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Spartacus: Testing the Strength of the Body Politic

A Hero of Liberty

In 1914, George Kleine distributed throughout the United States an Italian film that portrayed the gladiator Spartacus leading a rebellion against the armies of Rome. The promotional material produced to market *Spartaco* boasted of the ethical and aesthetic value of the historical film. Above a letter of endorsement from a teacher at Ohio University, who described his pupils' rapturous reception of the film, Kleine's publicity declares:

> The eyes of the greatest men in history have been fixed on the splendid character of this hero of liberty who was the first to dare cry out against the tyrannical force of Rome, the Mistress of the World. Pictures and statues represent the valiant gladiator in the historical moments of his adventurous life, always in the struggle against the power of tyrants and in favor of the weak and oppressed. Such a source has inspired the finest works of art; the French theatre employed the genius of two writers in two powerful tragedies in which the gigantic hero is represented in his dream of love and freedom. Taking our inspiration from the sublime verses of Bernard Joseph Sauria [sic] and of M. H. Marget, we have constructed the plot of this kinematographic tragedy which abounds in profoundly emotional situations, and which is splendidly loyal to the reconstruction of Roman grandeur. We are sure that we have composed a true work of art and we do not hesitate to affirm that "SPARTACUS" is one of the most splendid jewels of the screen.

In the ancient tradition that concerns the slave insurrection led by the Thracian gladiator Spartacus, however, little trace survives of the rebels' aims and ambitions. The sources for the slave revolt that lasted over two

years from 73 B.C. to 71 B.C. and appeared at one point even to threaten the safety of the city of Rome are relatively late and do not give voice to the servile perspective.[1] The summary of the rebellion which appears (some one hundred years after the event) in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* is largely incidental to a biography of the Roman victor Marcus Licinius Crassus and is incorporated into a narrative that, through the representation of the Roman general's career, seeks to demonstrate to Plutarch's readers the dangers of political ambition. Reference to the revolt in the survey of Roman history provided by Florus in the second century A.D. is even briefer and more partisan, designed to illustrate the ignominy that for Romans was attendant on a war against gladiators:

> One can tolerate, indeed, even the disgrace of a war against slaves; for although, by force of circumstances, they are liable to any kind of treatment, yet they form as it were a class (though an inferior class) of human beings and can be admitted to the blessings of liberty which we enjoy. But I know not what name to give to the war which was stirred up at the instigation of Spartacus; for the common soldiers being slaves and their leaders being gladiators—the former men of the humblest, the latter men of the worse, class—added insult to the injury which they inflicted upon Rome.[2]

For the ancient epitomist Florus, the insurrection led by Spartacus is not a glorious "struggle against the power of tyrants" but draws Rome into a disgraceful "war against slaves"; liberty is a blessed condition to be bestowed by the Roman elite not seized upon by its inferiors; and Spartacus himself is not a "splendid character" but a Thracian mercenary, a deserter, a highwayman, and finally, and worst of all, a vengeful gladiator.

Little material is available from antiquity on the slave war led by Spartacus because the Roman elite, as the producers or consumers of ancient historiography, did not find slave rebellion a worthy subject for historical discourse. Furthermore, although many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians of the rebellion found in Spartacus a champion of the oppressed in Roman society, a revolutionary hero of the class struggle, several more recent analyses of the ancient evidence have concluded that Spartacus was not a revolutionary, that he did not proffer systematic opposition to the power and the rule of Rome nor plan to remodel Roman society, but probably had as his limited design the restoration of the largely foreign slaves to their respective homelands.[3] The contrast between the fragmentary ancient sources on Spartacus and the narrative image of the Italian film with which Kleine sought to attract his American audience could not be sharper.

The tradition on which George Kleine drew to launch an Italian film about Spartacus on the American market stems from the mid-eighteenth century, when Spartacus began to be elevated in Western European literature, historiography, political rhetoric, and visual art into an idealized champion of both the oppressed and the enslaved.[4] From this period, representations of the ancient slave rebellion and the gladiator Spartacus were profoundly driven by the political concerns of the present. If, according to Walter Benjamin, all history is informed by "the presence of the now," it was the appropriation of Roman republican history by the French Revolution which Benjamin cites as a prime example of history's presentist rhetorical strategies. As Benjamin observes, "the French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate," and Paris became steeped in the political rhetoric and iconography of republican Rome.[5] The eagles which had adorned the standards of the Roman legions were introduced as the regimental insignia of the French army and the Roman *fasces*—symbol of the authority of the republican magistrates—were painted on the walls of the revolutionary government's seat of power when the National Assembly moved to the Tuilleries in 1793. The revolutionary cult of republican antiquity found popular expression in the renaming of streets, towns, and individuals, and in the diffuse display of the "liberty cap"—modeled on that worn in ancient Rome by liberated slaves.[6]

The French theater of the late eighteenth century, to which George Kleine's promotional material draws attention as a source for the Italian cinematic representation of Spartacus, was radicalized by the French Revolution. Plays concerning figures from the period of the Roman republic were performed and consumed as commentaries on current political events. Thus, when Voltaire's tragedy *Brutus* was revived in 1790, the audience at its first performance hailed Mirabeau, one of the early moderate constitutionalists of the revolution, as the "Brutus of France."[7] Similarly, Bernard Joseph Saurin's tragedy *Spartacus*, to which the American film distributor refers, although first performed in 1760, was revived in the libertarian atmosphere of Paris in 1792. When Kleine treats the cinematic Spartacus as politically exemplary for opposition to tyranny and support of the oppressed, he echoes the sentiments of the French dramatist Saurin. In an early nineteenth-century edition of his plays, Saurin justifies giving a voice to the Thracian gladiator on the grounds that until now historians and poets have done much harm to the human race by representing too often the lives of conquerors and the ambitious. He continues:

> How many young princes, seduced by the glamour of a false heroism, have caused desolation and havoc in order to march in the footsteps of Alexander or Caesar? . . . [Instead, historians and poets] should make them know true glory and make them nobly ambitious for the good of men.[8]

The profoundly presentist interest in the history of the slave rebellion led by Spartacus received further impetus from the turn of the nineteenth century, at a time when the slave rebellion led by Toussaint l'Ouverture in the French colony of St. Domingue was the first to match in scale the ancient revolt, and when slavery and its possible abolition became a burning political and social issue in Britain, America, and France.[9] Between 1807 and 1820, the slave trade was prohibited by the governments of first Denmark, then Britain, America, France, Spain, and Portugal, while slavery was formally abolished by the British government in 1833, the French in 1848, and the American in 1865. Even historical scholarship on ancient slavery was, in this period, inextricably enmeshed in contemporary debates and policy decisions about abolition. Most notably, when Henri Wallon published his three-volume work, *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*, in the Paris of 1847, his study of ancient slavery was preceded by an analysis of modern slavery in the French colonies. The second edition of the history, published in 1879, concluded the introduction with the text of the final act of abolition of 1848, which Wallon in the interim had himself helped to compose.[10] It was during this period of intense and ultimately successful campaigning for slave emancipation that, in 1830, a statue of Spartacus was positioned in the Tuilleries, and, in 1831, Edwin Forrest first played the role of Spartacus in the American melodrama *The Gladiator*.

Garibaldian Romanticism

Despite Kleine's attempt to construct from the theater of revolutionary France a narrative image for the American distribution of "the jewel of the screen," at least two of the surviving Italian film versions of the slave rebellion, *Spartaco* or *Il gladiatore della Tracia* (Giovanni Enrico Vidali, Pasquali, 1913) and *Spartaco* (Riccardo Freda, Consorzio Spartacus, 1952) are equally, if not more, indebted to a more immediate and enduring appropriation of Spartacus for the articulation of Italian political struggles. In 1874, Raffaello Giovagnoli published his historical novel *Spartaco*. Like Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), Wiseman's *Fabiola* (1854), Wallace's *Ben-Hur* (1880), and Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis?* (1895), the novel was widely disseminated throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and contributed to a novelistic typology and repertory of dramatic situations on which the historical films of the early 1900s would draw for the emplotment of their cinematic narratives of antiquity.[11]

Like those other historical novels, Giovagnoli's *Spartaco* is written in the

tradition of Walter Scott. It authenticates its fictive history of slave rebellion by incorporating substantial quotations from the ancient sources within the body of the text and by interspersing the narrative with a liberal deployment of Latin tags and antiquarian footnotes that explain Roman customs and cite further ancient sources to support the author's explanations.[12] The novel also humanizes the history of the rebellion by embodying in a personal confrontation between Julius Caesar and Spartacus the opposing principles of despotism and liberty, and by partially domesticating events within a melodramatic narration of romance and vendetta. Spartacus falls in love with a patrician matron, Valeria, whom he must tragically abandon when the opportune moment arises to pursue his holy cause of liberty for the oppressed. He cannot accept the Romans' offer of marriage to Valeria nor her own later pleas to surrender to Crassus and live with her in a Tuscan hideaway when the terms would necessitate the betrayal of his followers. In the latter part of the novel, Spartacus' military campaign against the Roman commanders is constantly thwarted by the vengeful machinations of a Greek courtesan, Eutibide, whose passionate advances he had earlier declined. The novel closes with Valeria weeping over the ashes of her lover in the company of her daughter by Spartacus. Secretly, the Roman noblewoman has had his body removed from the battlefield where, finally and courageously, he had fallen.

Giovagnoli's *Spartaco* is like other source novels for the cinematic representation of ancient Rome in its style and romantic emplotment but, unlike most of those other novels, it does not have its origins in a nineteenth-century opposition to contemporary religious scepticism. Not only is the novel unconcerned with the triumph of early Christianity over a decadent Roman empire but its tone is also decidedly anti-clerical. For example, when describing the priest of a temple dedicated to Hercules, Giovagnoli observes in passing that

> the priest of those days, like the priest today, like the priest of all ages, of all religions, of all peoples, minister of hypocrisy and superstition, used to judge the religious fervour of the idiotic, brutish and gullible masses, by the quantity and quality of the gifts brought to the temple, gifts which, in the name of the supposed God, fattened the insatiable belly of the ministers of the cult. (672)[13]

The narrative strategies of *Spartaco* locate it squarely within the anti-clerical and nationalistic agenda of many works of fiction produced in Italy around the time of unification. For example, when, in the novel, Spartacus encounters Julius Caesar just before the initiation of the gladiators' revolt

and discloses his objectives in an impassioned speech, his political rhetoric parallels both that of the French revolutionaries and of the leaders of the *risorgimento*:

> "I hope," replied the gladiator, with eyes flashing and in an outburst of uncontrollable passion, "to smash this corrupt Roman world, and from its ruins to see rise up the independence of the people. . . . I seek liberty, I desire liberty, I hope for and invoke liberty, liberty for individuals as for the nation, for the great as for the small, for the powerful as the wretched, and, with liberty, peace, prosperity, justice and all that greater happiness that the immortal gods have granted man to be able to enjoy on this earth." (271)[14]

Not only were national independence, liberty, and equality key political concepts for the *risorgimento* propagandists, but those concepts were also frequently incorporated into a classicism borrowed back from the French revolutionaries.[15]

Already, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Italian dramatist Vittorio Alfieri had composed a tragedy on the second Brutus, assassin of Julius Caesar, which he dedicated to "the future people of a free Italy" and which was designed to stir in his fellow Italians the same hatred for tyranny and love of liberty and republican government that was embodied in his play's hero.[16] Throughout the early nineteenth century, the Italian nationalists sought political authority in Italy's republican past. From the "Roman Republic" of 1798–1799, to that of 1849, classicizing imagery was everywhere adopted into the oratory, edicts, coins, seals, standards, and public ceremonial organized by the Italian revolutionaries.[17] By the middle of the nineteenth century, Giuseppe Mazzini was declaring that "there must not be on this earth either masters or slaves but only brothers," and at the center of attempts to achieve a republican liberty and equality for Italians by force of arms was the charismatic figure of Garibaldi.[18]

Giovagnoli's novel *Spartaco* was clearly conceived and circulated as a tribute to the achievements of the *risorgimento* and, in particular, to the military heroism of Garibaldi. Garibaldi, the militant advocate of Italian unity and independence from the rule of the papacy, both practiced and advocated the composition of novels that would record for Italy the brave men who gave up their lives on the battlefield for her and the turpitudes and betrayals of her past leaders and priests. Many Italian novels took up the call to produce this *romanticismo garibaldino* (Garibaldian romanticism) and were quickly pressed into the service of the *risorgimento*.[19] Giovagnoli himself had fought in the war of independence under the standards of Garibaldi, during which he was promoted to captain and cited for bravery. After

unification, he then composed his narrative of the revolt of Spartacus not only in conformity with the requirements of a "Garibaldian" nationalistic agenda but also as a homage to the achievements of Garibaldi himself.[20]

