CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Culturally Significant and Not Just Simple Entertainment": History and the Marketing of *Spartacus*

Martin M. Winkler

Ancient history has always played an important part in the American cinema, which produced films set in classical antiquity as early as 1897 and 1898. The first of them was Walter W. Freeman's *The Passion Play*, "almost certainly . . . America's first feature film with a storyline."[1] It was followed by *The Passion Play of Oberammergau*, directed by Rich G. Hollaman and made as a rival of the earlier film.[2] Both derived respectability from their subject matter, even if religious topics on the screen were liable to raise the concerns of clergymen and educators.[3]

1 On this film, which does not survive, see Kemp R. Niver, *Klaw and Erlanger Present Famous Plays in Pictures*, ed. Bebe Bergsten (Los Angeles: Locare Research Group, 1976), 1–12. My quotation is from page 4. The film was a record of the passion play performed that year in Höritz, Austria. Its producers were Marc Klaw and Abraham Lincoln Erlanger, the theatrical impresarios who two years later were to bring *Ben-Hur* to the stage.

2 Niver, *Klaw and Erlanger Present Famous Plays in Pictures*, 13–27, provides background information on this film. Despite its title, it was not an adaptation of the Austrian passion play but an American recreation filmed on a rooftop in New York City.

3 On passion plays and their influence on early cinema see Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture through 1925* (1926; rpt. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 366–378 (chapter entitled "The Saga of Calvary"), and Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner, 1990), 208–221. On the cultural contexts of early biblical films see William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson, *Reframing Culture: The Case of the Vitagraph Quality Films* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 160–194 and 240–244 (notes), in a chapter entitled "Biblical Qualities: Moses."

1. From Cheap Origins to Cultural Respectability

Geared toward mass consumption, the cinema had first become popular at fairs and in nickelodeons: "cheap places for cheap people."[4] But cinematic spectacle, born with Freeman's film, found wide acceptance. Films like his and Hollaman's could demonstrate their makers' artistic, educational, and moral seriousness and draw attention away from their commercial interests. As has rightly been observed: "Religious subjects in general were an important genre for the early film industry."[5] Besides Old and New Testament topics, literary masterpieces and subjects taken from history could lend status to the cinema and deflect criticism of the new medium from respectable citizens and spiritual or civic institutions. As film and cultural historian Siegfried Kracauer observed, the theater furnished a model for early cinema:

> The trend in favor of the theatrical story was initiated as early as 1908 by *Film d'Art*, a new French film company whose first production . . . represented a deliberate attempt to transform the cinema into an art medium on a par with the traditional literary media. The idea was to demonstrate that films were quite able to tell, in terms of their own, meaningful stories after the manner of the theater or the novel . . . From the lower depths the cinema thus rose to the regions of literature and theatrical art. Cultured people could no longer look down on a medium engaged in such noble pursuits . . . Producers, distributors, and exhibitors were quick to realize that Art meant big business.[6]

Especially in the United States, the Bible and the plays of Shakespeare supplied respectable stories. The early cinematic history of Shakespeare's

4 Benjamin B. Hampton, *A History of the Movies* (1931; rpt. New York: Arno, 1970), 61.

5 Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 219.

6 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 216–217. The 1908 French film is *L'assassinat du Duc de Guise*, directed by André Calmettes and Charles Le Bargy. The subject had first been made into a film in 1897. The screenplay of the new version was written by a member of the Académie Française, the music score was by Camille Saint-Saëns, and the principal cast came from the Comédie Française. Calmettes directed a considerable number of films on ancient history and on various literary subjects (including Shakespeare). For a detailed outline of the representative process of cinema's cultural elevation and social acceptability, achieved primarily through epic films on ancient topics and adaptations of literary masterpieces, cf. Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896–1914*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999), 246–277. For a general overview of European cinema and society in this regard see, e.g., Gian Piero Brunetta, "Identità e radici culturali," in *Storia del cinema mondiale*, ed. Gian Piero Brunetta, vol. 1: *L'Europa*, pt. 1: *Miti, luoghi, divi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), 3–50.

Julius Caesar is an instructive case.[7] Films based on this play could make a double claim: their subject is a famous turning point in Roman history, itself a venerable period of the past, and it derives from a revered author. Consequently the first version, *Julius Caesar: An Historical Tragedy* (1908), directed by J. Stuart Blackton and William V. Ranous, restages Caesar's assassination by imitating Jean-Léon Gérôme's painting *The Death of Caesar* (1869). The film depicts the senate hall just after Caesar's assassination in an almost exact copy of Gérôme's painting, if in black and white rather than in color. The point is clear: the educated filmmakers want the educated among their viewers to recognize their source and to appreciate the cultured representation of this decisive moment. This one image in this one film exemplifies what many other films on historical subjects have demonstrated as well: when done right, the cinema is artistic, uplifting, educating, and inspiring. It always remains a commercial product, but it is good for you. Fred Niblo's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1925) is a case in point. Its souvenir program makes the cultural significance of the story's progress from novel to stage to screen explicit and emphasizes its public appeal and its edifying and instructive qualities – not without the requisite advertising hyperbole. The souvenir book begins with a "Foreword: 1880–1925" that links novel and film:

> SINCE GENERAL LEW WALLACE wrote the last words of BEN-HUR forty-five years ago . . . that immortal story . . . has been the greatest of fictional themes. Eagerly read in every English-speaking community and translated into many foreign languages, millions of copies have been sold and the circulation during the period has been as great as that of the Bible itself. This tale of Bible times was blessed by His Holiness Leo XIII . . .
>
> MR. A. L. ERLANGER . . . realized the deep desire for a stage play based on the book . . . The success was instantaneous . . . The vogue of BEN-HUR

7 On this see especially Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio, "How Many Times Shall Caesar Bleed in Sport: Shakespeare and the Cultural Debate About Moving Pictures," *Screen*, 31 (1990), 243–262; rpt. in Uricchio and Pearson, *Reframing Culture*, 87–95 (on the 1908 American film of *Julius Caesar*), and, with abridgments, in *The Silent Cinema Reader*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 155–168. An amusing instance of the cultural pretentiousness that Shakespeare met with in Hollywood is the program for Warner Brothers' *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935), directed by William Dieterle and Max Reinhardt: "For the premiere in Beverly Hills, an elaborate program had been presented to each member of the audience, embossed on the cover of which were four golden plaques, each containing a well-known profile: the three Warner brothers and William Shakespeare." Quoted from David Niven, *Bring on the Empty Horses* (New York: Putnam, 1975), 30.

> was due not only to the theme, the spectacle and the admirable acting but equally to Mr. Erlanger's foresight and wisdom in maintaining the fine and reverential treatment of its grand subject by the author.
>
> A FEW YEARS SINCE – in the newer art of the motion picture – Mr. Marcus Loew undertook the tremendous enterprise of visualizing BEN-HUR . . . and now presents it as a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. The direction of the work was entrusted to Mr. Fred Niblo, with the aid of the most distinguished players of the screen and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's unrivaled art and technical resources.
>
> MR. NIBLO has handled the story of BEN-HUR in motion pictures with all the tenderness and delicacy and dramatic power that the subject matter calls for. The most casual reader of the book or former patron of the spectacle knows the richness of the material and the splendor and poignancy of the romance for picturization. It is now offered with the happy confidence that this immortal story has been filmed to the continual delight of millions of theatergoers in every part of the world where the newer art holds sway.

These points were thought to be so important that they could be made again. The next text section of the program book ("The Production of 'Ben-Hur'") is equally emphatic about the transition of respectability from stage to screen:

> TRADITION clusters around "Ben-Hur" as the most remarkable stage achievement of America. It is fitting that this well-grounded tradition is upheld by the Picture Spectacle, in its turn the capstone of the picturizing art.
>
> "Ben-Hur" [on the stage] effected epochal changes . . . the nature of its action and the fineness of its handling called to the patronage of the Better Drama millions of persons whose training hitherto had been sharply opposed to the theatre.
>
> . . . the causes of its vogue are not hard to seek, for it was great drama and great Spectacle in the historical setting of the birth of Christianity in the eastern half of the Roman Empire . . . Throughout its stage career "Ben-Hur" was wisely maintained at the level of its original excellence, elaboration, and reverent spirit . . .
>
> The Greater Ben-Hur exceeds the stage play, even as the Newer Art that has the whole world for its picturizing, exceeds the older one.[8]

So the cinema demonstrated its seriousness as a new art form and in the process killed two birds with one stone. It presented well-established

8 The quotations are from the inside front cover and pages 5–6 of the souvenir booklet for *Ben-Hur* (New York: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1926).

topics that were educational and elevating but that did not neglect audiences' demands for thrills or spectacle. What better way to achieve such a goal than by putting classical Greeks and Romans and their biblical "relatives" on the screen – people whose status as the very founders of western civilization was known to all?[9]

2. Classical Educators and the Cinema

Educators quickly realized how important for their teaching and how attractive to their students the new "photo plays" could be. Teachers and scholars of classical antiquity became aware of the educational potential of film early on. In 1915, B. L. Ullman, professor of Latin at the University of Pittsburgh and editor of the widely read *Classical Weekly*, made the point emphatically:

> Moving pictures are an excellent means of showing that the Classics are not dead. The classical teacher not only makes Latin and Greek alive, but makes the Greeks and Romans seem like living beings (if he does not do so, he should). He contributes matters of lively interest to the life of to-day and he draws on the same life to make his subject alive. The circle is perfect. Here is where the cinematograph plays its part . . . An institution which seems to some only an evil may be turned into useful channels. I have heard several teachers complaining that their students do no work because they are at the 'Movies' much of the time after School hours. This is undoubtedly true and will remain true. There is no question that the cinematograph is to become an even more important factor in our civilization than it is . . . As classical teachers, let us seize an opportunity . . . the cause of the Classics will be greatly benefited, for the people as a whole will become familiar with classical life and history. It is to the advantage of the Classics that these [photo-]plays be seen by the greatest possible number of persons, and that more and more plays of this sort be produced.[10]

9 Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema 1907–1915* (New York: Scribner, 1990), 128 and 255–256, respectively, mentions the 1910 version of *Elektra*, based on Richard Strauss's recent opera, and the Italian *Quo Vadis?* (1912), directed by Enrico Guazzoni, as examples of films that appealed to a better clientele, even though the production company of *Elektra* had advised distributors to "bill it like a circus."

