after being shot, this scene was shifted back to just before the slaves' first battle on Mt. Vesuvius. Nearly all the dialogue was replaced by retakes or eliminated.³⁹

Discussion of the Battle of Metapontum

This sequence, the opening section of the scene in the Roman baths, contained the following dialogue by Roman senators about the defeat at Metapontum:

LAELIUS: What news from Metapontum?
 SYMMACHUS: Heralds are crying the news now. We lost nineteen thousand men including Commodius and all his officers!
 LAELIUS: Nineteen thousand! . . . It takes us five years to train a legion. How can this Spartacus train an army in seven months? There's something wrong. Something very wrong.

Eliminated from the film's first rough cut, this sequence was restored as a result of an eloquent plea by Trumbo in his Report. It survived as the only specific reference to a major slave victory that is still in the film today.⁴⁰

Spartacus' Speech to the Slaves by the Sea

A cutting sheet dated March 2, 1959, reads "dialogue out" in reference to Spartacus' lines:

³⁸ Trumbo, "Retakes, With Notes and Old Scenes For Comparison" (October 1959), 22, and 24–27.

³⁹ *Spartacus*: daily production reports of January 22, 25, 28, and 29, 1960; "Spartacus. Music Notes, Revised II," Reel 18, Pt. No. 000; "Spartacus: Present Edited Continuity of Completed Picture" (October 2, 1959), Seq. No. 53; Trumbo, "Report on *Spartacus*," section II, 32.

⁴⁰ Trumbo, "Report on *Spartacus*," section II, 42–43; "Projection Room Notes: Running With Mr. Douglas" (November 12, 1959); *Spartacus*: "Roman Bath Sequence"; "Dialogue Continuity on *Spartacus*" (April 18, 1960), Reel 17, page 3.

We've traveled a long ways together. We fought many battles. Won great victories. Now instead of returning to our homes across the sea, we must fight again . . . I'd rather be here, a free man among brothers, facing a long march and hard fight, than to be the richest man in Rome. Fat with food he didn't work for, and surrounded by slaves.⁴¹

The heart of Spartacus' speech to the slaves, these lines ultimately remained in the film despite the initial order to cut them. But without the battle scenes to which they refer, most of their impact was lost.

The Panic in Rome

A sequence depicting defeated legionaries limping back into Rome while a terrified citizenry begins to flee the city was meant to convey the fact that Spartacus' revolt reached such proportions that it precipitated a panic. This in turn led to the installation of a quasi-dictatorship, the beginning of the end of Roman democracy. As a result of Trumbo's Report, this sequence was reinstated on the "Present Edited Continuity of Completed Picture" as one of the Added Studio Scenes to be shot as part of the retakes approved at a top-level studio meeting on October 10, 1959. It appeared three weeks later on the "Revised Music Notes" of November 2, 1959, marked "Scene Missing." It is unclear whether it was ever actually shot. It never appeared in studio documents again.⁴²

The Senate Appoints Crassus

A scene intended to follow the preceding contained dialogue in which the senate offers Crassus the command against the slaves and warns him that, if he does not accept, Rome will fall to Spartacus. To this prospect Crassus reacts with indifference. Shot, according to Trumbo, as part of the retakes, the scene was never used.⁴³

41 "Spartacus: Cutting Notes" (March 2, 1960): "Speech on Beach" (Reel 19); "Dialogue Continuity on Spartacus," Reel 19, pages 1-2.

42 "Spartacus: 2nd Draft Screenplay" (September 22, 1958), Scenes 256 and 259-260; Trumbo, "Report on Spartacus," section II, 45; "Spartacus: Revised Music Notes" (November 5, 1959), 13 (Reel 17); "Spartacus: Present Edited Continuity of Completed Picture" (October 2, 1959), Seq. No. 66; Appendix ST [Studio], ST-19.

43 *Additional Dialogue*, 562. A still photograph with caption appears in *Photoplay Studies*, 25 no. 4 (August, 1960), 18.

The Balcony Scene

In a scene which follows Crassus' assumption of power, Gracchus tells an increasingly outraged Caesar: "This Spartacus has quite a talent when it comes to handling an army . . . He's developed such a bad habit of winning that Crassus may not be able to cure him of it . . . If Spartacus wins I intend to ask the Senate to emancipate his whole army." Eliminated from the film's first rough cut, this scene was belatedly restored as a result of Trumbo's "Report" and went in and out several times. Its final elimination by the studio after the Final Previews destroyed the whole motivation for Caesar's defection from his mentor and from republican democracy to Crassus and imperial dictatorship.⁴⁴

The Original Prologue

Part of the first rough-cut flashback version of *Spartacus* contained Crassus' long address to his staff officers on the eve of the final battle. It included these lines: "Nine Roman armies have been destroyed by Spartacus . . . and our defeat will mean the fall of Rome." Cut along with the rest of Crassus' original speech when the flashback was eliminated, these lines were considered to have enough audience appeal to be used as the opening scene of the film's trailer, where they still can be heard.⁴⁵

Spartacus and Varinia's Last Night Together

Spartacus confesses his fear of impending defeat to Varinia:

VARINIA: They've never beaten us yet.