The didactic function of the historical novel *Spartaco* is made evident in the encounter between Julius Caesar and Spartacus, when Spartacus indignantly replies to Caesar's accusation that the revolt cannot succeed:

> I shall meet a glorious death for a just cause, and the blood we shed will fertilize the plant of liberty. It will brand a fresh mark of disgrace on the brow of our oppressors. It will arouse avengers without number by means of the most beautiful inheritance it is possible to leave to our descendants: an example! (273)

Similarly, at the novel's close, Spartacus' stirring words to his fellow rebels as they prepare for their final battle against the Romans authorize an interpretation of the gladiator's actions as a role model for the political struggles of the Italians to come:

> Our cause is holy and just and will not die with us. The road to victory must flow with blood, and it is with self-denial and sacrifice that great designs succeed. A courageous and honourable death is worth more than a disgraceful and shameful life. Falling in battle, we will leave to our descendants, dyed in our blood, the legacy of vengeance and victory, the banner of liberty and equality. Brothers! do not retreat one step. Conquer or die. (715)

Who, then, are the "avengers without number" who have brought "the plant of liberty" to full blossom? Who has taken up Spartacus' holy cause and, carrying the rebels' banner of liberty and equality, finally completed the bloody route to victory? That Giovagnoli means his readers to think of the *risorgimento* revolutionaries and their military leader, Garibaldi, is made clear both by an explicit comparison between Spartacus and Garibaldi as champions of liberty in the body of the text (447), and by the inclusion of a letter of endorsement from Garibaldi himself that, in the editions of the novel, precedes the historical narration. Describing himself as almost a *libertus*, a man freed from slavery, Garibaldi thanks Giovagnoli for a description of Spartacus' victories that, very often, moved him to tears. He concludes his letter by asking:

> Can our citizens strengthen themselves with the memory of such great heroes—who all sleep on land composed of our own same clay—land which no longer will have gladiators—but neither masters? (6)[21]

Placed as an introduction to the subsequent narration of the slave revolt, Garibaldi's letter effectively prepares the novel's readers to acknowledge that Spartacus' example of heroism in the cause of liberty has generated "avengers without number" in the very recent past. Under the leadership of Garibaldi, those avengers have at last created a united Italy without slaves or masters.

Embodying Italian Nationalism

The nationalistic pretensions and anti-clerical thrust of Raffaello Giovagnoli's historical novel *Spartaco* was ideally suited to the climate of Italian cinematic production in the 1910s. The 1900s saw the Italian production houses making tentative experiments in the cinematic reconstruction of Roman history, such as *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908) and *Nerone* (1909) of the Ambrosio production house, Itala's *Giulio Cesare* (1909), and Latium's *Spartaco* (1909).[22] By the time Giovanni Enrico Vidali's *Spartaco* or *Il gladiatore della Tracia* was released by the Pasquali film company in 1913, the Italian film industry was in a state of extraordinary expansion, fueled by its own nationalistic agenda and the huge commercial success of the historical film *Quo Vadis?* (1913). The constant flood of historical films onto the national and international markets had coincided with the entry of Italian aristocrats into the financial backing of the Italian studios. Film production was viewed as an instrument for the enhancement of the new nation's prestige both at home and abroad, and historical reconstructions of Italy's glorious past seemed highly appropriate vehicles for the acquisition of that prestige both for the Italian nation and its film companies. Extravagant cinematic reconstructions of Italy's past allowed for ambitious and visually spectacular themes, the exploitation of complex literary narratives, and the display of the production houses' own technical virtuosity in, for example, the construction of huge, often sumptuous set designs and exotic costumes, and the movement of vast crowds of extras in a newly developed cinematographic space that vastly exceeded the bounds of the proscenium stage.[23]

Furthermore, films set in Italy's Roman past were perceived and deployed as instruments particularly suited to the moral, civic, and patriotic improvement of their mass audiences. The Italian state born from unification in 1861 continued to view itself as the legitimate heir of its Roman past. Only two years before the release of *Spartaco*, Italy had celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of unification, still nourished by the myth of continuity with ancient Rome, and the nation's imperialistic ambitions which had recently been fired by the Italo-Turkish war of 1911–1912 were being legitimated by recourse to a vision of historical continuity with an ancient Rome that had once been mistress of the Mediterranean.[24] Rome could therefore supply the

Italian film companies with a repertoire of illustrious precursors through whom audiences could read their present as the crowning epoch of a long, glorious and communal history.[25]

After the huge national and international success of the film *Quo Vadis?* in 1913, the Italian production houses were all stirred to respond to the domestic and foreign demand for historical films and sought to produce works that would possess the same nationalistic drive and technical skill.[26] In the same year as the release of *Spartaco*, its director Giovanni Enrico Vidali rushed out a version of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (otherwise known as *Ione*) for the Pasquali company to circulate in competition with another version from the Ambrosio production house.[27] Although Vidali then incorporated into *Spartaco* a sequence of lion-fighting in an arena to fulfill audiences' expectations raised by the arena scenes in both *Quo Vadis?* and *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, the selection of his literary source material from the theater of revolutionary France and the Garibaldian novelistic tradition of 1870s' Italy may have been, at least for Italian audiences, a uniquely suitable choice. For, unlike Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis?* and Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Giovagnoli's novel *Spartaco* had been written by an Italian who was, moreover, a hero of the *risorgimento*. The novel *Spartaco* had received an enthusiastic endorsement from Garibaldi, and its protagonist, although ostensibly a Thracian gladiator, had already been configured as a secular Italian hero uniting disparate peoples with his calls for *luce e libertà* (light and liberty), *costanza e vittoria* (perseverance and victory).

Around the time of the release of *Spartaco* in 1913, the association of the Thracian gladiator with Italian nationalism had become almost inescapable. In 1907, for example, Raffaello Giovagnoli assisted in the publication of a pamphlet to celebrate the centenary of Garibaldi's birth in which he described the Italian general as having been endowed with all the military gifts and strategems of Spartacus.[28] Many editions of Giovagnoli's novel continued to be printed both before and after the release of the film, prefaced always by Garibaldi's letter of praise and often containing illustrations which abetted the association of Spartacus with the *risorgimento*. Thus, three years after the distribution of the cinematic representation of the slave rebellion, a seventh edition of the novel was published that, when illustrating scenes of the slave victories, displayed on top of the slaves' military standards the "liberty cap" beloved of French revolutionaries and Italian nationalists.[29] [illustration 3.1]

The anti-clerical thrust of the novel *Spartaco*, or at least its setting in a pre-Christian Rome, was also more suited to the glorification of the secular Italian state of the 1910s than the depictions of Christianity triumphant that figure in Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis?* and Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*. In

3.1 Spartacus leads his victorious troops in battle, illustration from a 1916 edition of Giovagnoli's novel *Spartaco*. [Seventh edition published in Milan by Paolo Carrera.]

1913, although Catholic support had been obtained for the election of Conservative or Moderate candidates to the Italian parliament, only a tacit truce rather than a general reconciliation operated between Church and state.[30] Cinematic representations of the early Church's triumph over Rome would therefore be fraught with potential difficulties. Guazzoni's film adaptation of the novel *Quo Vadis?* for Cines—a production house funded through Catholic banks—had achieved the status of a national cultural artefact largely through its technical accomplishment and despite its potentially ambiguous depiction of the rescue of Christianity from the persecutions of the Roman imperial state.[31] The subsequent Italian film adaptations of *The Last Days of Pompeii* released in 1913 both conveniently expunged any reference to Christianity from their representations of a city purged of Orientalism.[32] The cinematic depiction of Spartacus was at least free of such representational problems.

Following on a cinematic convention launched so successfully by the already canonic *Quo Vadis?*, *Spartaco* (1913) valorizes the populist figure of the strongman.[33] In *Quo Vadis?* the popular dimension of Italian nationalism was expressed briefly through the exhibition of strength demonstrated by the humble Christian Ursus. His fight with a bull in the arena helps incite the assembled Roman populace to revolt against the tyranny of the emperor Nero.[34] *Spartaco* extends the populist spectacle of muscular strength, which was displayed in the earlier film, by now placing the strongman centrally within the film's verbal and visual narration. The film opens, for example, with "the return of the conquering hero Crassus from the conquest of Thrace." From long shots of the general's triumphal procession through Rome, during which *fasces* and standard bearers, soldiers and senators march past a triumphal arch, the camera moves to a medium shot in order to focus on the naked, muscled right arm of Spartacus in chains; "but yesterday a warrior of Thrace—young, joyous, triumphant—today a shackled slave of Rome." As the parade passes across the screen, only Spartacus gazes out at the camera and thus establishes a look of engagement with the cinema spectators of the 1910s. As *Spartaco* proceeds, the spectator's look is constantly brought back to the muscular physique with which the hero breaks his chains of bondage. When Spartacus is forced to defend himself against the assaults of other gladiators, the film's play of light and darkness sculpts his tensed and semi-naked torso on the screen. And, towards the close of the film, when Spartacus bends back the iron bars that imprison him in the cells of the arena, the hero even stops momentarily to gaze on the taut bicep with which he effects his escape.[35]

This cinematic presentation of an ancient hero fighting against his Roman masters conveniently conjoined in the physique of the actor Mario

Guaita Ausonia a classical ideal of the muscular male athlete with a more recent, populist grammar of the body derived from circus shows—the breaking of chains, the bending of iron bars.[36] Before his appearance in *Spartaco*, Guaita was a "king of force." In Italian variety theaters, he performed a series of living reproductions of famous paintings and statues, while providing himself with the grand title of "gladiator of the early nineteen hundreds."[37] Reviews of the film constantly focused on the singular appropriateness of casting Guaita as Spartacus. *La vita cinematografica* for February 1914, for example, declared that

> Mario Guaita Ausonia has directly personified Spartacus. The sculptural beauty of his figure, the handsomeness and the combined agility and vigour of his perfect body, his lively and penetrating glance, his faultless acting, have made of this man . . . an artist, worthy of every consideration, a more than perfect protagonist.[38]

And George Kleine's American publicity for the film described Guaita as

> a celebrated Italian wrestler and fine actor, whose physique and finely chiseled face make him an extraordinary prototype [sic] of the ancient gladiator.

As the rhetorical strategies of Giovagnoli's novel overlaid the rebellion of Spartacus with the subsequent victories of Garibaldi, so the iconography of the strongman in the film *Spartaco* overlays the body of the ancient gladiator with that of a modern "king of force" and renders the classical body more readily available as a site for the display of the strength of the modern Italian body politic.[39]

In a memorably spectacular sequence of *Spartaco*, shot on location in a recognizable and expansive Italian landscape, the gladiators are seen gathered on a hilltop where they are trapped by the Roman soldiers visible in the far distant valley. The ingenious escape of the gladiators from the Roman blockade—described in several of the ancient sources—is here initiated by Spartacus, whose back and arm muscles are once again seen to tense when he tests the strength of the vines which will bear the weight of his men as they clamber down a steep incline of Vesuvius. The intertitle at this point then boasts hyperbolically that "History records no more gloriously daring act than the escape of the gladiators from the heights of Vesuvius." The subsequent extreme long shot contained within an equally hyperbolic framing iris displays large numbers of men lowering themselves down the mountainside.[40] [illustration 3.2] Like *Quo Vadis?* before it, *Spartaco* utilizes the spectacular display of vast crowds of extras (before whom and for whom

3.2 Gladiators climb down the slopes of Vesuvius, from Vidali's *Spartaco* (1913). [From postcard in private collection of Vittorio Martinelli.]

the strongman acts) to provide the mass audiences in the Italian cinemas of 1913 with an opportunity to visualize their own collective engagement with their national history. But the latter film draws the cinema audience more closely into the depiction of grand historical events by having its strongman also act with the crowds who appear on screen. Thus the film *Spartaco* utilizes the musculature of the screened male body to construct a popular historical and national consciousness.