10 B. L. Ullman, *The Classical Weekly*, 8 no. 26 (May 8, 1915), 201–202 (editor's letter). Ullman quotes a contemporary newspaper: "The classicists have a new ally. They have labored in vain to get the public to listen to them . . . , but now people are flocking by the thousand to the theater to see what they would not read or hear about in the classroom. Teachers may now be seen on a Saturday afternoon leading schoolboys who have refused to be driven" (202).

Ullman (1882–1965) was "one of the leading classical scholars in the world when he died" and had long been "preeminent as a teacher of teachers." Many of his numerous publications were intended to be "of practical application to those involved in classical pedagogy."[11] Ullman was an early champion of the cinema's engagement with antiquity, which he treated as a modern phenomenon worthy of serious attention from educators and scholars. In this way he lent considerable respectability to the new medium. Ullman's confidence in the cinema was restated in the same journal five years later, if from a more alarmist perspective, by another scholar of comparable authority. This was George Hadzsits (1873–1954), professor of Latin at the University of Pennsylvania and soon to become editor-in-chief of *Our Debt to Greece and Rome*, a book series of forty-four volumes published from 1922 to 1948. In the course of his professional life, Hadzsits made "substantial contributions to the development of classics in America," not least "through his energetic advocacy of classics as an important and enriching field of study."[12] In 1920, Hadzsits wrote about the state of classical education:

> The present status of our High School and College curricula but mildly reflects the menace of an ignorance almost incredible and indescribable . . . the comparatively brief time with difficulty snatched from other innumerable obligations for the joy of research is ill-spent, if there be no appreciation of such work in a world turning away from the totality of those things, of which each piece of research represents but a small fraction. The pathos of research work that does not gain a hearing will soon become bathos.

For classical education to continue successfully, Hadzsits called for "enlightenment on the subject of the value of the Classics, after which the will may assert itself to return to the Classics." One of the most effective ways to achieve this goal, he believed, was screenings of films on ancient topics:

> If these great films were exhibited in every High School, there would be a revival of interest which no other means would accomplish. After all, our work suffers from its fragmentary nature, and mere glimpses of reality

11 My quotations are from R. L. Den Adel, "Ullman, Berthold Louis," in *Biographical Dictionary of North American Classicists*, ed. Ward W. Briggs, Jr. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 659–661, at 659 and 660.

12 Quoted from Judith P. Hallett, "Hadzsits, George Depue," in *Biographical Dictionary of North American Classicists*, 246–247; quotation at 246.

> through individual pages of Latin do not, in the nature of things, satisfy any normal or natural human craving. Great film spectacles, even though it may be said that their educational value is ephemeral, ought at least to arouse the slumbering synthetic process which alone can energize knowledge. Whatever historical inaccuracies may mar one or another of these great moving pictures, their value, on the whole, is incalculable in stimulating enthusiasm. In place of the mosaic representations of human life and its problems, extracted from one page, one paragraph, and even one sentence, a brilliant revelation is brought to mind and to eye of the totality of ancient life in all its vitality.[13]

It is a measure of his concern about the state of education that Hadzsits should have used a word with religious connotations in the title of his article ("Media of Salvation") in order to characterize a mass medium that not too long ago had suffered from the stigma of being low-class entertainment. At a time when classical studies and a classical education carried great prestige and had great influence on society, Ullman and Hadzsits were in the vanguard of elevating cinema culturally and of making film acceptable in the classroom.

3. The Cinema Profits from the Prestige of History and Scholarship

Film producers and advertising managers or directors of publicity campaigns like to call on scholars for the making or marketing of historical films. Recent examples are the involvement of a classical scholar from Harvard University as historical consultant for Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) and the exhibition *Troy Retold*, organized by a curator in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum in connection with Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004).[14] The prestige of scholars, producers hope, only enhances the prestige of their films, which often appear with hyperbolic claims to be correct in every detail

13 George Depue Hadzsits, "Media of Salvation," *The Classical Weekly*, 14 no. 9 (December 13, 1920), 70–71.

14 On these see Kathleen M. Coleman, "The Pedant Goes to Hollywood: The Role of the Academic Consultant," in *Gladiator: Film and History*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 45–52, and J. Lesley Fitton, "*Troy* and the Role of the Historical Advisor," in *Troy: From Homer's Iliad to Hollywood Epic*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 99–106. For another recent example cf. Paul Cartledge, "The Greeks for All? The Media and the Masses," in *Greek Art in View: Essays in Honour of Brian Sparkes*, ed. Simon Keay and Stephanie Moser (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2004), 159–167.

or to be no less than history come alive. But historical or archaeological authenticity is usually absent from the screen for obvious reasons.[15] Nevertheless it is important for marketing strategies to claim that a film is accurate in its portrayal of the past and to let it be known that such accuracy was achieved with the guidance of acknowledged experts. Such claims may take a variety of forms.

The manual for a re-release of C. B. De Mille's *Cleopatra* (1934) advises theater owners to act by "following through full-force on the tried-and-proven exploitation stunts described on this page." "Arouse the kind of avid interest that sells tickets," the exhibitors are exhorted; the first strategy suggested to them is this:

> ANTIQUE DISPLAY: With the cooperation of a local museum or library, set up a lobby display of historic paraphernalia used by the ancient Egyptians and Romans. Exhibited material could include coins, figurines, scarabs and other crowd-stopping curios and antiques . . . surround the entire project with [film] stills and prominently placed credit cards.

The same page recommends to exhibitors to obtain "sponsorship of a men's fraternal organization or a group of society women" and to secure "the cooperation of a highly esteemed civic or society group," the latter for a fancy-dress ball "in the dazzling costumes of Cleopatra's Egypt and Caesar's Rome." Its proceeds are to be donated to charity.[16]

In 1951 MGM advertised Mervyn LeRoy's *Quo Vadis* with becoming modesty ("THIS IS THE BIG ONE!") and piety: "MGM feel privileged to add something of permanent value to the cultural treasure house of mankind."[17] These boasts drew attention to the film's giant size and to the significance of its story, which depicted the victory of Christianity over the "Antichrist" Nero. The studio's claims were bolstered by the extensive historical research done for the film by Hugh Gray, its historical advisor. A native of England, Gray had been educated at the universities of Louvain and Oxford. His notebooks for *Quo Vadis*, MGM

15 I have addressed, and provide further references to, this aspect of historical film in "*Gladiator* and the Traditions of Historical Cinema," in *Gladiator: Film and History*, 16–30, especially 16–24 (section entitled "Film and Historical Authenticity"). For pseudo-historical, i.e., mainly myth-based, films cf. my "Neo-Mythologism: Apollo and the Muses on the Screen," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 11 (2005), 383–423, and my "Editor's Introduction" to *Troy: From Homer's Iliad to Hollywood Epic*, 1–19.

16 The quotations are from page 11 of the 1952 *Paramount Showmanship Manual* for *Cleopatra*.

17 The quotation is from Leslie Halliwell, *Halliwell's Filmgoer's and Video Viewer's Companion*, ed. John Walker, 11th edn. (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 491.

announced, were to be donated to the University of Rome or the University of California at Los Angeles, presumably for the benefit of future scholars and researchers, academic or cinematic, in America or Europe.[18] But as has been plausibly observed: "Most of Gray's fact-filled notebooks went unread, for MGM had a film to shoot, not a lecture to give."[19]

The Big One deserved a big campaign. The studio suggested, among many other things, that theater owners turn to libraries, distributing "BOOK MARKS" in schools and public libraries (but also at beauty salons), to children for a coloring contest of drawings taken from scenes of the film ("You can run them off yourself for throw-aways to be distributed in elementary schools"), and to parents:

> EXPLOIT PARENTS' MAGAZINE MEDAL
>
> "Quo Vadis" won Parents' Magazine medal for extraordinary achievement. This award carries a lot of weight with parents, educators, P.T.A.'s, the clergy and the general public . . .
>
> MENTION the award or reproduce it in . . . all promotion intended to influence teachers, parents and the clergy . . .

A remarkable strategy, at least from today's perspective, is a "LATIN SAYINGS CONTEST":

> "Quo Vadis," which means "whither thou goest" [well, not exactly], is one of the many Latin expressions which have become part of the English language. Interest high school and local newspapers in a contest in which the reader translates the Latin expression. The first correct answers will win complimentary passes or promoted prizes.[20]

18 On this cf. Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 139.

19 Quoted from Jon Solomon, *The Ancient World in the Cinema*, 2nd edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 217. Cf. Gray's own perspective as expressed in "When in Rome . . . ," *Hollywood Quarterly*, 10 no. 3 (1956), easily accessible now in *Hollywood Quarterly: Film Culture in Postwar America, 1945–1957*, ed. Eric Smoodin and Ann Martin (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002), 345–353. *Hollywood Quarterly* was founded in 1945 and sponsored by the University of California and the Hollywood Writers Mobilization. An editorial note to Gray's article stated: "Mr. Gray was recently appointed an assistant professor in the Motion Picture Division of the Department of Theater Arts, University of California, Los Angeles." Gray (1900–1981) later became Professor of Film, Theater, Aesthetics, and Humanities at the same university and also taught at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, whose Center for Modern Greek Studies he co-founded.