SPARTACUS: No. But no matter how many times we beat them, they always seem to have another army to send against us. And another. Varinia, it's as if we've started something that has no ending.⁴⁶

44 "Spartacus: Final Shooting Script" (September 14, 1959), Scene 284; Trumbo, "Report on Spartacus," Section II, 45; "Spartacus: Present Edited Continuity of Completed Picture" (October 2, 1959), seq. nos. 67-68; Appendix ST, ST-15; "Spartacus: Music Notes, Revised II," Reel 20, Pt. No. 237, 11; "Dialogue Continuity on Spartacus" (April 18, 1960), Reel 19, page 1; "Dialogue Continuity on Spartacus (Incorporating Changes)" (June 3, 1960), Reel 18B, pages 2-3; "Combined Continuity on Spartacus" (June 20, 1960), Reel 10A, pages 4-5; "Continuity and Dialogue on Spartacus" (July 26, 1960), Reel 10A, page 4; "Post-Preview Preview Cutting Sheet," item 31.

45 "Spartacus: Final Shooting Script," Scene 8.

46 "Spartacus: Final Shooting Script," Scene 273.

This is the only specific statement in the film about Spartacus' series of victories that the censors never attempted to cut. It may have resulted from Trumbo's growing uncertainty about the ultimate fate of the modern proletarian revolution. Its tone of hopelessness meshed nicely with the studio's view, despite its unwelcome candor.

The Final Battle

A crucial reaction shot from this sequence remains in the film, in which a visibly dazed and frightened Crassus heaves a surreptitious sigh of relief at the appearance of his allies, Pompey and Lucullus. However, in contradiction to the filmmakers' express written intentions, long-shot and medium-shot takes rather than the close-up take of this shot were used. This obscured Olivier's subtle performance during the film's climactic moments and destroyed the basis for Crassus' lingering anxiety after his victory.⁴⁷

Crassus Walks among the Dead Slaves

This scene originally contained lines expressing Crassus' shock and disbelief at the sight of the mutual love between the fallen slave men and women, a closeness that banished their fear of death and transformed them into a force which he senses will ultimately prevail over the power of Rome. The cutting of these lines without their author's knowledge during the initial filming of this scene provoked some of the bitterest charges of bad faith in Trumbo's entire Report. But despite his vehement protests, they were excluded from subsequent retakes.⁴⁸

A large number of scenes from the first half of the film presaging great military success for the slave army survived beyond the Final Preview. They included "Spartacus' Speech to the Gladiators" after their return to the gladiatorial school, "Spartacus' Greeting to New Recruits on Mt. Vesuvius," "Spartacus Bargains with the Pirate Tigranes" (Second Version), "Spartacus Confronts the Defeated Glabrus," and "Glabrus Reports Back to the Senate." Furthermore, as indicated above, a number of scenes from the second half of the film that built upon or recapitulated the great slave victories also survived, including the triumphal

47 *Spartacus*: "Daily Production Report" (December 28, 1959); "Spartacus: Additional Shots Beyond The Script Requirements" (December, 1959).

48 "Spartacus: Revised Final Screenplay" (January 16, 1959, with revisions through June 1, 1959), Scenes 321-323; Trumbo, "Report on *Spartacus*," section II, 46-47.

"March into Metapontum," "Caesar Discusses Metapontum," "Spartacus' Speech on the Beach" at Brundisium, and "Spartacus and Varinia's Last Night Together." Taken together, they outline the Large Spartacus, the rebel slave who almost defeated Rome. The only remaining source that powerfully illustrates them was the Battle Map Metapontum, which encapsulated in six seconds the action to which the dialogue in all these scenes refers. Once the studio cut that map, the filmmakers' underlying conception of *Spartacus* disappeared.

6. The Attempted Overt Negation of the Film's Message

Not satisfied with the elimination or neutralization of nearly all of the scenes that affirmed the idea of the Large Spartacus, the studio also appears to have forced radical changes in key dialogue in order to make its message unmistakable. Thus, during the last days of 1959, the last scene between Spartacus and Antoninus, in which the key historical question posed by the film is addressed, was retaken. Here is the original:

ANTONINUS: Could we have won, Spartacus? Could we ever have won?
SPARTACUS: Just by fighting them we won something. When even one man says 'No, I won't,' Rome begins to fear. And we were tens of thousands who said it. That was the wonder of it.⁴⁹

In the retake Spartacus replies in the negative, providing an explicit statement of the almost hopeless message which the film still delivers today: "No. That was the wrong fight. We were doomed from the beginning. But it was a beautiful thing."⁵⁰ Editor Lawrence remarked about this to me: "this scene was redone because some people wanted the film to express this idea whereas other people wanted to express the original idea." No revolutionary leader could ever have expressed such defeatist ideas, and it is highly unlikely that Trumbo wrote these lines, not least because they completely contradicted Spartacus' subsequent defiant prophecy to Crassus. Referring to the fallen Antoninus, he declares: "Here's your victory. He'll come back. He'll come back and he'll be millions!"

49 Trumbo, "Retakes: With Notes and Old Scenes For Comparison" (October, 1959), 69-70.

50 "Dialogue Continuity on *Spartacus*" (April 18, 1960), Reel 26, page 1; "Combined Continuity on *Spartacus*" (June 20, 1960), Reel 12B, page 5.