This cinematic narrative of the revolt of Spartacus might be thought to bear the risk of offering its mass audience a radical critique of the Italy of the 1910s, for the representation of Spartacus' resistance to the cruelty and corruption of the Roman general Crassus (with which the film is initiated) could be read as an attack on the political authority of the present Italian state and as a call to further political struggle. That risk, however, is moderated and controlled by the narrative progression of the second half of the film, where Spartacus departs from the militant and rebellious characterization bestowed on him in Giovagnoli's novel and is refigured to match the nationalistic needs of the present moment. Here Crassus is defeated in battle by Spartacus, who then shows the Roman general mercy and expresses only a moderate desire for "the common right of all men—to live in peace

and freedom." Crassus makes Spartacus the commander in chief of the Roman army and the freed gladiator, like a triumphant Garibaldi, marches to Rome in the midst of popular acclaim.[41] The latter part of the film sets Spartacus' feats not against the might of the Roman state but against the jealous gladiator Noricus—a figure borrowed from Saurin's tragedy. Noricus conspires to kill Crassus and have Spartacus thrown to the lions as the supposed culprit.[42] The closing moments of the film show Spartacus heroically escaping the lions only to throw the villain Noricus to them. Against all the historical records, and against the tragic conclusion of Giovagnoli's novel, Vidali's film ends with a triumphant and successful Spartacus, a Roman now, and one able to unite the country's discordant factions. Spartacus then rejoins his beloved Narona who, as daughter of Crassus, acts as a female embodiment of the power and authority of the city of Rome fought for and finally gained by the brave gladiator.[43]

Whereas Giovagnoli's novel concluded with a Spartacus still in need of a militant Garibaldi to bring his holy cause to completion, Vidali's film *Spartaco* closes with a protagonist who has already become the victorious creator of a unified Italian state.[44] The nineteenth-century novel's Spartacus/Garibaldi parallel suggests a need for continued vigilance in support of a yet young and fragile Italy. As befits the nationalistic sentiments of a nation some fifty years after unification, the film's Spartacus/Garibaldi parallel suggests only the self-satisfaction of a nation strong and secure. The *Spartaco* of 1913, which was a triumphal success both in Italy and abroad, looks back to and exalts the creation of the modern Italian state rather than looking forward to a need for continuing political struggle. Victory and unity, the film informs its Italian spectators, have already been accomplished.

Resistance and Collaboration in Modern Italy

The next Italian cinematic reconstruction of the slave rebellion of Spartacus, *Spartaco* (Riccardo Freda, Consorzio Spartacus) was released in 1952. In the first half of that same year, a weekly magazine of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) published a serialization of Giovagnoli's novel in 27 installments.[45] The investment of the magazine *Vie Nuove* in the fictive narration of Spartacus' uprising belongs to a Marxist tradition of both admiration for Spartacus and academic analysis of the history of ancient slavery. That tradition has sustained interest both in the Thracian gladiator and Giovagnoli's novelistic representation of him throughout a large part of the twentieth century. In a letter to Engels of 27 February 1861, which was subsequently much published and quoted, Marx expressed his admiration for Spartacus as a grand general who had nothing to do with Garibaldi but

who was rather a "genuine exponent of the ancient proletariat." Transformed by Marx into a leader of the proletariat struggling against exploitation, Spartacus came to be read as acutely relevant to the consolidation of the modern class struggle.[46]

Spartacus soon became incorporated into a Marxist historiography of ancient slavery such as that published by the Italian academic Ettore Ciccotti in 1899, *Il tramonto della schiavitù nel mondo antico,* in which ancient slavery was interpreted as a mode of economic production and ancient struggles against it as a part of a larger, continuing historical process.[47] In the early decades of the twentieth century, Spartacus was appropriated by the German socialists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, who signed their pacifistic appeal during the First World War with the name "Spartacus" and later called their revolutionary movement the *Spartakusbund* (the Spartacus league).[48] The Russian Revolution, and the subsequent publication in the 1930s of Lenin's and Stalin's observations on the subject of Spartacus' revolt, stimulated a constant stream of Marxist historical writings on ancient slavery in the Soviet Union, and further enhanced Spartacus' symbolic status as a hero of the class struggle for several more decades.[49]

In the Italy of the post-war period, the posthumous publication of the prison writings of the Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci led to a renewed interest in Giovagnoli's novel *Spartaco* as a work which could have a radical, educative value for the masses. In the notebooks he had written while imprisoned at the orders of Mussolini, Gramsci was drawn to comment on the cultural value of Giovagnoli's *Spartaco* after observing a news item in the *Corriere della Sera* of 8 January 1932. The paper had published a copy of Garibaldi's letter endorsing the novel, since the original letter was now to be donated by Mussolini to the Museum of the Risorgimento. Drawing a connection between the particular "poetics" of popular literature that Garibaldi's letter appeared to advocate and the structures of Giovagnoli's novel, Gramsci argued for the modernization of the nineteenth-century novel's baroque narrative style to render it more contemporary. Gramsci favored such treatment of the novel because he regarded it as having a *culturale-populare* value, that is to say *Spartaco* could provide the masses with ready access to a highly significant, and politically charged, historical event.[50] It was therefore as a result of Gramsci's posthumous impetus—his prison notebooks were published in six volumes from 1948 to 1951—that the PCI magazine *Vie Nuove* serialized Giovagnoli's novel during the first half of 1952.[51] In the years after the release of Freda's film *Spartaco* (1952), a Marxist, didactic reading of Giovagnoli's novel continued to find acknowledgment. In 1955 an edition of the novel appeared in Italy prefaced by a detailed account of its association with Garibaldi, its contemporary utility as noted by Gramsci, and its current wide circulation in the Soviet Union.[52] And, as late as 1963, a Soviet handbook for secondary school teachers was issued on how to teach "the role of the masses in ancient history." The author suggested that instruction should be based on two pictures by contemporary Soviet artists and on two novels—that of a modern Soviet writer and that of Giovagnoli.[53]

During the year 1952, Riccardo Freda's film *Spartaco* circulated in Italy only a matter of months after the serialization of Giovagnoli's novel in *Vie Nuove*. It does not appear, however, that the Italian film director was working to the same educational, Gramscian agenda as the Italian Communist Party's weekly magazine. Nor does the reappearance of a cinematic Spartacus in post-war Italy align Freda's film with the celebratory, Garibaldian poetics of Vidali's silent version of 1913.

Towards the end of the 1940s, when the Italian film industry was deprived of state subsidies and found itself unable to compete with the huge influx and popularity of the Hollywood studios' products, the industry's possible salvation was perceived by some producers and directors to reside in the revival of the genre of historical films which had achieved such extraordinary commercial success and international artistic acclaim in the 1910s. Faith in the viability of the genre, and specifically in remakes of earlier silent films, appeared to be rewarded by the box-office success of Alessandro Blasetti's post-war *Fabiola*, which drew on the previous prestige of Enrico Guazzoni's silent *Fabiola* of 1918 and became the top grossing Italian film of the year 1948–1949. The following year saw the release of another version of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* directed by Paolo Moffa with Marcel L'Herbier, to be followed in 1951 by Carmine Gallone's *Messalina*—the empress having already supplied the title for two earlier silent films by Mario Caserini (1910) and Enrico Guazzoni (1923), respectively. The return to the historical genre, and the spectacular display of the Roman past, received further impetus from the international success that attended the release in 1951 of MGM's remake *Quo Vadis*, made (like Blasetti's *Fabiola*) at the recently reopened Cinecittà studios at Rome. Many remakes of past historical films followed, including Riccardo Freda's *Spartaco* (1952). This time, however, the introduction of ancient Rome onto Italian cinema screens did not occur in coordination with a strident, nationalistic interest in the visual reconstruction of Italy's continuity with its Roman past. On the contrary, *romanità* and its cinematic display was, in the immediate post-war period, inextricably bound up with memories of its exploitation by the Fascist regime and, therefore, with recollections of Italy's inglorious role in the Second World War.[54]

For this reason, the historical films in distribution in Italy during the

years from 1948 to 1954 have been interpreted by some film critics as examples of mere commercial opportunism. The film industry's primary imperative at this time was to restore faith in the Italian national product, to sell its films, and to secure foreign markets by, for example, the manufacture of international coproductions that would appeal to the widest possible audience.[55] If many such films were set in the Roman past, their historical component functioned to recall to spectators the glorious traditions not of the Italian nation in general but of its own film industry. Remakes of historical films which had made that industry famous in the early decades of the century allowed the Italian production houses to attract customers for their products through the glamor and prestige those new products might accrue simply by association with the industry's past splendors. New versions of silent films allowed Italian cinema to recall its glorious heritage and to put on display its current technological virtuosity—its renewed capacity to recreate on a vast and spectacular scale the costumes, decor, cities, crowds, and sweeping historical events of antiquity.[56] And the setting in the Roman past could justify the intrusion of sadistic and erotic scenes—the by-now conventional tortures and bloody battles, the exotic dances, orgies, and seductive patrician women—which might better evade the stringent requirements of post-war film censorship.[57] But, according to film critics such as Jacques Siclier, if these historical films also reproduced the analogical structures of their predecessors, it was only another piece of commercial opportunism, the better to gain an audience through the pleasures of the reconstructed past's apparent immediacy and relevance.[58]

In that commercial context, a remake of *Spartaco* would seem an appropriate choice. It could look back to the great success of the earlier Italian version of Roman history, pick up on the continuing popularity of Giovagnoli's novel, easily insert a lion fight in an arena to appropriate for itself the attractions of MGM's recent *Quo Vadis*, and fill the screen with scenes of violent battle and erotic seduction—the latter legitimated by the presence in Giovagnoli's novel of both a pure beloved and a sensuous, sexually avaricious villainness. But the extensive refiguring of Spartacus that takes place in Freda's *Spartaco* to suit contemporary concerns provides a richer terrain for analysis than the label "opportunism" might imply.

For twenty years, the Fascist regime had found in the culture of ancient Rome a rich source for the mass dissemination of propaganda to legitimate its rule. The Roman *fasces* and the supposed "Roman" salute had given to Fascism an identity as the inheritor of Roman civic virtues and imperial policy. Roman symbols and rhetoric, architecture, sculpture, and public ceremonial became part of an efficient semiotic language with which to arouse

popular support for the domestic and foreign policies of the regime. Mussolini himself was presented as the modern embodiment of a diverse array of Roman leaders. The *duce* was associated with Julius Caesar for having crossed his Rubicon when marching on Rome in 1922. He was identified closely with Scipio Africanus for having conquered Ethiopia in 1935. And he was linked with the first emperor Augustus for having transformed liberal Italy into an imperial monarchy.[59] Cinema too was to play its part in placing *romanità* at the service of the regime. In *Il Mattino* of 2 June 1936, the director Alessandro Blasetti had argued that

> the historical film can recall moments that are perfectly analogous to those which we now live, or, at least, that would have so clear a relation to them as to abolish the intervening centuries an instant after we recalled that they have passed, and from these analogies and from these relations can flow warnings, incitements, cognitions that serve to reinforce the popular consciousness of today.[60]

In the following year, the historical film *Scipione l'Africano* presented so close an analogy between the victorious Roman general and Mussolini that the writer Luigi Malerba recalled

> Well, yes, the Duce's image had become fixed in my memory against my will, precise and cinematographic, sepia-toned like a figure of *Scipio Africanus*. A mute image, as if cut out of a silent movie.[61]

In the immediate post-war period, such a close identification between cinematic antiquity and the legitimacy of the Fascist regime had to be exorcized from the memories of the Italian spectators who watched historical films. Hence the first post-war Italian film to be set in ancient Rome, *Fabiola*, paid tribute not to the civic virtues and military achievements of the Roman state but to the suffering and endurance of its victims. Blasetti, now putting his advocacy of historical analogy to a quite different use, assimilated the early Christians of *Fabiola* to the peoples and organizations which had been persecuted by the Nazis and Fascists during the Second World War.[62] Even the name of the company set up by API Film of Rome and Rialto Film of Paris to service the coproduction of Freda's *Spartaco* suggests that this film too was attempting to dissociate itself and its Italian spectators from the Fascist rhetoric of *romanità*. It was the production company "consorzio Scipione," assisted by organs of the Fascist state, that had

configured the Roman general Scipio as a prototype of Mussolini. Now the production company "consorzio Spartacus" was to configure the Thracian gladiator as a prototype of Italy's wartime resistance heroes.

Spartaco begins in a city of Thrace which has been reduced to burning rubble by the imperial ambitions of Rome.[63] An opening, expository title states

> In the year 74 B.C., Rome was expanding her domination over the Mediterranean world. Thrace, though conquered, refused to accept defeat.