20 The quotations are from pages 10–11 of the MGM press book for a 1964 re-release of *Quo Vadis*.

To help out the probably Latin-less exhibitor, a list of twelve phrases and their translations or equivalents are given next, beginning with Caesar's *veni, vidi, vici* and ending with *non sequitur*. It does not follow from this and other such ingenious concoctions that they significantly advanced actual awareness of the past and its continuing influence on the present, but, at least while the film was playing in town, bad pagans and good Christians were on people's minds. The combination of history and religion is good for society and good for business, and studios were ready to rise to each occasion. The souvenir program of King Vidor's *Solomon and Sheba* (1959) informs its readers:

> Construction of Solomon's Temple posed many problems for Vidor's research staff, since many weeks had to be spent searching not only The Bible but also the works of all other authorities on the period to establish the exact dimensions mentioned. Translation of Biblical cubits and spans into modern terms . . . became a major project which had to be resolved before the architectural designers could begin their sketches. The Temple was built according to the description in the sixth chapter of I Kings in The Bible, King James Version. A very similar problem confronted the costume designers, who had to make certain that the hundreds of costumes, vehicles, weapons . . . and jeweled ornaments were absolutely authentic and would bring the picture full approval from Biblical scholars and historical experts.[21]

The capitals of certain key words or phrases, especially in the two occurrences of "The Bible" (not "the Bible," as most readers would expect), are revealing. They are meant to express reverence before sacred scripture and to signal exactitude in each detail.[22] The problems mentioned were,

21 Quoted from page 5 of the *Solomon and Sheba* souvenir program. On page 15 we are assured that the film is "A SCRUPULOUSLY FAITHFUL RE-ENACTMENT" and that "the producers . . . adhered to the original Biblical text . . . with scrupulous fidelity to the Biblical version." Cf. the similar assertion in the unpaginated program book of the MGM-Samuel Bronston production of Nicholas Ray's *King of Kings* (1961): "Bronston drew upon the learning of outstanding religious scholars, seeking authoritative counsel of all faiths in the preparation of the screenplay." This booklet next claims that Bronston discussed the film prior to production with Pope John XXIII. In this, however, he had been outclassed by LeRoy, who had his copy of the script for *Quo Vadis* blessed by Pope Pius XII; cf. Mervyn LeRoy with Dick Kleiner, *Take One* (New York: Hawthorn, 1974), 174. (LeRoy does not neglect to mention that the papal blessing was in Latin.) Bronston, however, later received the order of the Holy Sepulchre from the Vatican. The Polish remake of *Quo Vadis* (2001) by Jerzy Kawalerowicz had its premiere in the Vatican before Pope John Paul II.

22 The title of MGM's *Quo Vadis*, both on the screen and on posters, goes even further than this. The novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz and all earlier film versions had been *Quo Vadis?*

the text implies, solved splendidly. With such noble efforts, who could criticize the film and its picture of the past for one of the most amazing production credits ever given ("Orgy-Sequence Adviser: Granville Heathway") or for some unintentionally hilarious dialogue? (The latter includes a sensible warning against Sodomite patrols.) Still, viewers, and not only the scholars and experts, were more likely to give their full approval to the architectural design of Gina Lollobrigida's amazing brassiere than to any other absolutely authentic construction in the established exact dimensions.

Old Testament history and archaeology are difficult to reconstruct. Similar problems and, consequently, incentives to claim to have done the virtually impossible face filmmakers who turn to another subject of proven cultural respectability: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the founding texts of Western civilization. Films based on the myth of the Trojan War and the return of Odysseus have been a staple of cinema since the silent days. The steady progress of our archaeological knowledge about Bronze-Age Greece has inspired filmmakers to follow suit in their re-creations of pre-classical cities such as Troy, especially when they could show off their sets in color and on the wide screen: "In Olympian scope and vastness," as the trailer for Robert Wise's *Helen of Troy* (1956) proclaims. Warner Bros. promoted this epic by taking recourse to another powerful mass medium. In connection with some of the studio-produced television series, popular contract-actor Gig Young hosted *Behind the Cameras*, short but elaborate and carefully structured promotions of upcoming feature films. In three such segments – "The Look of Troy," "Interviewing Helen," and "Sounds of Homeric Troy" – Young points out the extensive research done for this not-to-be-missed film. Standing behind a model of the set of Troy, he informs his viewers:

> Here is a model of the city of Troy. Later on, you're going with our team of research workers and see how the ruins on the site of Troy were used to rebuild that city, the city of Helen and Paris, the city that Homer wrote about.

But the Bronze-Age city that Homer wrote about, if indeed there ever was a Homer who wrote down the *Iliad*, did not look anything like the city Young and the studio's researchers show their viewers. (These researchers presumably included Hugh Gray, one of the film's two credited screenwriters and one of its two credited story adaptors.) Rather,

(The Latin phrase is a question.) But the question mark is now missing because Romans did not use it. And the words themselves appeared capitalized as QVO VADIS (not QUO VADIS) in imitation of Roman inscriptions.

Warner Bros. rebuilt a city that was modeled on a completely different and historically and architecturally unrelated culture, that of Minoan Crete. Except for its walls, the studio's Troy could almost be a rather faithful reconstruction of Knossos, the largest and best-known Minoan site. Young also promises: "Later on we'll explore the ruins of ancient Troy," and documentary footage of archaeologists working on a major ancient site appears in the third installment. But this site is not Troy; it is not even in Asia Minor. Over the images of temples that had been built after the Bronze Age and of archaeologists discovering in the ground a statue too recent by centuries to date from the appropriate period, Young tells us: "Like the study of Troy itself, here is where preparation for the picture *Helen of Troy* had to begin, not in Hollywood but at the feet of ancient temples."

This statement is revealing, for it lays claim to the serious research demanded by dedication to authenticity and simultaneously informs us of the reverence with which such stringent demands were met. This is "a great moment in history, a great moment on the motion-picture screen," Young will soon tell us. But the images we see discredit every word we hear. And the same goes for the sounds we hear. Demonstrations of how studio technicians re-created the whistle of flying arrows, the clang of helmets and armor being struck by them, and the reverberations of bronze gates being battered all sound thoroughly convincing, but they are nevertheless inauthentic. Still, Young claims that *Helen of Troy* is making it possible for us to hear what has not been heard for "three thousand years." And when, at the very end, he holds up a modern translation of the *Iliad* ("This book was our challenge"), experts on the Bronze Age or Homer may be skeptical about the grandiose claims that Young has been making, but all other viewers will most likely have been as impressed as they were meant to be. Watching *Helen of Troy* is good for you. And cannot even the experts be thrilled by the spectacular looks of a Minoan Troy in WarnerColor and CinemaScope?[23]

23 Minoan architecture, especially its characteristic columns, came to be *de rigeur* for the "right" look of Troy on the screen. Examples are Mario Camerini's *Ulisse* (*Ulysses*, 1954) and Giorgio Ferroni's *La guerra di Troia* (*The Trojan Horse*, *The Trojan War*, or *The Wooden Horse of Troy*; 1961), Marino Girolami's *L'ira di Achille* (*Fury of Achilles*, 1962), and, most recently, John Kent Harrison's *Helen of Troy* (2003) and Petersen's *Troy* (2004). The columns in Harrison's television film are even fluted. But if Troy can look attractive in Minoan guise, so can other cities or buildings. The palaces of Phaeacian king Alcinous in Camerini's film, of King Eurytus at Oechalia in Vittorio Cottafavi's *La vendetta di Ercole* (*Vengeance of Hercules* or *Goliath and the Dragon*, 1960), and of Odysseus on Ithaca, Menelaus in Sparta, and Alcinous on Scheria in Andrey Konchalovsky's television film *The Odyssey* (1997) sport Minoan columns as well. Even the Moabite temple in Henry Koster's *The Story of Ruth* (1960) and the palaces of King Saul and the king of the Philistines in Ferdinando Baldi and Richad Poirier's *David e Golia* (*David and Goliath*, 1960) have Minoan-inspired columns. Examples could be added.

The final big-screen Roman epic before *Gladiator* was Anthony Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964). Its credit sequence prominently names highly respected historian Will Durant as its historical consultant, although Durant had originally declined to be involved in a production whose historical inaccuracies he considered excessive. But director Mann succeeded in changing Durant's mind. The film's souvenir program opened with "A Prologue by Will Durant" that is spread over no fewer than four pages. It was accompanied by a color photograph of a distinguished-looking Durant in coat and tie, standing on the gigantic set of the Roman Forum and holding open a copy of *Caesar and Christ* (1945), the volume on Roman history in his series *The Story of Civilization*. The last page of the souvenir book features an epilogue that is unsigned but worded in such a way that it could have come straight from Durant's pen. Durant also wrote the brief voice-over prologue that announces to viewers the significance of the film's subject. With this film and the story it tells we have reached the apex of classical antiquity in epic cinema: a momentous historical topic, the fall of Rome, that is comparable in its long-term impact on Western history and culture to the story of Jesus. Like films about the latter, the fall of Rome is presented as important to audiences' own days. Mann's film is meant to be seen as thrilling and appealing, edifying and instructive.[24]

4. *Spartacus*: Educators Selling History for Hollywood

During the silent era, Italy and the United States were the chief producers of cinematic "spectaculars," as they were then called. The early Italian spectacles about ancient Rome became popular hits in the U.S. and influenced American producers and directors.[25] Italian films about Spartacus exemplify this influence.[26]

The most famous of all films to tell the story of Spartacus, however, and the one to eclipse all others in popular memory, is the version produced by Kirk Douglas and directed by Stanley Kubrick. It conforms to

24 I provide a first assessment of its qualities in "Cinema and the Fall of Rome," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 125 (1995), 135–154.

