

The Gladiators vs. Spartacus, Volume 1

The Gladiators vs. Spartacus:

*Dueling Productions
in Blacklist Hollywood*

*Volume 1:
The Race to the Screen*

By

Henry MacAdam and Duncan Cooper

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The greatest temptation for our kind [i.e. revolutionaries] is to renounce violence, do penance, come to peace with oneself. Most great revolutionaries succumbed to this temptation, from Spartacus to Danton and Dostoevsky—that's the classic form of betrayal of the cause.

Ivanov to Rubashov, Arthur Koestler's
Darkness at Noon (1940; 2019) 135

The authors and contributors to this volume dedicate it to the memory of Abraham Polonsky, whose screenplay for *The Gladiators* may now be read and discussed for the first time 60 years after it was written. He himself said: "It was one of my better scripts." Through it, we have some idea not only of what the movie would be like, but of Abe's vision of a better world: not just in antiquity, but in the present.

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FOREWORD

Of the unproduced screenplays from the Hollywood of the blacklist period, few are likely to have greater historical interest than Abraham Polonsky's *The Gladiators*. The story of the arena warrior of ancient Rome who led a slave rebellion against the empire had been a dream project of the Hollywood Left since the 1930s, when radical screenwriters were at the peak of their influence. Tales of insurrection were pushed aside in the 1940s by the urgency of the anti-fascist cause and, after the war, McCarthyism and the blacklist removed any possibility of a Spartacus film. Its moment finally arrived at the height of the Cold War, when for well over a decade many of Hollywood's most gifted screenwriters had been working under political censorship. By this time, the Spartacus story had become their own story.

There is a satisfying irony lurking in the fact that it was a narrative of a slave rebellion that struck off the blacklisted's handcuffs. How that was accomplished by Kirk Douglas, the hugely bankable star of the Dalton Trumbo's screenplay, has been told before, including the intriguing account of how the race to get a script to the screen involved two different blacklisted communists working from novels written by two other (current or former) communists. Polonsky's script, based on a novel by Arthur Koestler, came in second. It was never produced, and thereafter it was rarely spoken of. In an interview toward the end of his life, Polonsky told his biographers that all of his closely held journals and papers would be burned, which presumably would have included the gladiator story.

And so the recovery of Polonsky's version of the Spartacus epic by the authors of this volume will come as a welcome surprise to students and admirers of his work. In its importance as an unproduced script, it might compare to *The Proust Screenplay*, a collaboration between Harold Pinter and the blacklisted Joseph Losey. It provides valuable insights into the mind of the mature Polonsky, who for the first time in his career was able to work on a grander cinematic scale than the dark "urban fables" (his term), whose luminous dialogue made him famous. *The Gladiators* was also a story suited to his taste and preparation. He was one of the few intellectuals in the film capital in possession of a classical education.

As he worked on the screenplay, a decade had passed since Polonsky's most recent film credit (*I Can Get it for You Wholesale*, 1951), and it

would be another ten years before he would earn another (for *Madigan*, 1968). When the offer arrived to adapt the Koestler novel, he had served only half his sentence of politically imposed anonymity. It's not difficult to imagine, then, the eagerness with which Polonsky seized the opportunity to take on a substantial film project. He set aside his trademark gift for reinventing genre stories for something far more ambitious—the five-act heroic tragedy. Unlike Trumbo's *Spartacus*, which might have prevailed over Polonsky's version for its accessibility as a melodrama, *The Gladiators* purposefully set out to exploit the dramatic resources of the Sophoclean theater. It is a study of a practical, laconic warrior who wins the loyalty of an army of slaves, along with Roman plebeians, thousands of imperial subjects hailing from Gaul to Thrace to Nubia, one or two satirical versions of Cold War intellectuals, and religious prophets (including an Essene Jew, perhaps prefiguring Christians yet unborn). Spartacus molds this "horde" into a fighting force that conquers every despotic Roman regiment in its path until the warrior king succumbs to notions of his own grandeur, and thereafter to melancholy and clear-eyed regret. The critical moment comes when the aristocrats from the Greek city states offer to join Spartacus' war against the Romans on the condition that he return to them the slaves that had escaped to join him. Polonsky remains loyal to the arc of classical tragedy.