The original version of this scene was ultimately restored.⁵¹ Prompted by audience reaction, the filmmakers made a number of changes in Douglas' scenes after the final previews; this may be one of them. But simultaneously a hastily revised version of the film's voice-over prologue was introduced. It contained a new upbeat conclusion:

Here [in the mines] under whip and chain and sun he [Spartacus] lived out his youth and early manhood and dreamed the death of human servitude. The historians of ancient Rome have recorded the death of his dream, and the utter destruction of his life and all his hopes. Yet his name still lives. And the last vestiges of slavery disappear before our eyes. And the defeat of Spartacus has become the victory of man.⁵²

Shortly before the premiere, objections from the Catholic Legion of Decency forced the studio to restore the original prologue, with a new upbeat if anti-historical opening referring to Christianity as a historical force "destined to overthrow the pagan tyranny of Rome." This is the prologue we now have. It ends by reminding the audience that the cause for which Spartacus fought was ultimately victorious by describing Spartacus as "dreaming the death of slavery, two thousand years before it finally *would* die."

7. The Price of Breaking the Blacklist: From Primitive Rebellion to Middle-Class Respectability

Trumbo and Douglas failed to save any of the scenes depicting Spartacus' great victories. Plot and action are the crucial elements in a motion picture, and the plot of *Spartacus* is that of the Small Spartacus. Just as Trumbo predicted, after a promising beginning the result was not only a depressing film but, in large sections, a boring one. As the film's souvenir book states, *Spartacus* is about the life of a "man who led an inspired crusade for freedom against the most powerful state on earth, defeating in bloody battle nine of its best trained armies," but only one of those victories, the tiniest one at that, is ever shown.

51 "Continuity and Dialogue on *Spartacus*" (July 26, 1960), Reel 12B, page 4.

52 "Dialogue Continuity on *Spartacus*" (April 18, 1960), Reel 2, page 1; "Combined Continuity on *Spartacus*" (June 20, 1960), Reel 1B, page 1; "Continuity and Dialogue on *Spartacus*" (July 26, 1960), Reel 1B, pages 1-2; program notes on original soundtrack album of *Spartacus*.

Whatever its artistic weaknesses, *Spartacus* went on to break box-office records worldwide. Right-wing opposition from John Wayne and Hedda Hopper helped deny it a nomination for Best Picture, but the film was nominated for six Academy Awards and won four as well as the Golden Globe Award for Best Dramatic Film of the Year. Some of its negative reviews, particularly the devastating one by influential Bosley Crowther in *The New York Times*, show just how close the frightened and duplicitous studio executives came to ruining their own film. According to *Variety*, his review left the Universal bosses "stunned and almost in a state of shock" because he dismissed *Spartacus* as "heroic humbug" that is "pitched about to the level of a lusty schoolboy's taste" and concluded: "too many people, too many cooks had their ladles in this stew, and it comes out a romantic mishmash of a strange episode in history."⁵³ The film was ultimately saved by the public and by a handful of American liberal critics, who deplored the blacklist and knew what was at stake. But then and now most people would probably agree with film historian John Baxter, who later wrote: "In his novel, Howard Fast had seen Spartacus, the slave revolutionary, as the affirmation of man's ability in all eras to resist dehumanisation . . . But [in the film] Spartacus achieves nothing. His movement flounders in an orgy of torture and death for which Trumbo's hint that his protest will be heard centuries in the future seems a meagre justification."⁵⁴

Kubrick's bitter comment that the film "had everything but a good story" is quite apt. Even Crowther praised the opening gladiatorial training sequence as "lively, exciting and expressive, no matter how true to history it is." But, he went on to complain, "the middle phase is pretentious and tedious, because it is concerned with the dull strife of politics," and we see "an endless amount of simulation of political rivalry in Rome, in which the senators and generals are more confusing and less amusing than those in Washington." Crowther picked the final battle as his favorite sequence. But he concluded that *Spartacus* then "slides off into an anticlimax, wherein a great deal more is made of Miss Simmons' post-war predicament than of the crucifixion of 6,000 captured slaves." The bland banality of large sections of the film fully justifies Kubrick's own disavowal of it. The only exciting scene in the middle of the film is Spartacus' victory over Glabrus and the garrison of Rome. But it is a battle without combat. From all appearances, the slaves overrun a

53 Bosley Crowther, "Screen: Spartacus Enters The Arena," *The New York Times* (October 7, 1960); Entertainment section, 28. Further quotations from this review appear below.

54 John Baxter, *Hollywood in the Sixties* (New York: Barnes, 1972), 159-160.

Roman camp that is virtually deserted and already in flames. Violence, particularly successful violence by the oppressed, has been written out of it.

This was clearly not the kind of story Trumbo wanted to tell. In the first scene between Spartacus and Tigranes his dialogue is calculated to create the suspense needed to sustain the second half of the film. Can Spartacus and the slaves hope to overcome the formidable natural obstacles that block their path as they cross one third of the length of Italy? Can they survive the lethal dangers inherent in "fighting a major battle in every town," as Tigranes says? Is not their cause, as Tigranes contends, doomed from the beginning, or can they make it to the sea and freedom? If so, it will be a miracle. And that is just what Trumbo wanted to say, that Spartacus' heroic campaign was a miracle of the human spirit. The rest of the film was to consist of scenes switching back and forth among the love story, the slave community, and the Roman political struggle, punctuated by a series of bitter battle scenes and the slaves' successive victories over larger and larger Roman armies. Against overwhelming might, they reach Brundisium and, hopefully, freedom. But the intervention of Crassus frustrates their plan. To further his political ambitions, Crassus bribes the pirates, and the slaves are left in the lurch. They must now face the greatest test of all, the combined might of three Roman armies. In the final battle the slave army, resisting the Romans heroically, is destroyed. The aftermath reinforces the bond between the slaves and the man who has led them through their struggle when the survivors refuse to betray Spartacus to the Romans at the price of their own crucifixion.