25 Examples are Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?*, Mario Caserini's *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompeii* (*The Last Days of Pompeii*, 1913), and Giovanni Pastrone's mammoth *Cabiria* (1914). On these see, e.g., Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema 1907–1915*, 210–212 and 258. Bowser, 266–272, examines the emergence of the perception of film as an art form immediately after her discussion of film as spectacle.

26 These are listed in note 15 of my "Introduction" to the present book.

the basic narrative and stylistic patterns of historical cinema that were by then firmly in place, notwithstanding the complicated circumstances of its production and its social and political place in American culture. Made at gigantic expense, *Spartacus* had to reach the largest audiences possible. Its marketing campaign had to ensure the film's wide acceptance, especially in the face of such controversial features as censorship and the blacklist. What better way to obtain such acceptance than to fall back on the tried and true?

It is not my intention here to trace the marketing of *Spartacus* in all its ramifications. Instead, I will turn to two examples which exemplify the selling strategies outlined above. Both were in the form of written contributions by respected scholars approached to raise the public's awareness of the film's educational and historical significance. One text, a study guide, was intended for high-school teachers. The other, a short historical essay for the film's souvenir program, addressed a smaller segment of the film's audiences, in particular professionals in positions to influence large numbers of people. Both texts were commissioned because of their authors' prestige.

4.1. *The Study Guide to* Spartacus

The idea of a guide for teachers to discuss with their students a film set in antiquity is something that Professor Hadzsits could have approved of. The author of the *Spartacus* guide was Joseph E. Mersand (1907–1981), chairman of the English Department at Jamaica High School in the state of New York and a well-known teacher of English, with bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees from New York University. His academic specialty was modern drama, an area in which he published several anthologies and studies. His other areas of expertise were the teaching of English and general education. Mersand was a long-standing member of the National Council of Teachers of English and received its Distinguished Service Award in 1979. In 1938 he had published the short article "Radio Makes Readers" in the *English Journal*, the NCTE's publication for teachers in junior and senior high schools and middle schools. Mersand followed this with "Radio and Reading," a contribution to an essay collection called *Radio and English Teaching: Experiences, Problems, and Procedures*, published by the NCTE in 1941. These are only two of several of his essays on radio. Also in 1941, Mersand published a pamphlet entitled *What Do Our Students Think? Four Studies in Pupils' Reactions to Radio, Moving Pictures, Newspapers and Plays*. Three years before, he had written but not published an essay on "Facts and Fiction

About the Educational Value of the Moving Pictures," presumably using it for his later publications.

Mersand's guide to *Spartacus* appeared in a series of guides that had been published by the NCTE since 1935.[27] Co-founder and general editor of this series was William Lewin. The last page of the *Spartacus* guide ("EXTRAORDINARY ANNOUNCEMENT," 31) reminds readers that the NCTE had published Lewin's "pioneer monograph" *Photoplay Appreciation In American High Schools* in 1934. The NCTE now advertises its new monthly, *Mass Media Studies*, that will include *Photoplay*, *Drama*, *Television*, *Magazine*, and *Newspaper Studies* and "other mass media studies from time to time." The general editor of this new series will be Mersand. The rationale for his editorship and for the entire series is given as well (31):

> Dr. Mersand is a leader in the movement to include in the teaching of English a critical appreciation of America's mass media. The aim of this movement is to build "natural censorship" by developing independent critical judgment. It seeks to teach students to do better those worthwhile things they will do anyway.

The preceding pages of the *Spartacus* guide contained "Lewin's Unit in Photoplay Appreciation" (28–29), prepared under NCTE auspices, and a template of "Lewin's Photoplay Rating-Scale for Building a Critical Vocabulary of About 60 Words" (30). "Primary Objectives" of the former are (28):

1. Enjoyment of literature experiences through the medium of the theatrical motion picture.
2. Establishment of standards of taste in judging photoplays, as a phase of training in the right use of leisure.
3. Development of desirable ideals and attitudes.

The *Spartacus* guide exemplifies this approach and aids teachers in how to use the film in their classrooms.

With his impressive credentials and well-documented interest in modern media, Mersand had just the right background to promote the

27 *A Guide to the Study and Enjoyment of the Motion Picture SPARTACUS* (so page 3), *Photoplay Studies*, 25, no. 4 (August, 1960). The cover displays the film's title in its distinctive design and includes this information about the guide's author: "Prepared by Joseph Mersand, Ph.D. / Chairman, English Department, Jamaica High School, NY / Past President, National Council of Teachers of English." Below, numbers in parentheses identify the pages from which quotations of the guide are taken.

educational value of *Spartacus*. And he had been honored with the presidency of the NCTE the year before the film was released, as the guide's front cover does not neglect to inform readers.

Before we turn to the guide itself, it is instructive to examine the comments that Mersand's submission to the studio received from executives before it was revised for publication. Mersand described his approach to writing the guide in a memorandum of March 24, 1960, to Jeff Livingston of the "Office of Executive Co-ordinator of Sales & Advertising" for *Spartacus* at Universal's headquarters in New York City:

> I have spent a great deal of time (more than I usually spend) on the historical background, and on my essay on the significance of the Spartacus Rebellion. I kept in mind that when the film was shown in Washington at the N E A [National Education Association] meeting, you would be giving copies of the guide to each member, and they would all be teachers. I tried to impress them with the authenticity of the film and the guide.[28]

Livingston forwarded Mersand's memo the next day to Stan Margulies, the publicity director of the film's production company and a production assistant at Universal Studios. Margulies later became a well-known film and television producer. Livingston reported in a cover letter that the guide as submitted to him contained some "unnecessarily political" aspects. Margulies summarized his impression of Mersand's text in a memo to Livingston of April 5:

> Overall, I think it is a commendable effort. It sounds like all the other study guides, but I guess that's good. I felt it accomplished reasonably well the identification of Spartacus as a man worth all this attention. I am not an expert in the study guide field, but I assume that Mersand and Lewin are, so I will only comment on items relating directly to the film SPARTACUS, on which I am an expert.

Margulies' first such comment addresses the history of Spartacus from a rather anachronistic understanding of Roman historiography that has resurfaced repeatedly in modern times: "It has always been interesting to me that no contemporary historians ever wrote about Spartacus – possibly because they wanted to erase the memory of his rebellion?"

28 This and subsequent quotations from Mersand's guide and from Universal executives' reactions and comments are taken from materials on *Spartacus* collected in Boxes 33–39 of the Kirk Douglas Papers, deposited at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, part of the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives in Madison, Wisconsin. The background materials on the film's souvenir program that will be quoted below come from this collection as well.

But the memory of his rebellion was *not* erased, not even by the Romans. (Cf. on this below.) More revealing is Margulies' reaction to another observation by Mersand because it addresses the fundamental dilemma that confronts all creative artists who deal with an insufficiently documented past:

> Mersand states . . . that the film modifies historical fact. I do not know if he is referring to the overall Crassus strategy or to the statement that Spartacus died in battle. It has always been assumed that he was killed in battle, but he was never identified and we felt perfectly justified in keeping him alive for the crucifixion outside the gates of Rome. When no accurate historical facts exist, it is difficult to say how or if they have been modified.

This is an important observation. Even the committed scholarly historians are often hard pressed to give an accurate portrayal of the past – to show, in the famous phrase of Leopold von Ranke, "how it essentially was" (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*) – in the absence of complete or consistent historical documentation.[29] We can only sympathize with the dilemma of filmmakers and other creative artists who must build a complete and consistent image of history on a combination of fact and fiction, of limited knowledge and imaginative reconstruction. So we understand Margulies' complaint about Mersand's characterization of Crassus and Gracchus:

> I would like Mersand to define better Crassus' feeling of "an awesome emptiness in life." He certainly does not feel this at the start of the picture, but rather is consumed by desire to restore Rome to the Patricians, with himself in command. Gracchus also does not feel "the same elusive emptiness." All our characters have positive motivations, and I think we should spell them out rather than relying on elusive, empty phrases.

We may grant Margulies that the film's Gracchus has positive motivations, but does Crassus, its villain? Margulies' own words about Crassus' desire for power seem to tell us otherwise. His assertion that all characters have only the best intentions is negated by the finished film. It is also evident that Margulies' characterization of Crassus and Gracchus is based solely on the dramatic underpinnings of the film's plot and has

29 For a thorough examination of Ranke's famous phrase from 1824, which became a kind of mythical dictum in its own right, see Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984) 8–14. Bann, 10, quotes Ranke in the original.

nothing to do with history. The same is true when Margulies turns to Spartacus himself, but he reveals passion and commercial astuteness in his comments on Mersand's view of Spartacus:

> Mersand says, "Spartacus was just one more exponent of freedom and dignity." We don't want our leader denigrated. He was much more than *just another* exponent. He was perhaps the first leader of an organized rebellion, etc. etc. – a semantic difference but important in the total effect.

Historical evidence takes a back seat to a film that is being made because of its legendary or symbolic, not its historical, importance for the present. Margulies' "perhaps" is telling: Spartacus *may* have been important in history, but, whether he was or not, he *is* important now. When Margulies immediately turns to the political aspects of Mersand's text, Spartacus' importance as Margulies sees it becomes evident:

> I think we must be careful to relate our picture to the wide-spread, unassailable and noble human longing for freedom – and not be too specific in connecting it with African nationalism, subjugated peoples behind the Iron Curtain, etc. That is an inference I certainly hope many writers and reviewers will make, but I think they should say it, not us.