The ensuing sequence, in which the Roman army overruns the war-torn city and proceeds to insult and to murder its citizens, recalls much more recent scenes when northern Italian villages and towns had been devastated by the Allied carpet bombing of 1942–1943 and then occupied by German troops to a line south of Rome. The wartime devastation of northern Italy and the atrocities inflicted on its inhabitants by the Nazis had already been famously depicted in such neo-realist films as Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta*, released in 1945.[64] In the historical film, Spartacus first appears as a Thracian mercenary in the Roman army committed to Rome's authority, but he is then immediately transformed into a rebel who refuses to support the army's unjust treatment of the city's conquered inhabitants. Thus the film's spectators are given the opportunity to identify with a hero who has been, in some sense, a Roman but who is prepared to discard that Romanness when confronted by the cruel exercise of its authority. Similarly, the film's first vision of the city of Rome is of a military procession comprising both soldiers and prisoners which moves between majestic buildings towards the Colosseum, to the acclaim of a large crowd of Roman spectators. The anachronistic presence of the Colosseum in *Spartaco* is highly significant. Few Italian spectators could fail to recall that, from 1932, vast military parades had been staged by Mussolini along the *via dell'impero* (the Road of Empire) which had been especially designed to connect the Colosseum, as symbol of imperial Rome, with the headquarters of the Fascist government in the Palazzo Venezia.[65] In the processional sequence of *Spartaco*, however, Italian cinema audiences could witness the replay of such a Fascist parade now set to mournful music, and confront their wartime selves embodied in the crowds who face the camera and cheer the procession which passes before them. The experience offered, however, is a comforting one, as the film audience is being asked to identify not with the acquiescent crowds but with the resisting Spartacus who breaks away from the parade and attempts to escape the pursuing Roman troops. Resisting the cruelties of an occupying Roman army, escaping through the streets of

3.3 Crassus' daughter looks at Spartacus in chains, from Freda's *Spartaco* (1952). [Courtesy of BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.]

Rome, or successfully attacking a Roman encampment after an ingenious descent down the vines of Mount Vesuvius, Spartacus is refigured in Freda's post-war film in the mould of an Italian partisan fighting in the resistance movement that developed in northern Italy after it fell under Nazi rule in September 1943.[66]

In Vidali's *Spartaco* of 1913, the body of the strongman Mario Guaita was repeatedly displayed with muscles tensed in the successful service of a Garibaldian struggle for liberty and unity. The muscular screen body confidently celebrated the perceived vigor and cohesion of the Italian body politic in the early years of the twentieth century. In Freda's *Spartaco* of 1952, however, the body of the actor Massimo Girotti appears at one point in the pose of a crucified Christ, outstretched arms in chains, naked torso lashed by a Roman whip. [illustration 3.3] The framing of Spartacus in a Christ-like pose when tortured in the prison-cells of a gladiatorial school invokes the shocking sequence in Rossellini's *Roma città aperta*, where the Communist partisan leader Manfredi suffers and dies under interrogation at Gestapo headquarters.[67] In the spate of Italian films about the resistance which were released in the period 1944–1946 and distributed to considerable acclaim throughout Europe and the United States, such scenes of male

martyrdom encouraged spectators to feel that Italy had more than paid for its support of Mussolini's regime with the courage its partisans had demonstrated in resisting the German occupation.[68] Freda's *Spartaco* thus gives an historical authority to and exemplifies the sufferings and the bravery of wartime Italy through its representation of the physical torments endured by the film's hero at the hands of the cruel and sadistic Romans. The cinematic transformation of Spartacus from militant to martyred body belongs within a broader history of post-war alterations to the Italian national self projected in historical films.[69] After the muscular body of a Spartacus or a Maciste in the silent era and the statuesque body of Scipio in the heyday of the Fascist regime, the immediate post-war period saw Italian cinema screens filled with the wounded and suffering bodies of martyrs sacrificed to the despotism and ambition of Rome. Such a transformation from the militant to the martyred male body had already been rehearsed in the star image of the well-known actor who played Spartacus in 1952. Ten years earlier, Girotti had been cast in Roberto Rossellini's *Un pilota ritorna*—a propaganda film financed by the Fascist government—as an Italian airman who heroically escapes from a prisoner of war camp in Greece. By 1949 the actor was now starring as the persecuted and brutally murdered Saint Sebastian in Alessandro Blasetti's post-war apology *Fabiola*.[70] The Italian national self incarnated by Girotti in his subsequent role of Spartacus, however, is not wholly redeemed through a martyr's display of acts of bravery and physical suffering.

In sharp contrast to the moral commitment, triumphal progress, and unwavering success of Spartacus in Vidali's silent rendition of the slave rebellion, a central section of Freda's film shows the hero temporarily entrapped and unmanned by the seductive charms of Sabina, the evil and vindictive daughter of the Roman general Crassus. Faith in the leadership of Spartacus, both his own and that of his comrades in arms, is never fully restored, and the hero falls in battle convinced that he has betrayed his followers and assisted in their defeat. The pessimism of the film's narrative drive is mitigated only by the wholly fictional figure of Spartacus' Thracian lover and fellow victim Amitis, onto whom the film audience is allowed to displace their hopes for the future when, at night, in a field of corpses, she reassures the dying gladiator of the victory to come:

> SPARTACUS: I betrayed you all. . . . I made promises I didn't keep. I led you to disaster not to victory.
> AMITIS: It wasn't your fault.
> SPARTACUS: This is the end of our road. All is lost.

> AMITIS: Even if this battle is lost, the fight will go on until victory is ours. Be at peace. Your example will be followed. The flame you've lit is still burning. It will burn until the world is free.
> [*Spartacus offers Amitis his sword.*]
> SPARTACUS: Take this. Today it has failed. But you're right, some day it will be victorious.

This final scene of *Spartaco* ends with the camera moving forward to a close-up of Amitis's upturned face that cuts the prostrate Spartacus out of the film frame and relegates him to a space somewhere off screen.

The focus in the second half of Freda's film on the temptations, the self-doubt, and the failings of Spartacus, his marginalization in the fight for freedom and his final replacement on screen by the fictional Amitis, further demonstrate the considerable departure of the post-war cinematic historiography of the slave rebellion from the triumphant, Garibaldian romanticism that had been projected in the silent era. Nor does the largely pessimistic narrative drive of Freda's film align it with contemporary Gramscian readings of the gladiator's cultural significance for post-war reconstruction Italy. At the beginning of the year in which the film *Spartaco* was released, in the pages of the Italian Communist Party's weekly magazine *Vie Nuove*, the serialization of Giovagnoli's nineteenth-century novel was justified on the grounds that Spartacus' insurrection had prepared the way for the eventual collapse of the Roman ruling classes and that his name had become ever since a symbol for and inspiration to popular revolt.[71] Such contemporary veneration of Spartacus by Italian Communists facilitated the deployment of the gladiator in Freda's film as a figure for the PCI itself, and its troubled relations to power in the climate of the Cold War.

It has long been recognized that Alessandro Blasetti's earlier cinematic reconstruction of Christian martyrdom in *Fabiola* (1949) operates with a multiple historical focus. Through the narration of ancient religious persecution, the historical film addressess not only the wartime violence inflicted on victims of and rebels against the Nazi occupation of Italy but also the post war intolerance exhibited towards Italian communism.[72] Such a complex traffic in historical analogies was propelled by the popular identification of the Italian resistance with the Communist Party. Since the Communists had maintained constant underground activity during Mussolini's regime and since almost half of the armed resistance to the German occupation had been organized in Communist "Garibaldi" brigades, immediately after the war the PCI was able to base its moral and political prestige (and its participation in government) on its commonly acknowledged history of ceaseless and devoted struggle against Fascism and Nazism.[73] But

when in 1947 the Cold War set in, the heroes of the resistance were expelled from the coalition government of Alcide De Gasperi and demonized in a sustained and ferocious propaganda campaign that led to a landslide victory for the Christian Democrats in the elections of April 1948, to be followed swiftly by the attempted assassination of the PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti.[74] Released in the year after the elections, *Fabiola* paraded in historical guise a humanitarian denunciation of such recent outrages.

In Freda's *Spartaco*, the historical narration most closely addresses (and, perhaps, attempts to justify) the recent marginalization of the PCI in Italy's political life where it represents operational differences between the commanders of the slave army. Towards the close of the film, Spartacus is characterized as a moderate and conciliatory leader prepared to accept Crassus' offer of liberty and peace for his followers, only to have his negotiations rudely terminated by the military aggression of Octavius who has, in Spartacus' absence, initiated a foolish and ultimately fatal assault on the Roman army.[75] Such rifts between the slave leaders resemble those lately reported between the leaders of the post-war PCI. While Palmiro Togliatti, for example, advocated a policy of noninsurrection and coalition in the government of Italy, Pietro Secchia criticized such apparent compromise and called upon the party to recuperate a more oppositional profile.[76] In Freda's film, political division is met by historically inevitable defeat, and Amitis, who in the course of the film has been swayed against the conciliatory Spartacus by the false, combative rhetoric of Octavius [illustration 3.4], is left to acknowledge the wisdom of her betrayed leader but the need now to carry on the fight for freedom without him. If the shifting historical analogies set in play by the narrative of Freda's *Spartaco* call upon spectators to associate the slave rebellion with both the heroism of the wartime Italian resistance and the political failure of the post-war PCI, it is hardly surprising that after initial enthusiastic reports in *Vie Nuove* on the coming production of the film, its release was then met by complete silence.

A Gladiator for the Colonies

Freda's *Spartaco* carried no appeal for the Italian Communist Party magazine *Vie Nuove*, but the film fared little better when it was reviewed in the foreign press more than a year later. Although critics admired its spectacular action sequences, photography, and score, *Spartaco* was dismissed for its relatively unknown cast, its lack of dramatic compulsion, and the emptiness of its historical reconstruction.[77] When the Italian recreation of the ancient slave rebellion was distributed in the United States in 1954, it was projected almost begrudgingly in a severely truncated print and under a title—*Sins of Rome*—which even left its specific historical focus unidentified.[78] Yet some

3.4 Amitis turns against the conciliatory Spartacus, from Freda's *Spartaco* (1952). [Courtesy of BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.]

six years later, in 1960, the biggest draw at the American box-office was *Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, Bryna Production for Universal-International). Pressbooks and souvenir programs ignored the rich Italian tradition for the representation of Spartacus and instead appealed for authority to a more familiar, native tradition initiated in the early nineteenth century (the literature proclaimed) by Dr. Robert Montgomery Bird's American play *The Gladiator*. In the United States, the cultural force of Spartacus lay not in the rhetoric of national unity or wartime resistance, but in that of anti-imperialism and democracy, abolition, and racial equality.

In the late eighteenth century, the Founding Fathers had trawled antiquity for historical precedents to legitimate the emerging American nation. The Roman republic was viewed by them as the greatest and most serviceable exemplar of liberty and republicanism, and the heroes of the independence movement were dressed in the civic virtues of a Cincinnatus, a Cicero, or a Cato. In dynamic tension with the model of the virtuous Roman republic operated the anti-model of the corrupted Roman empire. Turning the British rhetoric of imperial *romanitas* back on itself, the war of independence was often re-enacted in American novels, drama, poetry, and paintings of the early nineteenth century as an historic struggle for liberty against Roman tyranny, as the struggle of a subjugated people against their

3.5 Edwin Forrest as Spartacus, in Bird's play *The Gladiator,* first performed in 1831. [Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.]

imperial oppressors.[79] First performed in 1831, Bird's patriotic melodrama *The Gladiator* staged the ancient slave rebellion in accordance with the broader political rhetoric of this New World *romanitas*. The uncompromising, charismatic hero (embodied in the theatrical star Edwin Forrest) displayed his muscles, fought, suffered, and died in laudable revolt against an

aristocratic despotism that had ravaged his distant country and victimized his people. [illustration 3.5] *The Gladiator* was a tremendous success and held the American stage for over seventy years.[80]

Bird's first staging of the ancient slave rebellion, however, occurred in the same year as William Lloyd Garrison launched a campaign for slave emancipation. Just as, from the mid-nineteenth century, America's territorial expansion was to challenge the Founding Fathers' unsullied version of New World *romanitas* (with America itself now appearing to have slipped from virtuous republic to tyrannical empire), so from the 1830s attacks on the institution of slavery often implicitly or explicitly compared early nineteenth-century America to a (now) insidious Roman state, both equally doomed to decline for their corruption, luxury, and dependence on a slave economy. Thus in 1834, some three years after performances of Bird's *The Gladiator* began, George Bancroft published a long essay analyzing the decline of "the Roman people" together with the first volume of his *History of the United States* while, some forty years later, William Dean Howells was even to find a resemblance between the antique portrait busts of Roman senators and those of American senators from the southern states, declaring that they possessed the common physiognomy of slaveholders.[81] Among the contemporary American audiences of Bird's *The Gladiator*, therefore, many interpreted the historical play as a loosely veiled address to the pressing contradiction between their ideals of liberty and their own institution of slavery. Reviewers such as Walt Whitman regarded the play's first act in particular, in which slaves are brutally sold, flogged, and torn from their families, as full of Abolitionism. The playwright himself, conscious of the contemporary resonance of his historical melodrama, suggested that "if *The Gladiator* were produced in a slave state, the managers, players, and perhaps myself in the bargain, would be rewarded with the Penitentiary!" Despite Bird's acknowledgment of the polemical potential of his play, however, he did not regard Spartacus' rebellion as a welcome paradigm for current uprisings by Negro slaves. When several hundred slaves in the state of Virginia were reported to have rebelled under the leadership of Nat Turner, Bird wrote that

> If they had had a Spartacus among them to organize the half million of Virginia, the hundreds of thousands of the [other] states, and lead them on in the Crusade of Massacre, what a blessed example might they not give to the world of the excellence of slavery!