The script is of additional interest for Polonsky's characterization of what in melodrama would be called the love interest. Where the rival *Spartacus* cast the delicate Jean Simmons in that role, Polonsky's Lydia is portrayed as a devotee of at least five powerful pagan goddesses. She is a fearless partner who understands Spartacus' destiny and intervenes to make sure that he will not elude it. (Was he not the son of Dionysus, and his son the hope of the world's slaves?)

Larger even than these themes is the emphasis Polonsky places on what was once called the "race question." From at least the end of the second act, the role of African warriors in the slave revolt is foregrounded on nearly every page. As historians of recent generations have explained, slavery was a cornerstone of imperial rule in the ancient world, with the Romans eager to plunder the peasant societies of the African continent for further conquest.

For many, and indeed most, American communists in the U.S., the political developments of the 1940s and '50s resulted in disillusionment with the Soviet Union under the force of revelations of official anti-Semitism and the invasion of Hungary. For Polonsky and others—whether they remained in the Party or abandoned it—the new attention to the

Global South, and domestically in the U.S.A. toward civil rights, was a new source of hope. *The Gladiators* captures this moment.

The sword-and-sandal Hollywood epics, popular since the days of silent film, had it nearly all wrong when it came to imaginative representations of any modern empire. Soon-to-be martyred Christians facing lions were not the central players, after all. Nor was the conscience-ridden Roman soldier ruminating under the Cross, as in *The Robe* (a script first drafted by blacklisted Albert Maltz), the key to historical drama. The crucial action would take place elsewhere, in other hands.

Spartacus the film, as written by Trumbo, had a great role to play in Hollywood history. But it was not the same role that a Polonsky screenplay, faithfully produced, would have played. With his extraordinary work now before us, we can begin to imagine not merely how it might have changed the history of the blacklist, but the history of American cinema.

Paul Buhle
Dave Wagner
October 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our debt to many individuals and institutions is large, and we hope that all receive a word of appreciation here and/or in the text or footnotes. If anyone who should be acknowledged is not, the oversight is inadvertent and we apologize.

Special thanks to Abe Polonsky's son, Henry Polonsky, of Los Angeles, who with his extended family (the Polonsky Family Trust) serves as the legal custodian of Abe's intellectual property. We are most grateful to the Polonsky Family Trust for permission to publish for the first time *The Gladiators* screenplay, as well as excerpts from Abe's personal *Journal*, quotations from his published novels, essays, and interviews, and an unpublished letter from Abe to Paul Radin in the Martin Ritt Collection at the Margaret Herrick Library. Photographs of Abe Polonsky are also reproduced with the permission of the Polonsky Family Trust.

Tom Sayers, and Gordon MacAdam read early drafts of both volumes, and contributed to improvements in each. Brian Hannan enthusiastically lent time and energy to identifying sources, sharing illustrations, and suggesting ways to improve both volumes. Yul's son Rock Brynner was generous in allowing publication of a fundamentally important letter from his father to Paul Radin and Martin Ritt early in the pre-production phase of *The Gladiators*, and for permitting us to excerpt portions of his two biographical studies of his father. Brent Shaw has been supportive throughout this project, suggesting improvements along the way.

We are grateful to Fiona Radford for allowing us access to her doctoral thesis, *The Many Legends of Spartacus*, for sharing more recent publications, and for contributing her vast store of Hollywood lore. Readers will benefit from her detailed analysis of, and commentary on, Abe Polonsky's script for *The Gladiators* in Volume 2. Thanks also to John Bokina for sharing publications on, and correspondence about, modern manifestations of Spartacus lore and legend. Those and more are now encapsulated in his *Images of Spartacus*, forthcoming in 2021. Prof. John Schultheiss, Director Emeritus of The Center for Telecommunication Studies, California State University at Northridge (CSUN), encouraged our research. In some ways, this project is a much later sibling of his publication of the Polonsky screenplays *Odds Against Tomorrow*, *Body and Soul*, and *Force of Evil* two decades ago.