With this we can fully agree. Spelling out the modern overtones is an act of condescension, even in a study guide meant for teachers of those who need help with approaching a historical film. Margulies' criticisms of Mersand are shrewd and to the point. Almost half a century after they were made they still appear sensible. Margulies was not an expert in Roman history, but he *was* an expert in how to present it effectively to large audiences.

As a scholar and teacher of English, Mersand may have been an expert in the study-guide field, but he was not an expert in the Roman-history field. Nevertheless he delivered a substantial guide to a particularly complex historical episode – or better: to its modern popular retelling. The published version of the guide provides introductions to ancient Rome, Spartacus, and the film. Its first section ("The Rome of the Gladiators," 3–6) is representative of its overall approach (3):

> ROME, the glorious republic that it was, and the empire that it was to become, has been remembered through the ages for its almost indescribable splendor . . .
>
> The people of Rome – the ruling, noble patricians, and the richest of the plebeians – were people of high sentiments and great refinement. Their

> tastes in dress, in food, in manners, were such as to dwarf most of what was to come after. Indeed, their love of luxury, the exquisiteness of their tastes, were to degenerate into decadence which led to the end of their civilization.

Mersand's mention of the eventual fall of Rome in connection with a story set at a time in history even before the establishment of the empire and more than half a millennium before the end of the Western Empire reveals the standard modern perception of the course of Roman history: high sentiments and excessive refinement lead to luxury, luxury leads to decadence, decadence leads to political ruin. These are easily understood simplifications of complex processes. Widely read novels like Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1880), and Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis?* (1895, Nobel Prize 1905), and theatrical "toga plays" and "pyro dramas" ensured that these historical clichés remained in the popular imagination. Spectacular stage adaptations of *The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Ben-Hur* but also of works directly written for the theater like Robert Montgomery Bird's Spartacus play *The Gladiator* (1831) and Wilson Barrett's *The Sign of the Cross* (1895) also propagated this simplistic view of the Romans. Their clichéd plotlines found even wider audiences in screen epics.[30] Such films pit pagan decadence against Christian nobility of spirit. *Spartacus* belongs to this tradition, and it is not surprising that its prologue should refer to the triumph of Christianity or that Spartacus himself should have become Christ-like.

Simplified and distorted as such a perspective on Roman history is, it has some ancient authority to bolster it. In particular, the Roman historian Sallust dealt in his surviving monographs with crises that exemplify aspects of the moral, social, and political decline of the previously exemplary republic. Sallust, whom Mersand does not quote or name, points to refinement, riches, luxury, and avarice as decisive factors in its decline.[31] Nevertheless, to deduce from such moralizing a straight and inevitable historical path all the way to the end of Rome, and over the course of centuries to boot, is to take simplification too far.[32]

30 The anthology *Playing Out the Empire: Ben-Hur and Other Toga Plays and Films, 1883–1908: A Critical Anthology*, ed. David Mayer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), is a useful introduction to the topic.

31 Especially instructive is Sallust's overview of Roman history in *The Conspiracy of Catiline*, 6–13.

32 Alexander Demandt, *Der Fall Roms* (Munich: Beck, 1984), 695, lists no fewer than 210 reasons that scholars have adduced for the fall of Rome, many of them contradictory or mutually exclusive.

After mentioning, in good Sallustian fashion, the import of luxury goods, military conquests, and banquets, Mersand reaches a conclusion appropriate for the film to be studied (4–5):

> we know that we are concerned with a people who had carried the exquisiteness of living to a high point indeed – perhaps the highest in recorded history.
>
> Yet, as the people . . . developed their republic . . . and as the republic in turn fell to consuls who became dictators, and ultimately emperors, we know that there was at the core of the Roman civilization something rotten which in the end had to bring about its doom.
>
> We have not far to look for what that rottenness was. Historians and social scientists agree that it was slavery – the extreme luxury of the few depending for its existence on the labor extracted from the abject misery of the many – and the disdain of human dignity, which were the underlying causes of the fall of Rome.

The images of the credit sequence of *Spartacus* give us a powerful parallel to Mersand's point of view. Designer Saul Bass used imitations of Roman sculptures and Latin texts for a highly atmospheric opening. He ends on an aristocratic head reminiscent of the colossal statue of Emperor Constantine that is now in the Vatican Museums. It survives only in fragments. The head of Bass's statue crumbles into several pieces at the sequence's fade-out. The implication is obvious: Spartacus and his revolt eventually bring down the power of Rome.

We know that we are concerned here with a perspective that is a serious, if handy, distortion of historical truth. Historians and social scientists are the modern authorities whom Mersand invokes collectively to back up his assertions. But historians and social scientists do *not* agree that slavery was decisive for Rome's fall. Had this been the case – i.e., had slavery been such a powerful social and political force that it brought about the end of slave-holding societies or, in the case of the Romans, the end of an entire civilization – then slavery would have been one of the principal factors of historical causation, for all ancient and many later and modern societies had slaves.[33] But only the Romans are

33 Cf. the summary of Moses I. Finley, "Slavery and the Historian" (1979), in the corrected reprint in Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, expanded edn.: ed. Brent D. Shaw (Princeton: Wiener, 1998), 285–309, at 299: "In the context of universal history, free labour, wage labour, not slavery is *the* peculiar institution. For most of the millennia of human history in most parts of the world, labour power was not a commodity which could be bought and sold apart from, abstracted from, the person of the labourer." Finley alludes to Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (1956; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1989).

popularly seen as evil slave drivers and exploiters who come to exactly the end they deserve. Mersand mentions the Roman custom of freeing slaves, but he refers to freedmen only in passing and only to add that many of them "were not free, in our modern sense" (5). No word about another aspect of ancient slavery: Christian Romans, the supposedly good and noble kind, owned slaves just as the evil pagans did. The Bible states so unequivocally, but many modern Christians do not wish to know.[34] If the triumph of one slave-holding religion, Christianity, over another slave-holding religion, Roman paganism, was unavoidable, then slavery cannot have been a factor. Nor can slavery alone make a society evil, for then the American Founding Fathers, great and revered figures all, would have been immoral as slave holders and hypocrites in their assertion that all men are created equal. The American republic, modeled chiefly on that of the Romans, could hold slaves and still consider itself righteous. So Mersand's perspective on Roman slavery is seriously flawed, even beyond the simplifications that a brief overview such as this one necessitates. But his view is entirely in keeping with that promoted in *Spartacus*, whose prologue reveals to us that "the [Roman] republic lay fatally stricken by the disease called human slavery." The decisive point for our understanding of the Rome which both film and guide show us is that what counts is not history but Hollywood. The proposition that the fall of Rome was a direct, if long delayed, consequence of the revolt of Spartacus is historically untenable.

After slavery, slave-gladiators. Mersand's description of gladiatorial games – "Gladiatorial fights to the death . . . the more inhumanly onesided the contests the better" (6) – are pithy, clichéd, and wrong.

34 Biblical references to Christians and their slaves are in the letters of St. Paul: *1 Cor.* 7.21 and 12.13, *Gal.* 3.28, *Eph.* 6.5–8; *Col.* 3.11 and 22, *1 Tim.* 6.1–2, *Tit.* 2.9–10, *1 Petr.* 2.18–25, and the entire letter to Philemon. On Paul see S. Scott Bartchy, *First-Century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21* (1973; rpt. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), and Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 173–190. Garnsey's immediately following two chapters are on the church fathers Ambrose and Augustine. Cf. also the old but still useful work by Paul Allard, *Les esclaves chrétiens: Depuis les premiers temps de l'Église jusqu'à la fin de la domination romaine en Occident*, 5th edn. (1914; rpt. Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1974). See further Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (expanded edn.), 82–86 (adducing numerous works of scholarship), and the assessment by Shaw in his "Introduction" to Finley's work (44): "There is no longer much serious argument made in support of the amelioration of the conditions and status of individual slaves because of Christian ideas and beliefs, and, least of all, any fundamental change in the slave system itself . . . with the exception of scholars writing from a Christian viewpoint or, more recently, from a 'Religious Studies' perspective."

There is no mention that not all gladiators were slaves, that they did not always fight to the death, that many survived for years, some for decades, or that referees were usually present in the arena during fights.[35] No film shows us this, and neither does *Spartacus*. Mersand next turns to "Spartacus as a Theme in Literature" (7–8); this is followed by a plot summary of the film (9–10). Margulies' suspicion about Roman historians duly appears in the former: "Could it be that Rome wanted to erase the memory of this rebellion against its power and its way of life?" (7) But Crassus' and Gracchus' spiritual emptiness has vanished from the latter.[36] Mersand's next and final essay ("The Historical and Human Significance of Spartacus," 11–12) is fully in line with Margulies' wishes about the greatness of Spartacus: "The path of human freedom has been a long one and a hard one, but Spartacus stands forth as one of the giants in the fight for freedom and dignity" (11). This is why, according to Mersand, *Spartacus* neatly fits in the elevating tradition that has already "inspired countless artists and writers" to turn to Spartacus: "The film SPARTACUS is another such expression on a grand scale told in modern terms" (11). In keeping with Margulies' perspective, modern political analogies now appear only in understated terms. They do not obtrude on those who prefer to ignore current nationalism or Communism and only nudge those who wish to pick up on them (11–12):

> Today, people all over the world are throwing off the bonds of colonialism and proclaiming their freedom. A dozen new nations have arisen since

35 David S. Potter, "Gladiators and Blood Sport," in *Gladiator: Film and History*, 73–86, is a convenient introduction to this subject. For detailed information on all aspects of Roman gladiators see Marcus Junkelmann, "*Familia Gladiatoria*: The Heroes of the Amphitheatre," in *Gladiators and Caesars: The Power of Spectacle in Ancient Rome*, ed. Eckart Köhne and Cornelia Ewigleben; English edn. by Ralph Jackson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 31–74, and *Das Spiel mit dem Tod: So kämpften Roms Gladiatoren* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2000). Cf. further Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 120–159 and 239–241 (notes), a chapter entitled "The Life of the Gladiator," with brief discussion of Spartacus at 125–129.