This was Trumbo's epic plot line, not what we have today. Trumbo saw Spartacus at the outset as almost an animal, an angry, brawling, rebellious slave, reacting to insult and abuse with primitive violence, which erupts in the revolt of the gladiators. Like Fast's, his Spartacus experiences personal growth as he rises to the leadership of the rebellion and deepens his romantic relationship with Varinia. Gradually he begins to understand the hopes and needs of others and finally identifies himself with oppressed humanity's yearning for freedom. Trumbo wanted to make Spartacus into a living symbol of man's passion for freedom:

We have given Crassus a love of something much bigger than himself: an emotion: his love of Rome. It is for Rome (and his concept of himself in relation to Rome) that all his thought and energy is expended. Just so Spartacus must have a love, an emotion that transcends himself and Varinia: his hatred of slavery, his passion for freedom for them all. We have

given Crassus his passion: but the Small Spartacus has denied Spartacus his passion.⁵⁵

But Trumbo could not make Spartacus' ideals apparent through his dialogue. Kubrick's preference for a more visual conception of the character, combined with a desire to put some limits on Trumbo's left-wing predilection, produced a political film with scarcely any politics in it.

The elimination of almost all violent conflict frustrated Trumbo's purpose and sealed the fate of the Large Spartacus. In the early parts of the film Trumbo was able to take Spartacus from a primitive rebel into a charismatic leader with a warm, loveable personality. But what is missing is the original Spartacus, that angry rebel against injustice. Where is the mine slave who hamstringed an overseer with his teeth, the gladiator who desperately fought for his survival in the arena, the enraged rebel who drowned his trainer in a vat of soup, bashed in the brains of one legionary, and stabbed another in the throat? Where are the anger and the passion that are his defining qualities? Spartacus could demonstrate his hatred of injustice and his passion for freedom only in moments of confrontation. But the film eschews all violent confrontation for most of its running time. Spartacus never draws his sword in anger until late in the final battle. The heroic gladiator has practically been emasculated. Instead of fighting arms in hand alongside his men, he rides in on a horse after a battle is virtually over or watches from afar until an emergency forces him to join the fray. He sets tasks for others to perform while he does the thinking. His followers obey him without question. His relationship with Varinia, who is reduced to the status of a supportive wife and mother, becomes conventional. Spartacus seems to have risen from his lowly status only to attain middle-class respectability.

Neither Trumbo nor Kubrick intended to turn Spartacus into a Hollywood cliché. His character was supposed to develop into a mature democratic leader. But without something substantial for him to do, his rival, Crassus, becomes a much more compelling personality almost until the film's final conflict.

8. The Film Builds to an Anticlimax

How the final battle was handled illustrates the two conflicting views of *Spartacus* because, by this time, the slave army itself has become the main

⁵⁵ Trumbo, "Report on *Spartacus*," section II, 11.

protagonist of the story. Either we view the slaves as innocent and helpless victims of Roman genocide and so perceive Spartacus as a benighted Pied Piper unwittingly leading them to their doom, or we view them as fallen heroes, warriors in a noble cause who, through their heroic sacrifice, have transcended their own time and place to reach immortality.

Trumbo, of course, fought for the latter alternative. Initially he had argued against showing the final battle on screen. The audience, he maintained, will already know the outcome; what really counts is the aftermath. But once the decision had been made to eliminate the battle montages showing Spartacus' victories, it was inevitable that the final battle scene would have to be included. As Kubrick argued, without at least one major battle this epic would be a complete bore and a box-office bomb.

Thus, while continuing his fight to insert battle scenes or montages, Trumbo also struggled to make the facts surrounding Spartacus' defeat into an even greater measure of his power and importance. In actual history, Crassus suffered several defeats at the hands of the slaves, even resorted to decimating his troops, and wrote to the senate requesting the recall of his rival Pompey from Spain and of Lucullus from Thrace. The clear implication was that without them he could offer no guarantees about the outcome should Spartacus march on Rome. Later, however, his fortunes began to improve as a result of divisions within the slave army. Word reached him that Pompey had crossed the Alps into Northern Italy, and Crassus, according to the ancient biographer Plutarch, was "pressing forward into action with greater speed than safety" before Pompey "would come and rob him of his glory." As a result, he came perilously close to defeat. During the battle he was forced to show himself in the front lines. Plutarch remarks: "even his best friends thought him, in the words of the comic poet, 'The bravest warrior everywhere but in the field.'"⁵⁶ Plutarch also reports that in the battle a heroic Spartacus was

pushing his way towards Crassus himself through many flying weapons and wounded men, he did not indeed reach him, but slew two centurions who fell upon him together. Finally, after his companions had taken to flight, he stood alone, surrounded by a multitude of foes, and was still defending himself when he was cut down.⁵⁷

56 Plutarch, *Comparison of Nicias and Crassus* 3.2 and 6; the quotations are taken from *Plutarch's Lives*, tr. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press / London: Heinemann, 1916; several rpts.), 431 and 433. Cf. Plutarch, *Crassus* 11.2 and 7-8.