Similarly, audiences in the South, perceiving that *The Gladiator* did not treat of an enslavement based on race, could choose to read its representation of terrible servitude as a vivid metaphor for the burdens presently

endured by America's poor whites, and the heroic revolt of Spartacus as comparable to the populist Democratic campaigns of the recently inaugurated President Andrew Jackson.[82]

Long after the emancipation of America's slaves had been effected, narratives of Spartacus' rebellion against a corrupt Roman state continued to be produced and consumed with an eye to their relevance for the internal economic, political, and social structures of the United States. In a brief preface to Howard Fast's novel *Spartacus* (1951)—the most immediate source for the Hollywood representation of the Thracian gladiator—the author dedicated the work to his two children, and made clear that his account of "brave men and women who lived long ago" had been written in order to inspire them and other readers to struggle against oppression and wrong and to fulfill the dream of Spartacus "in our own time."[83] Nine years later, in souvenir programs and publicity releases detailing the production of the film *Spartacus* (1960), Fast was permitted to reiterate his view that the novel (and, by implication, the film) bore a pointed message for modern times:

> Here is the story of Spartacus, who led the great slave revolt against Rome. I wrote this novel because I considered it an important story for the times in which we live. Not in the mechanical sense of historical parallels, but because there is hope and strength to be taken from such a story about the age-old fight for freedom—and because Spartacus lived not for one time of man, but for all times of man. I wrote it to give hope and courage to those who read it, and in the process of writing it, I gained hope and courage myself.

Although in neither case did Fast refer explicitly to a fight for freedom within the United States, the narrative devices of his historical novel and the conditions of its production underscore its address to Cold War America.[84]

According to his revisionist autobiography *Being Red* (1990), Howard Fast first became interested in Spartacus while incarcerated in an American prison for his allegiance to the Communist Party.[85] The launching of the Cold War by President Harry Truman in 1947 had been immediately followed by a systematic assault on domestic Communism, including the investigation of Communist influence in Hollywood by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Fast became one of the infamous Ten, the "unfriendly" witnesses who refused to answer the committee's question "are you or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" Cited for contempt of Congress and suspended from employment in Hollywood, he was eventually sent to prison in 1950, to be released in 1951 just as HUAC had reestablished its investigation into Hollywood

"subversives" and was blacklisting hundreds of writers, directors, and actors.[86] In the face of this consolidation of the Red Scare, when American popular fiction largely stressed the themes of individual acquisition, business success, conformity, military authority, and anti-Communism, when the private investigator "Mike Hammer" was reveling in the murder of Commies in the pages of Mickey Spillane's bestseller *One Lonely Night* (1951), Howard Fast attempted to popularize a Marxist hero of the class struggle aided by an account of ancient slavery which he had once received as a gift after a Party training school.[87]

In this respect, Fast's novelistic account of the slave revolt is more in keeping with the Gramscian injunction to circulate works with a radical, educative value for the masses than Freda's film version released in the following year, for in the novel Spartacus' rebellion is designed to signal indirectly the profound value of Communist activism. Thus, in historical guise, Fast's *Spartacus* graphically enacts for Americans (according to the social historian William Vance) the "liberation of the masses of laboring men and women, the productive members of society, from their 'enslavement' by the parasitic possessors of wealth and property."[88] At one pivotal moment in the novel, for example, a Roman recalls the stern message Spartacus sent to the Senate after his memorable victory at Vesuvius over their cohorts:

> What a foul crew you are and what a filthy mess you have made of life! You have made a mockery of all men dream of, of the work of a man's hands and the sweat of a man's brow. Your own citizens live on the dole and spend their days in the circus and the arena. You have made a travesty of human life and robbed it of all its worth. (171)

This speech rises to a stirring climax as Fast's Spartacus borrows from Marx's famous phraseology and, converting the metaphorical back into the more distressing literal, calls upon "the slaves of the world" to "rise up and cast off your chains!" (171)

While the representation of the slave rebellion as a conflict between labor and capital might not appear to engage Fast's *Spartacus* with a "fight for freedom" of specific reference to the United States, the elaboration of a significant plot line for a wholly fictitious character named Draba clearly marks the novel's radical commitment to American civil rights issues. In the gladiatorial school at Capua, Spartacus is compelled to fight to the death against Draba, a black man, for the amusement of a party of Roman nobles. Rather than kill Spartacus, Draba leaps up to attack the spectators in their box. The Romans construe this as an act of madness since, according to the novelist's account, they are incapable of making

> the journey to the black man's beginnings, and only if they had made that journey would they have known that the black man did not go mad at all. Not even in mind could they have seen the house he had by the riverside and the children his wife bore him and the land he tilled and the fruit of the land, before the soldiers came and with them the slave dealers to harvest that crop of human life so magically transmuted into gold. (104–5)

Aided by persistent references *throughout* Fast's novel to the "plantations" from which Spartacus frees the slaves, the historical narrative recalls the discourse of emancipation in which the American Spartacus had been articulated from the time of Bird's productions of *The Gladiator*. It also thereby establishes an heroic parallel for the contemporary engagement of American Communists in the political struggle for racial equality, since Party members had found a major site of resistance to the culture of the Cold War in the struggle against racial discrimination.[89]

Similarly, Fast lays down traces in the novel of both the American Left's commitment to women's rights (in intermittent references to a past and future golden age when women are equal to men), and its commitment to Zionism (in the fictional character of David, a Jewish gladiator who, towards the end of the novel, recalls how he had fought for freedom once before in Galilee). One civil rights movement, however, is not accorded the same respect. In the same year as the publication of Fast's *Spartacus*, the Mattachine Society was established in Los Angeles in order to protest against the persecution of homosexual behavior, yet homosexuality is deployed throughout the novel as a narrative device to mark the political perversity of the Roman elite. At a time when blacklistees were frequently accused of failing to match up to an idealized McCarthyite hyper-masculinity, when those suspected of political subversion were labeled "lavender lads," Fast turns such charges instead against the novel's representatives of state authority and lends credibility and historical legitimacy to his homophobic tropes by locating the acts of sexual "depravity" in a Roman setting.[90]

In *Spartacus*, Fast attempted to validate and popularize the political activism of the American left by displacing it circumspectly into a remote, but heroic and familiar, past where oppression and its resistance could take an especially violent and Manichean form. Attention to the book's radical narrative drive was further enhanced by public knowledge of both its origins in Fast's own victimization by HUAC and the difficulties that subsequently beset the book's publication. Deprived of the support of any American publishing house, Fast persisted in producing the book himself and was later to claim that reading it became "an act of defiance by people who loathed the climate of the time."[91] Even in 1960, political and commercial risks attended the employment of so apparently subversive a source for the making of a Hollywood film. Kirk Douglas proceeded to exacerbate those risks by appointing Dalton Trumbo to adapt the historical novel for the screen. Trumbo too had been a member of the convicted and notorious Hollywood Ten and, in common with other blacklistees, his real name had not appeared in screen credits since 1947. When, at the premiere of *Spartacus* thirteen years later, the names of both Howard Fast and Dalton Trumbo were finally listed again in screen credits, the press avidly scrutinized the film in case it might be furthering "the cause of the Kremlin."[92]

The Cause of the Kremlin

Spartacus (1960) inscribes itself into Hollywood's earlier tradition of epics set in antiquity by, for example, conjoining in one scene two actors who had both previously played Nero on American screens—Charles Laughton in *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) and Peter Ustinov in *Quo Vadis* (1951).[93] Yet the film also diverges significantly from the reverential historical epics that had typified the previous decade—films like *Quo Vadis* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), *The Silver Chalice* (1954), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and, most recently, *Ben-Hur* (1959). These religious films were privileged and, for the most part, enormously successful products of the Hollywood film industry. They were also steeped in the rhetoric of the Cold War. In a pre-credit prologue to *The Ten Commandments*, DeMille himself had appeared on screen to identify his film narrative centred on Moses as "the story of the birth of freedom," a freedom obedient to the laws of God rather than the whims of a dictator. The widescreen gaze of God is constructed in alignment with contemporary American political interests and in opposition to the perceived godlessness of the Antichrist, Communism.[94] Similarly, a long pre-credit sequence in *Ben-Hur* had displayed a painterly depiction of the nativity in anticipation of the narration of conflict between ancient Judaea and Rome, thereby establishing Christ as the historical agent who ultimately motivates resistance to a pagan, totalitarian rule.[95] In the noticeable absence of such opening religiosity, however, the titles of *Spartacus* roll over isolated images of Roman portrait busts cracking under the internal pressure of a more abstract, political force (the institution of slavery), and the film closes with its revolutionary hero crucified not for his religious faith but for his political challenge to corrupt government. The production company's publicity explicitly differentiated *Spartacus* from the earlier, conservative examples of the genre by labeling the film "the thinking man's epic," thereby hinting at its more enlightened political perspective, while in press interviews the director Stanley Kubrick even made the then highly provocative claim that he had been more influenced by Soviet historical

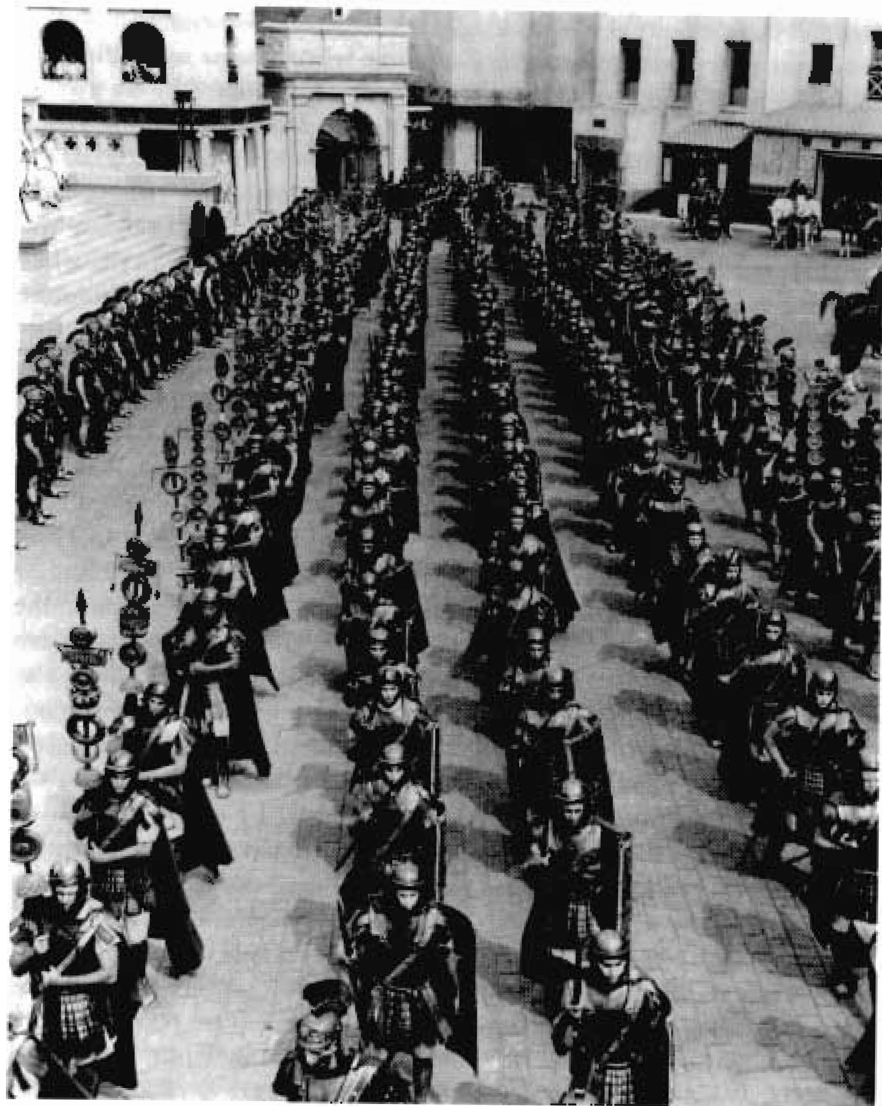
films like *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) than Hollywood's *Ben-Hur* or the oeuvre of DeMille.[96]

Such dissidence had already surfaced in the Kubrick/Douglas partnership which produced *Paths of Glory* (1957). There a radical assault on the militarism of 1950s America had been doubly displaced into an account of a mutiny in the French army during the First World War.[97] *Spartacus* demonstrated its radicalism more overtly through the credited employment of the blacklistees Fast and Trumbo, and through its emplotment of a rebellion long since assimilated to a revolutionary Marxist agenda. The film's box-office success was a measure of the degree to which the culture of the Cold War had been eroded by 1960. By then Truman had spoke out publicly against the blacklist, Khrushchev had toured the United States, and the election of President Kennedy was initiating a climate in which the representation of social and political problems might no longer be construed wholly as an act of treason.[98] Nonetheless, the production history of *Spartacus* exposes the problems of political focus that still beset Hollywood film-making at the beginning of the 1960s.