36 Only Crassus' victory over Spartacus was "an empty one" (13, in a section introducing the film's main characters). It may be due to an editorial oversight that Margulies' emphasis on the positive motivation of all characters in the film is contradicted on the same page by this statement about Batiatus, the owner of the gladiatorial school: his "major thought is how to enhance his fortune regardless of the price in human life." – On this page, as earlier on page 2, the aristocratic Roman ladies who appear at Batiatus' school are identified as "Helena Glabrus" and "Claudia Marius," an absurdity in regard to both Roman culture and Latin grammar. But Hollywood had already given us a foretaste with the tomb inscription "Marcellus + Diana Gallio" at the beginning of Delmer Daves' *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954).

> World War II, and several independent nations will be formed in Africa this year or soon thereafter. Yet great as the progress toward human freedom has been, there are still hundreds of millions today who serve masters not of their choosing, but the whole story of human history informs us that eventually human subjection will reach the limit and the cry for human freedom will not be denied.

The story of Spartacus as retold in the film, we can deduce, exemplifies all this. Spartacus' moral and spiritual victory over Crassus foreshadows the great progress toward human freedom, while, by analogy, his defeat in battle and his death explain why human subjection will not reach the limit at which it can be overcome for a long time. For this, history has to await the arrival of Americans. In this way Mersand achieves a kind of chiaroscuro image of Rome. A strange mixed metaphor in the passage to be quoted next betrays Mersand's equivocation about Roman culture and history. Predictably, however, in the end he comes down on the expected side (13):

> Roman life, which we saw as through a page darkly, now assumes in SPARTACUS some of the grandeur of which so many poets and historians have written. But some of its cruelty and contempt for human life, and values other than our own, are equally clear. One comes away from SPARTACUS understanding why the slave revolt was so ruthlessly suppressed, and with the knowledge that the seeds of liberty, once sown on such fertile soil, would inevitably ripen into the destruction of the Roman Empire.

Spartacus as an exemplary history lesson: Mersand the educator echoes the perspective that Kracauer summarized in regard to the early French art films: Mersand's guide, too, is a "deliberate attempt to transform the cinema into an art medium on a par with the traditional literary media," as Kracauer put it. So we need not wonder that Mersand's praise of *Spartacus*, required as it is in such a commission, is on the same level as Gig Young's praise of *Helen of Troy*. *Spartacus* presents history and its meaning "in vivid scenes and colors" (12) and "with all the resources of the newest film techniques in sound, scenery and superb action" (11). Soon after, the guide reveals to us "Some Interesting Facts About the Production" (14–15), presumably supplied by the film's publicity staff. This section reveals the involvement of experts: "Professor Vittorio Novarese of Rome, one of the foremost authorities on ancient military history, was invited to supervise the authenticity of the production" (14), specifically of the final battle.[37] The battle sequence is described in logistical terms, both historically ("the classic full-scale tactical deployment of troops," 15) and cinematically ("Kubrick trained his movie army for six weeks prior to filming," 15). Where Young had boasted that viewers of *Helen of Troy* could for the first time in three millennia hear the authentic sounds of Homeric Troy, the guide emphasizes a comparable visual experience: "For the first time since Roman lighting formations actually terrorized the civilized world, audiences will view first-hand the unique formation which military experts call history's most efficient and deadliest" (15). The negative slant on the Romans as militarists trampling civilized countries under their boots again exhibits the standard inauthentic and illogical perspective on their history.

The next text sections in the guide present twenty "Questions for Discussion" (18) and suggest twenty "Activities and Projects" (20–23). Some of the questions restate the view of Roman history found on earlier pages, some others reinforce the idea that the screen brings history to new life:

> 2. Why do you think the Roman and Greek historians gave such a one-sided view of Spartacus?
>
> 12. Some historians have stated that Rome was destroyed by its own wealth. What evidence does the film show of its impending [!] doom?
>
> 20. What aspects of film technique make you feel that you are actually reliving the time of 73–71 B.C.?

The activities include readings (Howard Fast's novel, the film's source; Bird's play, Roman and modern historians), projects on Latin (as for *Quo Vadis*: "17. Words from the Latin language or Roman history frequently

37 On this sequence of *Spartacus* cf. "Training + Tactics = Roman Battle Success" and the contribution by Allen Ward, both elsewhere in this book. Novarese (1907–1983) had a long career in Italy and Hollywood as screenwriter, art director, second-unit director, assistant director, and costume designer on a wide variety of films with historical and contemporary settings and in various genres. Besides *Spartacus*, he worked on the following films set in antiquity: *Messalina* (*The Affairs of Messalina*, 1951), *La regina di Saba* (*The Queen of Sheba*, 1952), *L'amante di Paride* (*Loves of Three Queens* or *The Face That Launched a Thousand Ships*, 1954; a film for which Hugh Gray received story credit), *Nel segno di Roma* (*Sign of Rome* or *Sign of the Gladiator*, 1959), *La regina delle Amazzoni* (*Colossus and the Amazon Queen*, 1960), *The Story of Ruth* (1960), *Cleopatra* (1963), *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), *Masada* (1981; television film), and *Peter and Paul* (1981; television film). The titles reveal that imagination must have played at least as large a part as history in his reconstructions of the past. The study guide is silent on this side of Novarese's qualifications.

appear in our daily lives." 23), on the Roman army, and on Roman "organizing ability" as the basis of its rule over "the western world" (22). The last suggestion is once again the expected one (23):

> 20. Despite all her power, for several hundred years, Rome was finally beaten by people whom she called "barbarians." Study the causes of Rome's downfall in some standard history text, and report to the class.

A brief bibliography (25) and additional information on some of the filmmakers (26) round out the guide. Illustrations, which appear throughout, are mainly film stills, a few publicity photographs, and paintings of the stars (16–17) as "depicted by REYNOLDS BROWN, distinguished American artist, now working in Hollywood" (16).

My description of Mersand's guide will lead those familiar with Roman culture and history to a verdict not quite as positive as Margulies' had been. Specifically, Mersand's emphasis on the historical background of Spartacus is disappointing, although we should keep in mind that Mersand was not a historian or classical scholar and did not write for historians or classical scholars – just as *Spartacus* was not made for them. But Margulies' other point about the guide – that it is like all other such guides – might give us pause. Is the *Spartacus* guide representative of the level of media education in or around 1960? Is this all there was? Or are we demanding more than any educator could deliver, then and now, within the constraints of limited space and under a studio's or production company's pressure? Should we be grateful to Lewin and Mersand, dedicated educators as they clearly were, for their pioneering work in integrating new media, especially film, into their classrooms – even if these are media of salvation neither for history nor for the teaching of history? Regardless of how we approach or answer such questions, the *Spartacus* guide remains instructive today. It is a revealing example of how and how not to present the distant past in the age of mass media, of the marketing of history as cultural commodity, and of what we could call, with Walter Benjamin, the "aura" of a work of popular art.[38]

4.2. *The Ivy League Meets* Spartacus

A different segment of the audience was to be reached with program or souvenir books, a long-established part of the marketing of classy, expensive, and otherwise memorable films, as we have seen. The one for *Spartacus* is an exceptionally handsome specimen. Unlike others, this one names its editor: none other than Margulies.[39] It is in hardcover and contains numerous lavish illustrations: color photos, drawings, diagrams, a large fold-out, and essays on various aspects of the film and its theme. Among them is a two-page outline of gladiatorial games: "We Who Are About To Die . . . ." with the sub-headings "Ancient Gladiators" and "Modern Gladiators." The book emphasizes the contributions of the film's historical and technical advisor among profiles of the filmmakers, production heads, technicians, and cast. The essays are short, and there are only a few. A four-page illustrated "Portrait of a Production" opens the book; it is immediately followed by a three-page essay on the film's historical background. The essay's title and author are given as follows:

> SPARTACUS, REBEL AGAINST ROME by C. A. Robinson, Jr., *David Benedict Professor of Classics, Brown University*

Charles Alexander Robinson, Jr. (1900–1965) was the son of a professor of classics at Princeton University and held B.A. and M.A. degrees from Princeton. At Princeton, he had won fellowships to the American School of Classical Studies in Athens and the American Academy in Rome. Robinson taught at Brown University for over thirty-five years. His scholarship was chiefly on Alexander the Great, ancient history, and Hellenistic Greece. The year he died, the Classics Department inaugurated the annual Charles Alexander Robinson, Jr., Memorial Lecture, "delivered by a distinguished, senior scholar on a topic of broad interest to scholars, students, and community members at Brown," as the department's website describes it. By all accounts, Robinson was a dedicated, successful, and inspiring teacher and a distinguished scholar.[40] Where Mersand was the right man for the study guide, Robinson was the right choice for the souvenir book, lending the weight of his academic authority to a part of the marketing campaign that was to reach especially important people. Robinson "was very pleased to be involved in this opportunity to spread the word about ancient history."[41] His participa-

38 Cf. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn (1968; new edn. New York: Schocken, 1969; rpt. 1986), 217–251.

39 *Spartacus: The Illustrated Story of the Motion Picture Production*, ed. Sam Margulies (Bryna Productions and Universal Pictures, 1960).