Mitzi Trumbo generously allowed us to include a family photo of her father Dalton Trumbo in the company of Bryna producer Edward Lewis, and to quote from her father's published books and unpublished documents. Jane Radin Eagleton shared photos of her late husband, producer Paul B. Radin, and granted permission to quote from, or reproduce, Radin's unpublished correspondence with author Arthur Koestler. Koestler's unpublished correspondence, as well as quotes from his many publications, are reproduced here courtesy of the Arthur Koestler Estate in conjunction with Peters, Fraser, & Dunlop, Ltd., London. The staff of the Koestler Archive in Edinburgh, Scotland provided scans of additional Koestler Correspondence. Gabriel Miller shared recollections of Martin Ritt's family, and photos of Ritt, that he acquired during research for his volumes on Ritt's movies and interviews.

Mary Huelsbeck generously answered requests for multiple items in the WCFTR movie archives. Kristine Kreuger did the same at the Margaret Herrick Library. Nancy Randle and Ann Leifeste were available for independent research work in Los Angeles, CA (UCLA Library) and Austin, TX (Harry Ransom Center), respectively. Sharon Rubin in London skillfully expedited the publication permission process at the Koestler Estate. Paul Buhl and Dave Wagner shared with us the wealth of information they gained in working with Abe Polonsky on their biography of him, and generously agreed to contribute the Foreword to this volume. Kirk Douglas knew of this work in progress from the beginning, and during the summer of 2019 wrote to say he was looking forward to reading it. A copy of his letter to us was in the condolences sent to Michael Douglas at the time of his father's death.

To Dori Seider, and to Joanna Baymiller, we extend special gratitude for a complete read-through of the final text, a labor that consumed more hours than either would want to admit. Cooper's thanks go in particular to editor of *Cineaste* Gary Crowds; his sponsor and mentor Prof. Martin Winkler; to Prof. Theresa Urbainczyk; to close friend and advisor William Morrow, and to friends and critics Steve Fagin and Rick Van Houter. Zeno VERNYK has championed our interests in any and all matters Koestlerian.

A few words about publication permissions are relevant. Every effort has been made to obtain permission to publish portions of, or entire documents (especially letters), unpublished as well as published. In all but a few instances, this was successful, and we are grateful to the granting individuals and agencies for that assistance. Unfortunately, successive, sustained attempts to make contact with some family members, or literary executors, or publishers, of deceased individuals resulted in failure, and this is deeply regretted. Nevertheless, the authors of those documents

and/or illustrations are acknowledged in the text or the footnotes on the relevant pages of this, and its companion, volume.

Although we have shared the laboring oars in getting this large vessel into harbor at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, we were aware throughout the voyage awaiting the docking of the text, illustrations, and whatever else was on board, were Commissioning Editor Adam Rummens and the staff in Newcastle upon Tyne. Our thanks go to them for seeing this heavy-laden ship through the publishing process. This volume goes to press at precisely the time the global Covid-19 pandemic has begun to impact every aspect of the social, economic, and private life of us all.

Henry I. MacAdam
Duncan L. Cooper

PREFACE¹

When I look back at Spartacus today—more than fifty years after the fact—I'm amazed that it happened at all. Everything was against us—the McCarthy-era politics, competition with another picture, everything.²

This volume is a response to my search for information about a movie that was never produced. During a quest to learn how that project began and why it was abandoned, the lost screenplay for it reappeared. Thus the focus here is on the failed project to film Arthur Koestler's epic novel *The Gladiators* at the very same time (1957-60) that the parallel, and ultimately successful, attempt to film Howard Fast's novel *Spartacus* was also underway. During the late 1950s I read both novels: *The Gladiators* in a 1954 paperback (Graphic Giant) reprint,³ and *Spartacus* when it was republished as a 1959 British (Panther) paperback brought to the USA by a family friend.⁴ Both authors drew their inspiration from the same event: The Slave War or Gladiators' War of 73-71 BC. The main characters, particularly Spartacus and Crassus, and the fate of the slave revolt, were presented in a remarkably different fashion. Later, the political differences of Koestler and Fast emerged.