In the early 1950s, 20th Century-Fox had required numerous rewrites of the screenplay for the film *Viva Zapata!* (1952) in order to ensure the conversion of the contentious Mexican revolutionary hero into a more congenial liberal and supporter of American-style democracy. It was commercially expedient for the studio to "keep the red-baiters in check."[99] In the repressive atmosphere of the 1950s, there was no economic incentive even for leftist films to bear clear political messages, and they were often subject to the conflicting ideological pulls of their writers, directors, producers, and exhibitors.[100] According to the detailed account of the production of *Spartacus* by the film historian Duncan Cooper, an enormous gap began to open up between Fast's novelistic vision of Spartacus and that being prepared for projection. The screenwriter Trumbo constantly reproached the director Kubrick and the executive producer and star Douglas for what he took to be their "unremitting attack on the political meaning and the intellectual content" of every proposed scene in the historical film. In Trumbo's view, the omission from the film of any sequence displaying a significant victory for the slave army emasculated the heroic gladiator, while the decision to close the film with his crucifixion—against all the historical evidence and against the narrative closure of both book and screenplay—created an "irritating allusion" to Christ (which appeared to remodel the political militant as spiritual martyr).[101] But far greater risks and constraints were attached to film production than book publication, even in the period of transition away from the culture of the Cold War. In the 1950s, the Hollywood "blockbuster" in particular was a producer's picture. As an immense financial ven-

ture and huge industrial undertaking, the widescreen historical epic needed to address a very broad constituency at a time when cinema was fighting to survive the competing attractions of television.[102] Confronted by the market interests of the studios, the scrutiny of the Production Code Administration and the vociferous threat of boycotts by pressure groups such as the American Legion of Decency, even "the thinking man's epic" had to have attempted limits imposed upon its political provocation. Thus Douglas, who made *Spartacus* for his own independent production company Bryna while receiving financial backing for the twelve million–dollar project from the major Hollywood studio Universal-International, circulated an uncontentious, seemingly patriotic narrative image for his film as "an American statement by an American film company about the cause of freedom and the dignity of man."[103]

The big budget, Super Technirama, Technicolor *Spartacus* of 1960 only partially preserves or adapts for screen the defense of American political activism and the investigation of labor which had been encoded in Fast's self-published novel concerning the ancient slave rebellion. It is possible, for example, to read the representations of slave labor and incarceration in the first part of the film as a visual translation to screen of the Marxist concern with the conflict between labor and capital manifested in Fast's novel. The mines and the gladiatorial school vividly display a grim, brutal and inhuman world of enforced production which provides both wealth and entertainment for the unperturbed elite of the Roman state.[104] Similarly, in the second part of the film, frequent cross-cutting (aided by sharply contrasting musical motifs) juxtaposes and contrasts the rebel and the Roman armies, where the rebel camp is presented as a kind of utopian, proto-Communist society peopled by whole families who share their work and meagre possessions along with a common aspiration to equality and liberation from slave-labor, while the Roman troops are marked by their sinister, machinelike maneuvers, their lack of individuality, and their complete obedience to a rigid hierarchy controlled by rich, ambitious politicians.[105] [illustration 3.6] The Hollywood historiography of Spartacus, moreover, raises issues of labor both on and off screen. Extra-cinematic discussions of the making of the film drew attention to claims that it had instituted good labor practice. *Variety* for 18 January 1961 noted that, in the American labor press, *Spartacus* was being touted as the most expensive film ever made in Hollywood under union conditions of employment, and that (unlike the earlier "runaway" production of *Ben-Hur* in Italy) almost all its sequences had been shot in California. Recognition that *Spartacus* had been given a special screening for labor leaders in New York and that union leaders were sending out "please support" pleas to their members encouraged audiences



3.6 Regimented Roman soldiers on the march, from Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960). [Courtesy of BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.]

to read the historical film itself as one which confronted the difficult conditions endured by at least one sector of the American labor force.[106]

Although *Spartacus* reveals surviving traces of the general Marxist commitment to class struggle encoded in Fast's novel, it manifests a more immediate, liberal concern with the American Communist Party itself and the

recent hounding by HUAC of Party members, like Fast and Trumbo themselves. Just as Freda's *Spartaco* had refigured the Thracian gladiator to explore the marginalization of the PCI in post-war Italy, so Kubrick's *Spartacus* refigures the ancient hero to expose the vicious assaults on domestic Communism that had been such a feature of American culture in the Cold War era. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, witnesses who appeared before a congressional investigating committee were expected to inform on their friends and associates as a test of their patriotism and as the price of full citizenship. Howard Fast and Dalton Trumbo had both been vilified in the press when, in 1947, they chose not to be "friendly" witnesses before HUAC.[107] Yet, towards the close of *Spartacus*, after the rebel army has been defeated and the surviving slaves taken prisoner, a Roman soldier announces that their lives are to be spared on condition that they identify the body or the living person of Spartacus in their midst. Rather than do so, the slaves rise up in turn to declare "I'm Spartacus." As the camera focuses first on Crassus perplexed by such behavior and then on Spartacus moved to tears, as the musical theme rises to a stirring crescendo, the sequence insists not on the virtue of incriminating, but rather on the heroism of shielding, the subversive within.[108] Similarly, soon after the scene in which the solidarity of the rebels has been championed, *Spartacus* denounces the brutality of their persecutors. In a darkened and near-empty Senate-house, bereft of all semblance of the democratic process, Crassus threatens the demagogue Gracchus with the fate of the crucified slaves:

> As those slaves have died, so will your rabble, if they falter one instant in loyalty to the new order of affairs. The enemies of the state are known. Arrests are in progress. The prisons begin to fill. In every city and province, lists of the disloyal have been compiled. Tomorrow they will learn the costs of their terrible folly, their treason.

The familiar Cold War rhetoric of vigilant patriotism takes on an extremely sinister turn when relocated in the setting of the proscriptions of the late Republic. The historical dressing helps justify the breaking of the blacklist which brought out large numbers of pickets to the film's premiere. In Los Angeles, for example,

> Uncle Sam, an intense gentleman in striped trousers and frayed satin tails, showed up, too. He joined a picket line of pickets which formed at the theater to protest the work of "Unfriendly Ten" writers Howard Fast and Dalton Trumbo on the "Spartacus" script. The pickets who carried such

> signs as "Stamp out Red Writers" said they represented the "Democrats United for America, Inc."[109]

Such a troubled context for viewing *Spartacus*, in turn, lent an immediate, contemporary relevance to the film's Senate house sequence.

The Hollywood film also sustains the novel's commitment to American civil rights by preserving on screen a significant role for the fictitious character of Draba, the African gladiator who is ruthlessly cut down for refusing to kill Spartacus in the Capuan arena. The film's narrative drive offers two immediate motivations for Spartacus' vividly portrayed breakout from the gladiatorial school—the purchase and removal of his beloved Varinia and the noble sacrifice of Draba, whose body the Romans leave hanging as a lesson against (and, it turns out, in) insurgence.[110] [illustration 3.7] Thus in the Italian popular tradition for Spartacus, in Giovagnoli's novel and in the films of Vidali and Freda, ancient slavery functions as a metaphoric narrative device to intensify concerns with Italian nationalism and the body politic, while in the American popular tradition, from the time of Bird's *Gladiator*, slavery partially operates as the originary economic institution that has laid the foundation of American racial oppression. During the course of the 1950s, the Eisenhower administration constantly evaded the question of civil rights. Black activists instead achieved victories in the courts (such as the racial desegregation bill of 1954), through individual acts of civil disobedience (such as Rosa Parks's famous refusal to submit to the segregation laws operating on Alabama's buses), and through the formation of campaigning organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference established in 1957 under the presidency of Martin Luther King.[111] In locating the inspiration for revolt largely in the brave defiance of a black gladiator, *Spartacus* acknowledges the central role of black activism in the emerging protest movements which, in 1960, confronted Kennedy's new administration.

The narrative function of the African gladiator played by Woody Strode was already marked out for audiences of the period by Strode's earlier portrayal of a persecuted black soldier in *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960).[112] But, in the course of *Spartacus*, black suffering interlocks with and is soon superceded by Jewish suffering, a slippage aided by the tradition common to African Americans and Jews of narratives concerning diaspora and slavery, such as the shared use of the Exodus story, which celebrates the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian enslavement.[113] In the same year as Otto Preminger's *Exodus* (1960) put the Zionist case for a Jewish homeland in a provocatively contemporary setting, the *Spartacus* associated in particular with its executive producer and star Kirk Douglas constructs a more discrete histor-

3.7 Gladiators see the punishment of Draba, from Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960). [Courtesy of BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.]

ical parable in which a Moses-like hero courageously attempts to lead his surrogate Israelites to the Promised Land.[114] This reading of the film and its characterization of the Thracian gladiator has retrospectively gained authoritative support from Douglas's autobiography, which was published in 1988. There Douglas constructs for himself the persona of "the ragman's son," and discloses that his original name was Issur Danielovitch, that he was the son of an illiterate Russian-Jewish immigrant to the United States,

and that he identified with the oppressed slaves of ancient Rome because he too came from a race of slaves.[115] According to Duncan Cooper, it was Douglas' Zionist convictions that above all caused an ideological rift between the narrative drive of Fast's novel and that of the Hollywood film, for the Zionist Spartacus appears on screen as a leader of a mass migration of slaves back to their homelands rather than as a revolutionary aiming to overthrow the oppressive Roman state, and his revolt appears driven more by religious piety than by class struggle.[116]

As in Fast's novel, gender and sexuality also function within the film *Spartacus* as a persistent and powerful cultural metaphor for oppression. On screen, as in the novel, Roman homosexuality marks the political and moral decadence of the regime. By comparison, however, its representation is distinctly muted—displaced, in the case of Crassus' attempted seduction of Antoninus, into an oblique conversation about oysters and snails. The Production Code forbade overt references to homosexuality, and even this scene was eventually cut by Universal under pressure from the American Legion of Decency.[117] Such specifically cinematic operations of gender and sexuality in *Spartacus* have been the subject of some recent critical attention within wider debates about the construction of masculinity and the display of the male body in Hollywood cinema.[118] Although Spartacus's fictitious beloved Varinia first appears in the film unconventionally experienced in sexual matters and equal to the hero in her desire for liberty, she soon falls back into the more familiar patterns for encoding gender in Hollywood cinema, whereby she is presented as the pleasurable object of a desiring male gaze, as a helpmeet to Spartacus rather than an agent of historical narration.[119] The more troublesome display of the male body, however, plays an integral part in the narrative trajectory of the film, which traces the hero's attempt to liberate himself from the humiliating condition of being looked at—a mere spectacle for the gratification of his Roman masters.[120] As in Freda's *Spartaco*, the hero never achieves the complete restoration of a "proper" masculinity and, in an image wholly out of keeping with the McCarthyite hyper-masculinity frequently projected in the Cold War era, ends the film with his crucified body posed as a spectacle of suffering martyrdom.[121] *Spartacus* even problematizes the epic genre's customary invitation to audience pleasure in the display of male bodies. During the Capuan arena sequence, when Spartacus and Draba fight for the perverse pleasure of the onlooking Romans, the cinema spectator's visual pleasure in looking at their bodies is frequently frustrated and then violently terminated. When Draba throws his trident at the watching audience, the weapon flies straight at the camera, suggesting that to take pleasure in looking upon such a scene is to become no better than a Roman.[122]

Certainly at the time of the original release of *Spartacus*, it was the contributing personnel explicitly linked to the film rather more than its content that caused an outcry. Both the right-wing columnist Hedda Hopper and the American Legion of Decency attempted to instigate mass boycotts of the film under slogans such as "Red Writers are back!" but the protests proved ineffective when the newly elected President John F. Kennedy openly crossed a picket line to attend a public screening of the film in Washington.[123] If, however, *Spartacus* went on to be an international box-office success, it was due, in no small measure, to the ways in which the film also laid itself open to reappropriation by the American Right as a Cold War sermon in historical guise no different from the earlier, religious blockbusters from which Byrna had attempted to differentiate its product.