40 Cf. John Rowe Workman, "Robinson, Charles Alexander, Jr.," in *Biographical Dictionary of North American Classicists*, 527–528. The immediately preceding entry is on Robinson's father.

41 E-mail communication of March 7, 2006, to me from his son Frank Robinson, Cornell University.

tion in the promotion campaign for *Spartacus* is a telling example of an American academic's involvement with an epic film and an equally revealing example of what may happen in the process.

A letter of February 15, 1960, written by Livingston from Universal's office in New York to Robinson in nearby Providence and copied to Margulies and other executives, describes the studio's intent:

> The purpose of the article is to establish the historical importance of the story unfolded in the film, SPARTACUS, so that the readers of your article will be convinced that the film is culturally significant and not just simple entertainment.

Livingston next reminds Robinson that in exchange for his compensation Universal will be sole owner and copyright holder of the article "for use in any manner the Company desires toward the advertising and publicizing of the film." Livingston adds: "With your approval the article may be edited and used in shorter forms." Its intended readers are "newspaper editorial writers, columnists and magazine writers, film reviewers, educators and high level opinion-makers – whatever they are." Then Livingston comes to the most important point:

> The article should establish that the story of Spartacus is one of the great and heroic stories of the pre-Christian era, little known perhaps, because the rulers of those days wanted to and almost succeeded in blotting out this outstanding episode in the story of man's continual struggle for freedom. You might want to write about the classes of society existing in Spartacus' world, previous and subsequent slave revolts, etc. If you feel that Spartacus' revolt contributed to the downfall of the great Roman Empire, please emphasize this; if it can be said that this revolt was the first *organized* fight for freedom, that would be good; if Spartacus as an individual can be properly compared to other great, noble and well-known figures in history, that would also be good.

Understandably, Livingston, like Margulies, wants to give the slave revolt and its leader as much historical importance as possible, and so the specter of the fall of Rome appears again. Livingston and Margulies favor the view that Spartacus came close to altering the course of history forever. Livingston continues: "It might be amusing to speculate on what changes there might have been in world history if Spartacus had defeated Crassus." Robinson is unlikely to have found such speculation amusing, for he does not ask any *What if . . . ?* question in his essay. But then, Livingston only offers a suggestion. Before requesting a preliminary outline from Robinson, Livingston adds: "More than anything

else, it is important that the article convey the fact that the story of Spartacus is essentially true and historically important."

The last sentence quoted presents us with the heart of the matter in regard to the cinema's portrayal of history, not least in the telling words *fact* and *story* and the way Livingston used them. Was he aware that both appear as if in opposition to each other? Does not the phrase *essentially true* indicate that the film's story is and must be partly fictional, even if only in minor aspects or details? But where, in any portrayal of the past, does the fictional remain inessential or become separable from the factual? Where, if at all, does the factual remain unaffected by the fictional? Such truth as *Spartacus* or any film contains is not so much essentially true as only approximately true.

It is difficult to believe that Livingston or Margulies did not realize that historical films cannot keep fiction out of their plots. But their chief duty was not to history but to Hollywood. The best strategy they could adopt was to pretend that fact and fiction could be successfully fused. In this, Hollywood marketers are not completely wrong and could point to a weighty ancient authority if they knew of it. None other than Aristotle had broken a lance for the truth of fiction, for the superiority of myth over history. In a well-known passage of his *Poetics*, Aristotle contrasts historiography and poetry, as he calls fiction:

> The poet and the historian differ [in that] one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.[42]

To Aristotle, myth or fiction as it was presented on the classical Greek stage reveals the essential, while the underlying significance of history has to be abstracted from the individual event to make it, in Livingston's words, "historically important." Both fact and fiction profit from being important. As marketers might argue and as Aristotle might understand, if facts or historical characters lack significance, it is necessary and defensible to impart it to them.

Academic authors usually look with skepticism on anyone editing or shortening their work, even if such editors are their fellow scholars. But Robinson agreed, and his text was indeed revised and condensed.[43] He obliged Livingston with the outline requested in a letter he wrote on

42 Aristotle, *Poetics* 9.2–3 (=1451b1–7); quoted from S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Arts*, 4th, corrected, edn. (1911; rpt. New York: Dover, 1951 and later), 35.

43 Compare the composite of Robinson's original essay and the published version elsewhere in this book.

March 12. The most important part of his outline was its last paragraph, for it elicited vehement disagreement from Margulies, to whom Livingston forwarded it. After summarizing what aspects of Roman history and historiography he would address in his article on Spartacus, Robinson wrote:

> Conclusion. The terrible war for freedom did result in the improvement of the condition of slaves. And ultimately the Roman Empire settled down to a long era of peace and prosperity.

Margulies reacted to this in a memo to Livingston of April 6. In general, Margulies found Robinson's outline "comprehensive and slanted from the proper point of view" – a revealing characterization not so much of Robinson as of himself. But Robinson's conclusion was enough to alert Margulies that not all was well:

> With one exception! His conclusion is all wrong for us, I believe! His statement that Rome settle[d] down to a long period of peace and prosperity and that the slaves had better working conditions sounds like a dismissal of the Spartacus uprising. The rebellion is then merely a disease which was cured and the patient was only bothered temporarily. Our conclusion, if it does not distort history too much and if Robinson will go along, is that Spartacus set in motion a chain of events that led to the fall of Rome and that is why he is remembered – an early important figure in the never-ending fight, etc.
>
> Okay?

Margulies' outburst at the beginning of this passage reveals his and the studio's own slant on history, and his phrase *wrong for us* (not: *wrong about history*) gives this slant away. Spartacus is less a historical figure than a culturally significant one and must be presented from the correct point of view. Margulies shrewdly picks up on Robinson's opinion of Spartacus from just two short sentences, and he is fully justified in his worry about Robinson's view of the historical importance of Spartacus. Something has to change. As editor of the book in which Robinson's essay is to appear, Margulies will see to it that Spartacus is shown in a different light, whether it distorts history too much or not.

Robinson did not see Margulies' objection. He adhered to his outline and revealed his view of the significance of Spartacus' revolt in the concluding paragraphs of his essay:

> The war was over, but the memory of the terrible fear it had instilled lasted on. Steadily the Romans improved the living conditions and treatment of their slaves. More free men were required by law to be hired on the great plantations to lessen the danger of large slave concentrations and revolts. Six short years after Spartacus' death, there was born in southern Italy a son of a freedman who was destined to be one of Rome's greatest and most wonderful poets. This was Horace, an ornament of the Augustan Age together with Virgil and Livy. The freeing of slaves became a common custom at Rome, until finally the clever and able freedmen filled up the Roman imperial bureaucracy. With the establishment of the Emperors, however, foreign conquests came pretty much to an end, and with them the capture of prisoners of war and their enslavement. Slavery thenceforth counted for less and less in the imperial economy, for house-bred slaves are notoriously expensive. Still, the institution continued and was not vigorously attacked in antiquity until the triumph of Christianity.
>
> Spartacus lost his bid for freedom, his army of oppressed malcontents, which he so skillfully organized, was utterly destroyed, and everyone tried to forget. A terrible episode in history had come to an end. But further generations of slaves could be grateful for the heroic sacrifice which made their own lot better. And the generality of mankind, forty years after Spartacus, was able to settle down with the Emperor Augustus to a period of prosperity never before equaled and to an era of peace that is thus far the longest on record.[44]

Robinson did not hesitate to refer to the organizational skills of Spartacus, for which the historical record provides sufficient evidence. But he did not see Spartacus' revolt to have "contributed to the downfall of the great Roman Empire," as Livingston had put it. Nor does Robinson compare Spartacus to any "other great, noble and well-known figures in history." Instead, the only effect that Spartacus' revolt appears to have had is that the fate of slaves improved – not so much because "everybody wanted to forget" (a dubious generalization that Robinson might have omitted) but because the Romans remembered, as Robinson correctly states in the first sentence of his conclusion. Ancient sources show that Spartacus was anything but forgotten.[45] A modern historian concludes:

44 For an almost contemporary parallel to Robinson's statement about the improvements in the slaves' conditions after Spartacus cf. the conclusion of Jean-Paul Brisson, *Spartacus* (Paris: Le club français de livre, 1959), 243–252 ("Le déclin de l'esclavage antique et l'heritage de Spartacus").

45 Cicero, *On the Response of the Haruspices* 26 and *Philippics* 4.15; Horace, *Odes* 3.14.19 and *Epodes* 16.5; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 1.43 and 2.554, the latter following mention of Crassus; Claudian, *Against Rufinus* 1.255. While gladiators were being subdued after an unsuccessful attempt to escape from Praeneste (Palestrina) in 64 A.D., the common people were immediately reminding each other of Spartacus (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.46.1). As late as 393 A.D., a Roman senator thought of Spartacus when twenty-nine Saxons committed

> it is undeniable that the memory of the slave leaders, kept alive for generation after generation, long reminded slave-owners of events which were not to be repeated . . . But it was Spartacus who became the most powerful symbol of the dangers slaves posed to free society and of the need therefore for constant vigilance . . . By the time of Horace, Spartacus had become one of Rome's canonical enemies of the past. . . . assuming mythical proportions.[46]

So the presentation of Spartacus as promoted in the film is historically untenable, although it still persists. Producer and star Kirk Douglas restated it himself decades later: "Rome was ashamed; this man had almost destroyed them. They wanted to bury him."[47] Remembrance of Spartacus does not fit a story in which the Romans systematically denied him a place in history. Nor is the Roman Empire in any danger of falling, for the only chain of events that, according to Robinson, Spartacus set in motion was to have made the slaves' lot somewhat better rather than to have made the Romans' lot decidedly worse. On the contrary, the Romans came to enjoy unprecedented "peace and prosperity" instead of being punished for their inhumanity.