57 Plutarch, *Crassus* 11.7 (quoted from Perrin, 349).

The historian Appian even adds that Spartacus, wounded in the thigh and down on his knees, continued to defend himself against his attackers but was eventually killed.⁵⁸ The ancient writer Athenaeus says flatly that if Spartacus had not been killed in this battle with Crassus he would have posed a major threat to the Romans.⁵⁹

Taking a few liberties with history, Trumbo insisted that the slave army be overcome by the combined might of the three armies of Crassus, Pompey, and Lucullus rather than by Crassus alone. His objective was to make clear that, had the armies of Pompey and Lucullus failed to arrive in time, Spartacus would have defeated Crassus and perhaps taken Rome. In the concluding section of the film, the feelings and actions of all the main characters, especially Crassus, are predicated on this fundamental premise. The dialogue that Trumbo wrote to precede the final battle was meant to lend credibility to this idea. Following his original Final Screenplay, the first rough cut of *Spartacus* was constructed in the form of a flashback from the eve of this battle, with an opening scene, now appearing late in the film, of Crassus and his aides galloping into the Roman army camp. Inside his command tent, Crassus receives his officers' briefing and surprisingly informs them that all dispositions are to be changed. He then launches into a summary – known as the film's Original Prologue – of the course of the war up to this point. His words were the film's definitive statement of Spartacus' historic stature:

Nine Roman armies have been destroyed by Spartacus because they went out to fight slaves. Unless I am able to persuade you that the enemy we engage tomorrow is as formidable and skillful as any that you have met in your entire military career . . . then we too shall be defeated. And our defeat will mean the fall of Rome. The question is this: Why has a rabble of slaves been able to destroy the best troops the world ever saw? To answer that question you must understand that rabble. And most particularly, you must understand the man who commands them.⁶⁰

Crassus informs his officers that he has been collecting information about Spartacus since the outbreak of the slave revolt and starts to recount what he knows of the life of the slave leader, beginning with his years spent as a youth in the mines. The scene then shifts to these mines, and the film's story begins. Late in the film, the action returns to Crassus' tent as he finishes his account and dismisses his staff.

58 Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.120.

59 Athenaeus, *The Sophists at Dinner* 6.272-273.

60 "Spartacus: Final Shooting Script" (September 14, 1959), Scene 8.

During the rewriting and re-editing that followed the acceptance of Trumbo's Report, it was decided to eliminate the flashback and to open the film directly in the mines with a new voice-over prologue. The original opening was shifted and combined with its continuation late in the film. At Trumbo's insistence, Olivier returned to shoot some new lines for this scene in which he referred to the anticipated arrival of Pompey and Lucullus.

Even as other new scenes containing Large-Spartacus dialogue were being filmed, the "nine Roman armies" dialogue from the Original Prologue was eliminated from the scene just described. Reportedly this was done because the story told up to that scene could stand on its own without a verbal introduction. However, as we have seen, during further editing that story was deprived of its essential elements, the Battle Map and Battle of Metapontum that showed the destruction of those nine armies. The result was a complete reversal of the tone and meaning of the film as it builds to its climax. Instead of anxious expectation, we get assurance of an easy victory. This nearly ruins all of Olivier's efforts in this and the succeeding scene to reveal Crassus' anxiety and frustration. His second-in-command declares: "Sir, I think we can pledge you the most glorious victory of your career!" In itself this amounts to a back-handed testimonial to the historic stature of Spartacus. But Crassus slams the table with his rod and roars back at him: "I'm not after glory! I'm after Spartacus! And, gentlemen, I mean to have him. But this campaign is not alone to kill Spartacus . . . It is to kill the legend of Spartacus." Then, sensing that it may already be too late to destroy that legend, Crassus dismisses his officers and falls into a despondent funk, only to be roused by the arrival of Batiatius. Olivier's performance, which helped Peter Ustinov win his Oscar, is lost on an audience which remains almost completely unaware that Spartacus has achieved anything of historic significance.

Without Crassus' enumeration of and reaction to the slave army's accomplishments, most of the suspense now dissolves. The result is a foregone conclusion. All the time, money, and effort expended to film the only real battle in *Spartacus* are largely wasted because, as Trumbo predicted, the audience knows perfectly well what the outcome is going to be. In this context, Crassus' rueful references to the legend of Spartacus become ludicrous. The attempt to make the battle more exciting by having it appear during its opening moments that the slaves are winning falls flat because there are no close-ups of Crassus reacting with fear as his battle plans go awry when the slaves put his advance guard to flight, break through his lines, and engage his legionaries one on one. The

appearance of the armies of Pompey and Lucullus almost immediately after the fighting has begun quickly kills any hope – equally on the part of the slaves and of the viewers – that Spartacus' army might somehow still win.

Trumbo's idea about three Roman armies was a dramatic device, devoid of historical validity but designed to explain to the audience how a heroic slave army, led by a genius like Spartacus and fighting in a noble cause, could finally be vanquished after destroying nine Roman armies. The elimination from the film of any depiction or even mention of these nine Roman disasters made this device backfire. Instead of serving as a measure of Crassus' fear of the slave army, the vast extent of the forces he mobilizes against them simply demonstrates the overwhelming superiority of Roman military power which no rebellion, no matter how inspired or justified, can hope to challenge. This fatalistic vision is the very opposite of the theme of Fast's novel and Trumbo's script: that no empire, regardless of its power, can ultimately prevail over the force of man's passion for freedom.