Liberal readings of *Spartacus* require its spectators to assimilate the oppressive Roman state and its corrupt leaders to an American society still in need of radical transformation. But much of the film's accessibility resides in its deployment of conventions for narrating Roman history familiar from the earlier Hollywood historiography of Rome. Following the aural paradigm set by Cecil B. DeMille's historical epics, the heroic Spartacus and his fictitious companion Antoninus speak in the American cadences of the actors Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis, while the sadistic villain Crassus, played by Laurence Olivier, speaks in the oratorical diction of the English stage.[124] Through the continuation of this earlier analogical device, *Spartacus* provides its audiences with the more comfortable opportunity to equate the repressive Roman state with foreign empires and the rebellious slaves with a principled America in perpetual, heroic struggle against tyranny.[125] Similarly, the Judeo-Christian religiosity of the Cold War epics momentarily resurfaces at the beginning and the end of *Spartacus*. In the post-credits voiceover, which introduces the Hollywood history of the slave rebellion, we are told that it is Christianity (rather than class struggle) which "was destined to overthrow the pagan tyranny of Rome and bring about a new society," while at the film's close the crucified Spartacus is posed above his newborn son and its mother in a manner that simultaneously invokes, through composition and lighting, the iconography of the Nativity and the Passion.[126] Although this closing Christian tableau may have been employed to suggest a more positive outcome, and even a divine sanction, for radical social action, it enabled conservative reviewers of the film, in the rhetoric of the Cold War, to extricate Spartacus from his godless, ghastly Communist tradition and to convert him into a blameless spiritual reformer. Thus a review of *Spartacus* in *Time* of 24 October 1960 righteously declared

> Despite his personal predilection for the 20th century's most crushing political orthodoxy, Trumbo has imparted to *Spartacus* a passion for freedom and the men who live and die for it—a passion that transcends all politics and

persons in the fearful, final image of the dying gladiator, the revolutionary on the cross.

Studio press releases, souvenir programs, study guides, and press interviews did not attempt to pinpoint a specific ideological message for the film but stated noncommittally that its hero's "passion for human rights and dignity is an inspiration to this very day," and spoke of its plot line as a powerful demonstration of "man's eternal desire for freedom."[127] But the fight for "freedom against tyranny" was precisely the terminology President Truman had used to launch the Cold War in 1947, and it belonged to the rhetoric in which the historical blockbusters of the 1950s had been steeped. Picking up, therefore, on the film's narrative image as a depiction of the eternal fight for freedom, many writers in the popular press instated *Spartacus* as an historical film that did not further the cause of the Kremlin so much as hinder it:

> Although it deals with a revolt by slaves against the pagan Roman Empire, the desire for freedom from oppression that motivates Spartacus has its modern counterpart today in areas of the world that struggle under Communist tyranny, and it stands as a sharp reminder for all mankind that there can be no truly peaceful sleep whilst would-be conquering legions stand poised to suppress.[128]

In the right-wing press, Spartacus became refigured as a Cold War warrior fighting against the autocracy, atheism, and state control of the Soviet Union, and his aspirations were assimilated to the alternative, divinely blessed values of democratic America.[129]

4

Cleopatra: Spectacles of Seduction and Conquest

Competing Images

Under the headline "'Cleopatra' never had it so good," a journalist from the *New York Times* recounted a visit he had paid to the Cinecittà studios in Rome in January 1962. He had been sent to investigate rumors that the Twentieth-Century Fox studio was continuing to encounter difficulties in the production of its film *Cleopatra*. Instead, the writer claimed to have found an optimism which stemmed from "the feeling that a film of import is taking shape." On set, the director, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, described the importance and focal point of his new film as residing not so much in its impressive sets or in its imposing cast list as in its characterization of Cleopatra. She is to be depicted as "a vivid and many-sided personality, whom Mankiewicz calls 'a terribly exciting woman who nearly made it'" and her political climbing and intrigue is to be brought out in the "meat" of the film—the scenes of intimacy between Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, and Mark Antony, which Mankiewicz was then shooting.[1]

Some fifty years earlier, however, in November 1913, the newspaper *Giornale d'Italia* carried a significantly different account of the production of a silent film about Cleopatra, in which her "many-sided personality" scarcely figured. According to the Italian director Enrico Guazzoni, he chose to make *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* because

> no theme could better attract and move an artist than that which, through the figures of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, had so much weight over the destinies of the ancient world. It provided above all the opportunity to parade before the eyes of the spectator the most distinctive places of ancient Rome and ancient Egypt, which everyone has imprinted in their minds at their

34. Wood (1975), 169.

35. Neale (1983), 34–6; Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson (1985), 353–64; Belton (1992), esp. 183–210.

36. Neale (1983), 35. Cf. dall'Asta (1992), 31–2.

37. Houston and Gillett (1963); Wood (1975), 165–80; Sklar (1975), 294–6; Hirsch (1978), 29; Rondolino (1980), 65; Neale (1983), 34–6; Belton (1992); Babington and Evans (1993), 6–8.

38. Cf. on the Cold War rhetoric of Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956), Whitfield (1991), 218–9; Nadel (1993); Higashi (1994), 202–3.

39. Babington and Evans (1993), 207. Cf. Belton (1992), 190–1.

40. Wood (1975), 184–5. Cf. Belton (1992), 194–5; dall'Asta (1992), 31–2.

41. See, for example, *Variety* and the *Los Angeles Times* for 17 September 1953.

42. Wood (1975), 173.

43. Houston and Gillett (1963); Wood (1975), 168–73; Neale (1983), 34–6; dall'Asta (1992), 31–2; Belton (1992), 210.

44. Cf. Higson (1989), 42–3, on strategies for the analysis of "national" cinema, and Pearson and Uricchio (1990), 243–4, on strategies for the analysis of Shakespeare on screen.

45. On the numerous evidentiary problems faced when researching film history see, for example, Sorlin (1980), 22–4, and Allen and Gomery (1985), 28–36.

46. On the methodological problems of writing film history see, for example, Nowell-Smith (1977); Rosen (1984); Elsaesser (1984); Beck (1985); Allen and Gomery (1985), 25–42; de Cordova (1988); Allen (1990); Straw (1991). Cf. Wyke (1996), 152–3.

47. Lowenthal (1985), 412.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. For a history of the rebellion led by Spartacus, and for the following analysis of the ancient sources, see Bradley (1989), esp. 136–9.

2. Florus 2.8.20. The translation is that of Yavetz (1988), 101.

3. See, for example, Bradley (1989), xi–xiii; Vogt (1974), 61.

4. Rubinsohn (1987), 1.

5. For Benjamin's views on the cult of republican antiquity instigated during the French Revolution, see Norman Vance (forthcoming).

6. Highet (1949), 390–9, and Bondanella (1987), 130–1.

7. Bondanella (1987), 143.

8. Saurin in Petitot (1803), 211–9.

9. Bradley (1989), xi; Yavetz (1988), 118.

10. Vogt (1974), 172; Finley (1983), 12–7. See also Canfora (1980), 23–30, for the slavery debates in France and America.

11. Calendoli (1967), 68–70; de Vincenti (1988), 12.

12. Lopez-Celly (1939), 10 and 14; Russo (1956), 75–6.

13. Page references are to the seventh edition of Giovagnoli's novel, published in Milan by Paolo Carrara in 1916.

14. On this passage, compare Russo (1956), 76–7.

15. Lovett (1982), 28.

16. Bondanella (1987), 137–41; Norman Vance (forthcoming).

17. Springer (1987), esp. 65–74.

18. Lovett (1982), 56; Treves (1962), 91; Bondanella (1987), 158–65.

19. Lopez-Celly (1939), 51–2.

20. Russo (1956), 74–5.

21. On Garibaldi's letter, see also Russo (1956), 77.

22. Analysis of the Latium film *Spartaco* of 1909 is precluded by the apparent lack of primary material concerning the film. Brunetta (1993), 154, remarks only that the film was based on Giovagnoli's novel. To my knowledge, no copy of the film survives.

23. Bernardini and Gili (1986); Bernardini (1991b); Brunetta (1991b); dall'Asta (1992), 19–20; and see chapter 2 above.

24. Cagnetta (1979), 15–34; Bondanella (1987), 165–6; Visser (1992), 7–8; Moatti (1993), 128.

25. Cardillo (1987), 25–37, Brunetta (1991a), 64–5; dall'Asta (1992), 31; Brunetta (1993), 143–6. See also chapter 2 above.

26. Brunetta (1993), 52–3.

27. Prolo (1951), 54.

28. Giovagnoli (1907), 28.

29. Giovagnoli (1916), plates on pages 353, 385, and 449. Giovagnoli had also bestowed Spartacus's armies with the iconography of modern revolutionary movements within the narrative proper (346). For the use of "liberty trees" in the rituals of the *risorgimento*, see Springer (1987), 68.

30. Webster (1960), 14–6.

31. See chapter 5.

32. See chapter 6.

33. My analysis of *Spartaco* (1913) is based on examination of the footage which survives in the George Kleine collection in the Library of Congress. Although few of the film's English intertitles remain, and one whole reel as well as parts of others are missing, it has been possible to piece together the plot of the film from the summary available in the publicity distributed by Kleine, and that provided by *Illustrated Films Monthly* 2 (1914), 97–104.

34. dall'Asta (1992), 27–9.

35. Compare dall'Asta (1992), 36–9, on the camera's voyeuristic play on the muscled body of Maciste in *Cabiria* (1914).

36. Farassino (1983), 42–4.

37. Martinelli (1983), 13. Perhaps some of the paintings Guaita brought to life included such famous gladiatorial scenes as Gérôme's *Ave Caesar, Morituri Te Salutant* (1859) and *Pollice Verso* (1874), both of which provided a recognizable iconography for the arena set designs in many early historical films.

38. This and other reviews are quoted in Martinelli (1993), 261–4, who also notes that *La vita cinematografica* dedicated several pages to photographs of Guaita and comments about him after he exhibited his muscular physique at the film's opening in Budapest.

39. On screen bodies as metaphors for the Italian body politic, see Dalle Vacche (1992), 27–52, on *Cabiria* (1914) and *Scipione l'Africano* (1937).

40. My description of the scene follows Brunetta (1993), 167–8.

41. This sequence of *Spartaco* does not survive in the copy at the Library of Congress, but is referred to in *Illustrated Films Monthly* and, more briefly, in the Kleine publicity.

42. Here the plot draws on that of Vidali's earlier film *Ione o Gli ultimi giorni di Pompeii*, where Glaucus is falsely accused of murder and thrown to the lions. The credibility of incorporating the historical figure of Spartacus into such a fantastical plot is perhaps sustained for film audiences by the repetition of the earlier film's narrative drive.

43. Crassus's daughter is called Emily in the summary provided by *Illustrated Films Monthly*. According to Martinelli (1993), 261–2, she is named Elena in the version of the film exhibited in Italy. Martinelli's summary of the plot does not include the final,

triumphant sequence found in the Kleine archive and assumes that both Noricus and Spartacus die in the arena.

44. The film's celebratory parallel between Spartacus and Garibaldi is also observed by Mayer (1994), 314.

45. Noted by Russo (1956), 78, and Cammarota (1987), 121–2.

46. Guarino (1979), 13–5; Yavetz (1988), 126.

47. Finley (1983), 40–4; Vogt (1974), 176–7.

48. Rubinsohn (1987), 1.

49. Guarino (1979), 13–5; Rubinsohn (1987), 5; Finley (1983), 57; Yavetz (1988), 127–8.

50. Gramsci (1975), 845, n.208. See Russo (1956), 77–8, and Cammarota (1987), 122.

51. As Russo (1956), 78.

52. The preface by Luigi Russo appeared in an edition of *Spartaco* published by Parenti in 1955, and reappeared as a self-contained article in 1956. See Russo (1956).