Apparently, to Margulies (and Livingston) the general Roman prosperity that Robinson emphasizes in his references to two famous good Romans, Horace and Augustus, unduly overshadowed the achievement of Spartacus. After carefully going over Robinson's text, Margulies sent another memo to Livingston on April 28, in which he presents his "constructive criticism." He is correct in his main point: "I still feel the major lack in the piece is a unifying point-of-view." Margulies was to address this lack with considerable efficiency. Robinson dealt with history, Margulies is concerned with the present: "Seriously, I do feel very

collective suicide rather than fight in the gladiatorial games he was putting on (Symmachus, *Letters* 2.46). See further sources in Keith R. Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140 B.C.–70 B.C.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989; rpt. 1998), 169 note 8, and Zvi Yavetz, *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Rome* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988; rpt. 1990), 106–110.

46 Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140 B.C.–70 B.C.*, 131.

47 Kirk Douglas, *The Ragman's Son: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 304. For a far older and different assessment, although one reached from a general view of Spartacus that Douglas could easily share, see Charles Creighton Hazewell, "Spartacus," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1 no. 3 (January, 1858), 288–300, at 293 (note): "These ravages [of Spartacus' men in Southern Italy] seem to have made a great impression on the Romans, and were by them long remembered." This text is a historical survey and virtual hagiography of Spartacus as noble leader and military genius by a well-known and popular American journalist and editor.

strongly that in the first page there must be some relation between Spartacus and today" as a "spring-board to bridge the gap between a 20th century reader and the years before Christ."[48] This link could be forged in several ways, of which Margulies lists three. One of them puts Spartacus firmly into the course of American history:

> This is not a natural connection, but I think it might be handled – to relate the upcoming centennial of the Civil War to Spartacus. This approach might concentrate on the historic American drive for freedom, including the Boston Tea Party, Paul Revere, Valley Forge, Lincoln, etc.

History, this implies, is best understood from one's own perspective, not from that of the people whose history is being told. In this particular case the connection is indeed not natural, but it fits Margulies' general strategy.[49] More importantly, it echoes, if unwittingly and not in every respect, the famous thesis of historian Benedetto Croce that all true history is contemporary history. Croce's analysis is worth remembering in our context, and I quote those of its parts that most directly shed light on historical cinema:

> 'non-contemporary' or 'past' history, if it really is history, that is to say, if it means something and is not an empty echo, is also *contemporary* . . . the condition of its existence is that the deed of which the history is told must vibrate in the soul of the historian . . . Thus if contemporary history springs straight from life, so too does that history which is called non-contemporary, for it is evident that only an interest in the life of the present can move one to investigate past fact. Therefore this past fact does not answer to a past interest, in so far as it is unified with an interest of the present life . . .

48 Robinson actually made such a connection at the beginning of his essay. Either Margulies erred, or there was another (unpreserved?) version of Robinson's text.

49 And not only his. To show the past by emphasizing its meaning for the present is a virtually necessary narrative and artistic strategy. In the case of *Spartacus*, the following words by composer Alex North express it directly: "The story . . . has something to say about the world which existed then and which still exists." And: "I decided . . . to conjure up the atmosphere of pre-Christian Rome . . . in terms of my own contemporary, modern style – simply because the theme of *Spartacus*, the struggle for freedom and human dignity, is every bit as relevant in today's world as it was then. I wanted to write music that would interpret the past in terms of the present." Quoted from Sanya Shoilevska Henderson, *Alex North: Film Composer: A Biography* (Jefferson and London: McFarland, 2003), 131; source references at 246 notes 5–6. Henderson, 129–158 and 245–246 (notes), examines the score of *Spartacus* in detail.

> I have recalled these forms of historical technique in order to remove the aspect of paradox from the proposition that 'every true history is contemporary history.'[50]

Related to this point is Margulies' criticism of Robinson's overview of the history of slave revolts before Spartacus. Livingston suggested to Robinson to include such an overview, and Robinson did. But Margulies does not want to have it divert attention from Spartacus:

> I think we have to be careful not to give too many details or too much attention to the rebellions of Eunus and Salvius. I don't want to ignore or distort history (heaven forbid) and I note that Robinson in several places says that Spartacus' rebellion was the best organized and the best led – but I think I would like to go past these earlier uprisings a little quicker and thus give the impression that Spartacus was really the key man.

Margulies' parenthetical exclamation and its immediate context are apt to appear amusing today, but they merit attention. We can agree that a short essay like Robinson's should not lose itself in "too many details" like those about Eunus and Salvius, of whom most readers and filmgoers will never have heard. Nor will they have cared to learn about them. So Margulies is right after all, and we may believe him when he says that he cares about history, if perhaps not as much as he cares about *Spartacus* and his obligation to promote the film in the best way he can. But what about his juxtaposition of *impression* and *really*? Do not these terms imply an incompatibility, or can impression and reality be reconciled? The dilemma that we may glimpse behind these words actually surfaces when Margulies follows the quotation above with this suggestion: "I'd like a more dispassionate observer than I [*sic*] to evaluate this."

Neither Eunus nor Salvius nor Athenion and not even Spartacus' own fellow leader Crixus, all of whom Robinson mentions in his essay, made it into the published version, which kept a closer focus on Spartacus. Robinson's title ("Spartacus – Rebel or Hero?") was changed to "Spartacus, Rebel Against Rome," an improvement because Robinson never sufficiently addressed his own question. The new title is pithy, to the point, and historically accurate. But more important is what happened to Robinson's conclusion. In the published version it appears significantly condensed:

50 Benedetto Croce, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, tr. Douglas Ainslie (1921; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), 12.

> The war was over, but the memory of the terrible fear it had instilled lasted on. Steadily, the Romans improved the treatment of their slaves, and the freeing of slaves became a common custom.
>
> Spartacus lost his bid for freedom, his army of oppressed malcontents was utterly destroyed, and everyone tried to forget. A terrible episode in history had come to an end. But further generations of slaves could be grateful for the heroic sacrifice which made their own lot better.
>
> And the generality of mankind, forty years after Spartacus, was able to settle down to a period of prosperity never before equaled, and to an era of peace that is thus far the longest on record.

Gone are the good Romans Horace and Augustus and most of the details on Roman history. Gone also is Christianity. But is the new conclusion "slanted from the proper point of view"? Not quite, for we read only that Spartacus and the slaves lost and that their main legacy was the improvement in the lot of future slaves. The Roman Empire does not fall. On the other hand, the statement that freeing slaves became a common custom *is* a slant, an overstatement in its hint that slavery came to be seriously diminished. The Augustan peace and prosperity in Robinson's earlier version, from which primarily the ruling Romans profited, have now been extended to all – thanks to Spartacus. Spartacus, it is implied, may not have been a cause for the fall of Rome, but he and his Christ-like death for dignity and freedom represent the first link in a chain of improvements in mankind's lot that extends from ancient Rome to modern America. This chain could not have been forged if *Spartacus* had not acquired, in tried and true Hollywood fashion and sanctioned by the prominent support of prestigious figures like Mersand and Robinson, the seal of quality: "culturally significant and not just simple entertainment." Partly because of their contributions, the film is not merely an epic spectacle but has become an uplifting and educational lesson in history and morality. *Spartacus* is good for you. We may be reminded of the souvenir book of the silent *Ben-Hur*, part of whose text fits *Spartacus* like a glove. With only a few minor adjustments, it could read like this:

> A FEW YEARS AGO Mr. Kirk Douglas undertook the tremendous enterprise of visualizing SPARTACUS and now presents it as a Bryna-Universal picture. The direction of the work was entrusted to Mr. Stanley Kubrick, with the aid of the most distinguished players of the screen and Universal's unrivaled art and technical resources.
>
> MR. KUBRICK has handled the story of SPARTACUS with all the tenderness and delicacy and dramatic power that the subject matter calls for. The most

casual patron knows the richness of the material and the splendor and poignancy of the romance. It is now offered with the happy confidence that this immortal story has been filmed to the continual delight of millions of theatergoers in every part of the world where the new art holds sway.

The Principal Ancient Sources on Spartacus

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Greek historians Plutarch and Appian provide us with the longest and best-known accounts of the rebellion of Spartacus (73–71 B.C.). They appear as the first of the translations included here. Roman historians follow according to their authors' chronology; only the most important passages are included. The ancient sources on the Roman slave wars and on Spartacus are available in translation in the following works: Thomas Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (1981; rpt. New York and London: Routledge, 2004); Zvi Yavetz, *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Rome* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988; rpt. 1990); *Spartacus and the Slave Wars: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Brent D. Shaw (Boston and New York: Bedford / St. Martin's, 2001). Patrick McGushin, *Sallust: The Histories*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), provides the fragments on Spartacus from Book 3 of Sallust's lost *Histories* (translations: pages 34–37 and 39; detailed notes: pages 133–136). His and Shaw's translations incorporate "major reconstruction" (McGushin, 119) of some fragments. These reconstructions and other words or phrases surviving in the fragments without immediate context are not included here.

All translations are my own except those of passages by Plutarch, Appian, and Florus. These are taken, respectively, from *Plutarch's Lives*, tr. Bernadotte Perrin, vols. 3 and 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press / London: Heinemann, 1916 and 1917); *Appian's Roman History*, tr. Horace White, rev. E. Iliff Robson, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press / London: Heinemann, 1913); and *Lucius Annaeus Florus: Epitome of Roman History*, tr. Edward Seymour Forster (Cambridge: Harvard University Press / London: Heinemann, 1929). Translators' notes have been omitted. My editorial additions appear in square brackets.

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Film and History

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