9. The Film's Greatest Performance Is Destroyed

The elimination of the Battle of Metapontum, the Battle Map, and the Original Prologue not only gravely weakened the dramatic impact of the final battle but also thoroughly undermined the motivation for Laurence Olivier's subtle portrayal of Crassus. Crassus embodies the delusions of grandeur of the decadent Roman aristocracy, based on its military conquests, and its fear of the human spoils of those conquests, the slaves. This fear remains dormant only as long as the victims accept their fate. As soon as some form of rebellion or resistance develops, however, it surfaces. Those supposedly safe and powerful realize that they have become vulnerable, so they are determined ruthlessly to crush any form of opposition. This is part of the explanation for the paradox of how a military power that had conquered large parts of the world could have nearly been destroyed by the most pathetic victims of that conquest.

The slave owners also believe in their natural superiority over other races as evidenced particularly on the battlefield. For them, power becomes its own justification. Moreover, slave owners whose entire existence is bound up with the violent conquest of other peoples and with the exaction of obedience through intimidation lose their ability to give and receive genuine affection. The price for their grandeur is the loss of

the power to love or to be worthy of love. As Varinia reminds Crassus, love cannot be bought or compelled by force but must be given freely.

These barely concealed tensions come to a head during the final battle. As a modern historian summarized Crassus' campaign some time ago:

Crassus . . . was sent with six legions against Spartacus. His mission was not an easy one, and he was frequently outgeneraled by the slave; but after suffering several humiliating defeats he destroyed the main body of Spartacus' troops. The last survivors of the slave revolt attempted to escape from Italy but were destroyed by Pompey, who came upon them as he was returning from Spain. Pompey thereupon claimed credit for saving Rome. This claim intensified the jealousy that had separated Crassus and Pompey . . . Moreover, military defeat at the hands of a slave brought a stigma that Crassus could never forget and that darkened his mind for many years to come.⁶¹

So Trumbo intended the final battle to be *the* traumatic event which sends Crassus into a rampage of senseless cruelty and a pathetic attempt to compete with Spartacus for the love of Varinia. But the film fails to realize Trumbo's intention because there is nothing to convey the idea that Crassus experienced any fear during that battle. It has close-ups of Spartacus directing his army and fighting, but the feelings and reactions of Crassus are absent from this climactic confrontation between the film's two main antagonists.

During the shooting of the retakes following Trumbo's Report, two new shots of Crassus and his staff watching the battle were filmed: the first when the slaves ignite their rolling barricades, thus upsetting the Roman battle plan; the second at the arrival of Pompey and Lucullus that turns the tide against the slaves. The medium close-ups obscure Crassus' anxious reactions to these decisive moments. Here Trumbo missed the opportunity to characterize the real motivation of Crassus' fear. Instead, he spent his efforts on some lines to be said by Crassus about the heroism of the slave women and the love among the slaves. Trumbo believed that the message of these lines was crucial, so he was horrified when, without his knowledge, they were cut from the script:

I cannot find words to tell you my horror that Olivier's lines relative to the slave women fighting alongside their men and dying in the battle, and to

61 Joseph Wurd Swain, *The Ancient World*, vol. 2: *The World Empires: Alexander and the Romans After 334 B.C.* (1950; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 304-305.

the quality of love among slaves which is to him, such a profound mystery, were not even shot.

If, after all the effort that went into the writing of what could have been an absolutely superb moment . . . a moment essential to the intellectual and spiritual comprehension of what this film is about . . . if these were cut from the script before shooting, and if no one consulted me about the cut (which no one did) then I charge bad faith . . .

For the cutting of these lines before they reach film represents a final and irrevocable step in the total elimination of women from this film; the total downgrading of the moral and heroic quality of the slave rebellion; in the castration of Spartacus as a character of any consequence in the film; in an obsession with the Small View of Spartacus as almost to represent a conspiracy, a vulgar conspiracy to kill any distinction which this film might have had.

If we have these lines on film they should by all means go back into the picture.⁶²

Kubrick preserved part of what Trumbo was trying to convey. As the camera tracks across the battlefield, the peace and serenity on the faces of the dead slaves, many of them locked in a last embrace, powerfully conveys their nobility, courage, and love.

Trumbo intended Crassus, coming face to face with the heroism and nobility of the slaves in their finest hour, to become frightened and angry. He recoils from the contrast between their simple humanity and the emotional barrenness of his own life, an emptiness he has tried to suppress through his compulsive struggle for wealth and power. His victory has not brought him any peace of mind. Crassus also senses that, without the arrival of Pompey and Lucullus, the slaves might well have defeated him. Trumbo's Crassus was meant to struggle with a new sense of the criminal, morally indefensible, and ultimately doomed social system he has just barely managed to preserve. But in this struggle he fails. In his final confrontation with Spartacus and his utter contempt, Crassus loses all his illusions. He now believes that Spartacus and what he represents will eventually win. In the defiant face of his adversary Crassus sees the future destruction of the edifice of power that he identifies with. Faced with the genuine greatness of Spartacus, his own delusions of grandeur shrink to insignificance.