53. Rubinsohn (1987), 36, n.155.

54. Sicher (1962), 29–31; Brunetta (1982), 499–502; Liehm (1984), 90; Gori (1984), 79–85; Spinazzola (1985), 324.

55. Corsi (1991), 92. *Spartaco* (1952) was one such coproduction, made by API Film of Rome in collaboration with Rialto Film of Paris.

56. For the epic genre's capacity to exhibit the powers of cinema, see Neale (1983), 34–6, and dall'Asta (1992), 31–2.

57. Sicher (1962), 29–30; Spinazzola (1965), 274; Brunetta (1991a), 419.

58. Siclier (1962), 29–30.

59. Cagnetta (1979); Bondanella (1987), 172–206; Braun (1990); Visser (1992); Quartermaine (1995); Benton (1995); Fraquelli (1995).

60. Quoted in Gori (1984), 41, and Gori (1988), 12–3.

61. Quoted and translated in Dalle Vacche (1992), 44. Cf. Becker (1995) and Quartermaine (1995), and see chapter 2 above.

62. Siclier (1962), 29–30; Brunetta (1982), 405–6; Gori (1984), 79–84; Spinazzola (1985), 324.

63. My analysis of *Spartaco* (1952) is based on a version dubbed into English and lasting 85 minutes which is available from UK film distributors. The version originally distributed in Italy is said to have been 110 minutes long, cut by the state censors from Freda's 120 minutes. See the filmography in Martini and Della Casa (1993).

64. On such Italian films about the resistance, see Sorlin (1980), 189–206, and Bondanella (1988), 31–73.

65. Bondanella (1987), 181–2.

66. For the development of an armed resistance movement in Italy, see Forgacs (1990), 83–5, and Ginsborg (1990), 10–7.

67. For the Christian iconography in Rossellini's film, see Sorlin (1980), 200–1; Bondanella (1988), 41–2; Dalle Vacche (1992), 180–1, and still 37.

68. See Sorlin (1980), 189–206 and, more generally, Ginsborg (1990), 70.

69. See, especially, Dalle Vacche (1992).

70. On Girotti's varied roles, including his subsequent appearance as a failed *risorgimento* revolutionary in Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954), see Bondanella (1988), 23 and 95–100; Forgacs (1990), 91–3.

71. *Vie Nuove* 1 (1952), 18.

72. See Brunetta (1982), 405–6, and Gori (1984), 79–94.

73. Sassoon (1981), 8–28; Ginsborg (1990), 15; Forgacs (1990), 152–72.

74. Sassoon (1981), 59–72; Forgacs (1990), 103–6; Ginsborg (1990), 72–120.

75. Spartacus's opponent within the slave army is (more plausibly) entitled "Oenomas" in Italian credits for the film. See Martini and Della Casa (1993), 77–8.

76. Sassoon (1981), 73–97; Ginsborg (1990), 42–8 and 199–200; Gundle (1991), 114; Dalle Vacche (1992), 123–4. My thanks to Joseph Castagna of Queens University, Kingston, for drawing my attention to the Togliatti/Secchia debates within the PCI.

77. See, for example, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 20.239 for December 1953 and *Variety* 30 June 1954.

78. Smith (1991), 204–6.

79. Reinhold (1984); Lowenthal (1985), 105–24; Bondanella (1987), 115–50; Vance (1989), 1–67; Anderson (1992), 95. See also chapter 2 above.

80. Dahl (1963), 40–61; McConachie (1992), 91–118; Mayer (1994), 20; Vance (forthcoming).

81. See especially Vance (1984), and Vance (1989), 31–3. Cf. Canfora (1980), 26–30, on the use of studies of ancient slavery in the American emancipation debates and the southern counterexample of the glories of a Greek-style democracy based on slavery.

82. Dahl (1963), 58–61; Vance (1989), 18 and 30; McConachie (1992), 91–118; Mayer (1994), 20.

83. See, for example, the Panther edition first published in Great Britain in 1959. All subsequent page references refer to this edition.

84. Cf. Vance (1989), 33.

85. Fast (1990), 275–7.

86. Sklar (1975), 256–68; Ceplair and Englund (1979); Smith (1989), 76; Leab (1993), 120–2.

87. Wittner (1978), 129–30; Whitfield (1991), 34–7 and 60–4; Elley (1984), 109; Fast (1990), 275–7. Cf. Biskind (1983), Vanderwood (1991), and Samuels (1991) on mainstream films of the 1950s and their stress on conformity and domesticity.

88. Vance (1989), 33; Smith (1989), 93 and n.148.

89. See Whitfield (1991), 20–2, and, for covert commentaries on race relations to be found in, for example, liberal Westerns of the 1950s, see Biskind (1983), 228–45. I am also indebted here to a paper on Howard Fast given by Alan Wald at a conference on Cold War culture held at University College, London, in 1994.

90. See Whitfield (1991), 43–5, and Biskind (1983), 326–7, on Cold War attitudes to homosexuality, and Vance (1989), 33, on its narrative function in Fast's novel.

91. Fast (1990), 286–95; Whitfield (1991), 180. Cf. Wald (for which see n.89 above).

92. Ceplair and Englund (1979), 250 and 419; Elley (1984), 109–12; Smith (1989); Whitfield (1991), 218–9; Cooper (1991), 18. See also *Limelight* 13 October 1960.

93. Bourget (1985), 58.

94. Nadel (1993), 416 and 419; Whitfield (1991), 218–9.

95. On the conservative ideological structures of *Ben-Hur*, see Babington and Evans (1993).

96. Cary (1974), 52; Hirsch (1978), 98; Babington and Evans (1993), 183; Whitfield (1991), 218–19. For Kubrick's claims to inspiration, see the *New York Times*, 2 October 1960.

97. Biskind (1983), 97; Elley (1984), 112; Whitfield (1991), 218.

98. Ceplair and Englund (1979), 418; Biskind (1983), 336–48; Smith (1989); Suid (1991), 220; Whitfield (1991), 205–30.

99. Vanderwood (1991).

100. See Biskind (1991).

101. Cooper (1974) and (1991); Bourget (1985), 59–60. Cf. the review of the rereleased *Spartacus* in *The Independent on Sunday*, 27 October 1991.

102. Houston and Gillett (1963); Sklar (1975), 294–6; Wood (1975), 168; Hirsch (1978), 29; Smith (1989); Babington and Evans (1993), 4–8. Cf. chapter 2 above.

103. Cooper (1991), 27.

104. Bourget (1985), 57–8.

105. Solomon (1978), 34–8; Hirsch (1978), 98; Elley (1984), 109–12; Bourget (1985), 58–9; Babington and Evans (1993), 191–2.

106. See Sklar (1985), 65, and cf. *Film Daily* 7 October 1960.

107. Whitfield (1991), 100–26.

108. Cf. Smith (1989), 76, who notes in passing a similarity between the sequence in *Spartacus* where the gladiators break out of their imprisoning school and the traditional, heroic accounts of breaking out of the confines of the blacklist.

109. *Los Angeles Mirror*, 20 October 1960. Cf. *Variety*, 12 December 1960, on the protests of the American Legion against the film, and a letter to the *Los Angeles Times* of 15 January 1961 denouncing the distribution to schools of a photoplay study guide to *Spartacus*.

110. See Adam Mars-Jones's review of the rereleased *Spartacus* in *The Independent*, 1 November 1991.

111. Wittner (1978), 190–2 and 198–201, Whitfield (1991), 20–3.

112. Babington and Evans (1993), 224–6.

113. Shohat (1991b), 232–3. Cf. Babington and Evans (1993), 224–6.

114. See Alexander Walker's review of the rereleased *Spartacus* in *The Evening Standard*, 31 October 1991. Cf. Derek Elley in *The Independent*, 25 October 1991.

115. Douglas (1988), 277.

116. Cooper (1974), 30. Cf. Elley (1984), 109–12.

117. Cooper (1974), 30. Elley (1984), 111; Hunt (1993), 71–2 and 74–7. It was fully restored for the 1991 rerelease of *Spartacus*.

118. See especially Hunt (1993) and Hark (1993).

119. See Hark (1993), 161–2, who, in her analysis of gender operations in *Spartacus*, draws on and responds to Laura Mulvey's work on the cinematic gaze.

120. Hark (1993), 152–3.

121. Hark (1993), 159–68; Hunt (1993), 65. See also Biskind (1983) on the roles of John Wayne in the 1950s.

122. Hark (1993), 160–1, who refers to a review by David Denby of the rereleased film.

123. Smith (1989), 92–3, Cooper (1991), 18; Whitfield (1991), 218–9.

124. Hirsch (1978), 98.

125. See Wood (1975), 183–4.

126. See the review of Adams Mars-Jones in *The Independent*, 1 November 1991. Cf. Elley (1984); Solomon (1978), 37; Hirsch (1978), 98; Babington and Evans (1993), 194.

127. Smith (1989), 92–3.

128. *Variety*, 7 October 1960.

129. Cf. Babington and Evans (1993), 55–6.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Robert F. Hawkins, *New York Times*, 7 January 1962.

2. *Giornale d'Italia*, 4 November 1913. Quoted in Prolo (1951), 55.

3. Hughes-Hallett (1991), 21–143; Wyke (1992), 100–5; Hamer (1993), 1–23.

4. Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 25.1, and see Brenk (1992).

5. Hughes-Hallett (1991), 15–6 and 64–82; Wyke (1992), 106–12; Hamer (1993), xvi–xvii.

6. See especially Hughes-Hallett (1991) and Hamer (1993).

7. Pearson and Uricchio (1990).

8. For details of this film, and a survey of the silent era's film adaptations of Shakespeare, see Ball (1968).

9. Ball (1968), 47–8.

10. Ball (1968), 96. English titles and release dates are listed in Ball's index.

11. Ball (1968), 167.

12. *Giornale d'Italia*, 4 November 1913. Quoted in Prolo (1951), 55.

13. On Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* see, for example, Bloom (1990) and Hughes-Hallett (1991), 169–202. For its place among the other Roman plays, see Thomas (1989) and Martindale and Martindale (1990).

14. For the "killer-Cleopatra" of the nineteenth century, see Hughes-Hallett (1991), 252–311.

15. The motif is inherited from Dryden's *All for Love*, for which see Hughes-Hallett (1991), 212–4, and Martindale and Martindale (1990), 140–1.

16. The sequence of the triumph at Rome survives in the print at the Library of Congress but is missing from the print at the Cineteca archive—a clearly mutilated version with scarcely any intertitles. But, as if to elide the film's difference from Shakespeare's play, George Kleine's publicity for the American launch of *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* fails to conclude its plot summary with mention of the triumphal procession.

17. On Italy's use of the tradition of *romanità* in the period before the First World War, see chapter 2 above, and Cagnetta (1979), 15–33.

18. Quoted in Cagnetta (1979), 17. See also chapter 2 above.

19. Brunetta and Gili (1990), 9–13 and (1993), 160–77.

20. For discussion of the nineteenth-century "colonialist imaginary" and its structuring of film narratives, see esp. Shohat (1991a).

21. Hughes-Hallett (1991), 252–80.

22. Said (1985), 3. For the importance of the Napoleonic campaign see also Said (1985), 42–3 and 76–88.

23. Curl (1994), 132.

24. For the feminization of the Orient, more generally, see Said (1985), 188 and 206–8, and Shohat (1991a), 46–62.

25. Higashi (1994), 90, who extends Said's definition of orientalism to include its more theatrical forms. Cf. Stevens (1984) and Lant (1992), 96.

26. Lant (1992), 93–8. For the spectacle of Egypt generally, cf. Curl (1994), 187–206.

27. Hughes-Hallett (1991), 266–70.

28. Shohat (1991a), 45.

29. de Vincenti (1988), 25. The opening documentary sequence survives in the Cineteca print, but not in that of the Library of Congress.

30. Shohat (1991a), 49.

31. Quoted in Martinelli (1993), 42–5, along with a number of other reviews.

32. The translation is that of Mandelbaum (1981).

33. Cagnetta (1979), 22–5.

34. This intertitle, as well as the subsequent triumph in Rome, is missing from the Cineteca print of the film.

35. Ball (1968), 166.

36. Quoted in Ball (1968), 168, from *The Art of the Motion Picture* (New York, 1915).

37. Lant (1992) and Shohat (1991a), 49–51.

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