As originally released and even as restored, the film conveys hardly any of this. Olivier's performance has been robbed of all psychological motivation at key moments. Trumbo's concentration on Crassus' lines as

62 Trumbo, "Report on *Spartacus*," section II, 46-47.

he surveys the dead slaves resulted in a lack of attention to Crassus' much more palpable fear of Spartacus and the slaves while they were alive. This misplacement of emphasis probably stemmed from Trumbo's confusion about the primary cause of the terror that the slave revolt inspired in the Roman ruling class. His emphasis on the moral and psychological threat the slaves posed to Rome rather than on the danger of the Romans' destruction flowed from his underlying belief that, short of a general uprising, the slave army never had a chance at ultimate victory. Trumbo made this explicit in a dialogue between Crassus and Caesar, trying to transform the slaves' crushing defeat into some kind of moral victory:

- CRASSUS: I want no grave, no marker for him. His body's to be burnt and his ashes scattered in secret.
 CAESAR: Did you fear him, Crassus?
 CRASSUS: Not when I fought him. For I knew he could be beaten. But now I fear him. Even more than I fear you.

But these lines turn the filmmakers' intentions and history on their heads. The fear inspired by Spartacus when he was alive remained in the minds of his adversaries for generations after his death. The film's emphasis on the moral and symbolic dimension of Spartacus' challenge derives from the hidden message of non-resistance and otherworldly resignation that is implicit in the Prologue with its assertion that only Christianity would overthrow slavery.

The historic legacy of Spartacus and the underlying theme of East's novel and Trumbo's screenplay affirmed a faith that remains true today, as we know in the wake of the Vietnam war and the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union: that oppressed peoples can rise to challenge all-powerful empires and win. Sadly, the film as released delivered the opposite message: that those who dare to rebel will be crushed. *Spartacus* leaves us with some faint hope for the future, as Varinia and Spartacus' newborn son escape to freedom. Universal produced a film that pleads with the audience to remember the truth about what Spartacus dreamed of while burying the truth about what he actually achieved.

10. From Restoration to Reconstruction

The restoration of *Spartacus* at a length of 197 minutes appeared in 1991. Perhaps, if director Stanley Kubrick had gained enough control

during production to include his plot enhancements concerning the political struggles within the slave community between idealistic Spartacus and opportunistic Crixus, the film's story might have cohered and succeeded better. But executive producer Kirk Douglas, not Stanley Kubrick, was the real auteur of *Spartacus*, and in the end Douglas canceled these additions at the urging of screenwriter Dalton Trumbo. Douglas's and Trumbo's own heroic conception for *Spartacus* was in turn later reduced by Universal Studios.

Viewers and scholars may differ on whether the restored film as it stands today adequately conveys Douglas's concept of Spartacus as "the slave whose vision of freedom almost overthrew the Roman Empire." There is a significant body of dialogue in the film which gives that impression by anticipating or referring to Spartacus' great military victories over the Romans. However, the nearly complete absence of the battle action to which this dialogue refers seriously weakens the film's impact. In the words of its restorer, Robert Harris: "if we are speaking of the Large and the Small [Spartacus], then if you want the Large Spartacus, you've got to have the battle montage [showing the slaves' victories]."⁶³ The inclusion of deleted battle scenes, such as the Battle of Lúceria, the Battle of Metapontum, and the Battle Map Metapontum, in the restored version of the film would have improved it significantly by injecting excitement into its middle section and strengthening its historical image of Spartacus.

The last two decades have seen numerous restored versions of classic films which included some lost or censored footage that had not been part of the final cut or of the version in wide distribution after the premiere. There have also been restored versions that were termed "directors' cuts," in which the director chose to add scenes to a new version that had never appeared in the original, either because of cuts imposed by the studio or because budgetary constraints prevented them from being shot. Some directors' cuts have significantly improved some of these films, which now more clearly express their creators' intentions.

The restoration of *Spartacus* contained some lost scenes, particularly a homoerotic seduction scene. These added scenes, together with the beautifully restored cinematography and soundtrack, enhanced the film as a work of popular art and ensures its future preservation in a form close to its original release. But for *Spartacus*, the question of whether or not to attempt a true director's or, in this case, auteur's cut, takes on

63. Quoted from interview with me and Gary Crowds.

particular importance. Many of the film's admirers hoped that the 1991 restoration would serve as a director's cut. Restorer Harris had hoped to use many deleted scenes which, however, were never found because almost all of the many scenes cut from *Spartacus* had been destroyed and because the negative of the Final Preview version had been cut in dozens of places early in the process of making the black and white separations that Harris later used for his restoration.

If Harris had found any of the lost battle scenes, he would undoubtedly have included them. There have been some unconfirmed rumors that some lost scenes were clandestinely rescued and sent for safekeeping to a now deceased archivist at a major national film library. But the chances that any further lost or unused footage would be uncovered seem remote. Even if Douglas had considered joining the growing list of directors and auteurs who have produced personal versions of their films, there appeared to be almost no additional footage which could be used to construct such a cut.

Faced with similar situations, many directors have inserted new scenes which were not shot at the time the original film was made. In some cases they were produced especially for the director's cut, as in the case of Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind: The Special Edition* (1980; original version, 1977), with a Collector's Edition prepared by Spielberg following in 1998. Most famously, George Lucas made significant changes for a redone version of his first *Star Wars* trilogy. For the restoration of *Spartacus* the missing sound for the "oysters and snails" scene was re-dubbed by Tony Curtis and Anthony Hopkins, the latter standing in for the deceased Laurence Olivier. For some films new scenes were borrowed from other films. The 2004 television remake of *Spartacus*, directed by Robert Dornhelm, contains numerous battle scenes, but the different aspect ratios of the two films and the different looks of Kubrick's and Dornhelm's battle scenes rule out any borrowing for a reconstruction of the original *Spartacus*.

Such awkward measures are no longer necessary for a reconstruction of *Spartacus*. The key to bringing the filmmakers' original conception back to the screen is the reconstruction of the six-second Battle of Luceria from the working version of January, 1960, and the eight-second Battle Map Metapontum from the Final Preview version. Such a reconstruction has become practicable because the final seven seconds of battle footage which closes the teaser trailer of the film, footage which was originally meant to be used in the final battle, appears nowhere in the film we have today. This footage consists of a one-second close-up of

Spartacus signaling his army to attack, followed by about six seconds of footage showing the front ranks of the charging slave army from the Roman legions' point of view. These scenes may have been used as the opening master shots of the now lost Battle of Metapontum. Their only drawback is the majestic letters of the title *Spartacus*, which appear one by one across the screen during the final five seconds of the shot of the slave attack. But computer restoration programs can remove these letters and fill in the resulting blank spaces with convincing projections of the preceding and succeeding footage. The same programs can extend the attack shot for as many more seconds as required by looping back to a point near its beginning. The resultant scene could be inserted as a reconstructed Battle of Luceria, immediately followed by a reconstructed Battle Map Metapontum, from Saul Bass's original design, that shows the slaves' line of march south from Luceria to Metapontum. The map would be superimposed over a re-run of the slaves' charge in the background. The eight-second score for the Battle Map Metapontum that opens the film's overture, with its four crescendos, could provide musical accompaniment. The first four of the five titles from the Battle Montage in Trumbo's "Spartacus: Revised Final Screenplay," with changes through March 27, 1959 (Scene 248-D), all naming the sites of Spartacus' great victories –

LUCERIA
CANUSIUM
VENUSIA
POTENTIA
METAPONTUM

– could be flashed on the screen in time with the musical crescendos. Finally, the closing phrase of Gracchus' preceding speech ("and assign two legions to intercept and destroy Spartacus at the city of Metapontum") are to be replaced by the original version from the final preview ("... at the city of Luceria"). The resulting sequence of fifteen seconds is to be inserted between Gracchus' speech and the opening of the current triumphal sequence which already bears the on-screen title METAPONTUM. The film's intermission, which was shifted several times during the editing, is to come immediately after the march into Metapontum. This focuses the audience's attention on the zenith of Spartacus' successes and builds up his image, especially in anticipation of his coming confrontation with Crassus.

Insertion of the reconstructed Battle of Luceria and Battle Map Metapontum provides the minimum action necessary to resuscitate Douglas's Large Spartacus. It also permits the addition of the vital opening scene from the trailer, taken from the film's original rough cut, in which Crassus tells his staff officers: "Nine Roman armies have been destroyed . . . by Spartacus. And our defeat would mean the fall of Rome." This fits easily into the current section of the scene in which Crassus turns to face his staff and so replaces his present lines: "Spartacus has every reason to believe that he has outdistanced the pursuing armies of Pompey and Lucullus." The restored dialogue also feeds logically into his next lines:

However, there are passes through the Apennines unknown to any man. It may fortify your courage to know that the army of Pompey is encamped some twenty miles to the west of us and that the army of Lucullus is approaching this position by forced night march.

All this provides the rationale for the succeeding dialogue about Crassus winning the most glorious victory of his career and killing the legend of Spartacus.

This reconstructed sequence conveys Douglas's and Trumbo's vision of the historical stature of Spartacus, brings his character into clearer focus, provides credibility for Crassus and Batiatus in their next scene, and creates the necessary suspense as the action leads up to the final battle.

In addition, there are three reaction shots of Crassus during the final battle, done as medium or long shots, which put him too far away from the viewers for Crassus' anxiety to be noticeable. Computer technology can bring these shots closer in order to express Douglas's concept that, had Pompey and Lucullus not arrived in time, Spartacus might have won. They also allow the audience fully to comprehend Olivier's performance in the aftermath of the battle, particularly in Crassus' final confrontation with Spartacus. To give the reconstruction a distinctive look, the original drawings done for the film's souvenir book can be used as backdrops for the overture, intermission, and walkout music.

This reconstruction deepens the dramatic impact of every scene in the film, softening its pessimistic tone and endowing it with a more uplifting meaning. As Robert Harris told me, he tried his best to restore the complete 202-minute Final Preview version of *Spartacus* "because a minute can make a big difference. A single line of dialogue can change the whole

meaning of a story line." Since "*Spartacus* is a film right on the edge of greatness," as editor Lawrence told me, the difference between merely good and truly great could be very small. The reconstruction proposed here may reveal what impact *Spartacus* could really have had and what was lost when it fell victim to various censors' scissors.⁶⁴

64 I would like to express my gratitude to Gary Crowds, founding editor of *Cineaste*, where the first version of this essay appeared. Without his guidance and encouragement, my work on *Spartacus* would not have seen the light of day.

Spartacus Film and History

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