When I first saw *Spartacus* on screen just a few years later, it was evident how differently the script and the camera had re-fashioned Fast's tale. At the time, I knew nothing about the attempt to film *The Gladiators*, or that a script for it had been written. Sixty years beyond that introduction, the layers and complexity of these four versions of the Spartacus Revolt—the two novels and the two scripts—became very

¹ Since the authors developed an independent interest 60 years ago in what became this research project, we feel justified in presenting separate accounts of that in a single elongated Preface. The initial remarks are those of MacAdam, and what follow are by Cooper, over our signatures. We trust our editors and readers will find this approach acceptable, and helpful to this narrative.

² Douglas, *I Am Spartacus*, Introduction 3.

³ MacAdam, "Arthur Koestler's *The Gladiators* and Hellenistic History" (2006) 84-85.

⁴ I did not know then that CPUSA member Fast had self-published his novel in December 1951. Koestler's novel had been in print since 1939, and translated into a dozen different languages.

evident. The starkest contrast that emerged was the difference of interpretation in Trumbo's and Polonsky's screenplay, *first* in the treatment of the direction taken when the gladiators' escape from captivity grew into a full-scale slave insurrection, and *second* in the reasons given (or not) of why that revolution did not succeed. The two interpretations emerged as both profound and complex.

Those differing, even contradictory, visions are discussed to some slight degree in the narrative chapters below, but in much greater detail and intensity in several chapters of Vol. 2: notably through Fiona Radford's Commentary on Polonsky's screenplay, commentary on two scenes in Polonsky's draft script, and especially in Duncan Cooper's essay about "Koestlerian Visions of Spartacus".

I remained unaware that a rival project to film *The Gladiators* had given the Kirk Douglas production a serious challenge until I read Bruce Cook's biography, *Dalton Trumbo* (1977), a year after its publication. In it was the revelation (to me, at least) that plans had been underway for a rival film to challenge *Spartacus*, a movie that had actually gone into pre-production before the end of 1957: "...[T]here was a competing project, Arthur Koestler's *The Gladiators*, covering the same Roman slave rebellion, which Anthony Quinn was preparing for production."⁵ Though Quinn was slated to co-star in that unproduced film, he was *not* the prime mover—but at the time of reading I did not know this. Unmentioned there, as I later learned, is that Yul Brynner's Alcione Productions, with United Artists as financier and distributor, was behind the film project, and that a script for *The Gladiators* had been completed by Abe Polonsky.

Cook's cryptic reference prompted letters from me to Anthony Quinn, Kirk Douglas, Arthur Koestler, Stanley Kubrick, as well as to Cook himself. Quinn and Kubrick never responded, and since I forgot to ask how far along *The Gladiators* project had gone before it was cancelled, no one who *did* respond mentioned Polonsky. Nevertheless, I received three replies; the first came from Koestler:

"All I can remember is that some twenty years ago [1958] an American producer obtained an option on *The Gladiators*, but subsequently dropped the project when he discovered that another big American producer intended to make a film based on Howard Fast's novel *Spartacus*."⁶

Kirk Douglas agreed that Koestler's novel was worthy of screen attention, but did not mention that there had been two attempts to merge the competing film projects: "I do have great admiration for Koestler's

⁵ Cook, *Trumbo* 270.

⁶ Koestler to MacAdam, 21 June 1978.

book, and feel that it would have, and still would, make a wonderful movie.”⁷ Bruce Cook confirmed that he had only one source for his information about *The Gladiators*: “I have just moved [to Maryland] ... and have no idea where my leftover *Trumbo* material is. My memory ... tells me that [what I wrote about the parallel movie project came from] Edward Lewis in an interview.”⁸ The outlines of *The Gladiators* project remained largely obscure. As an outsider to Hollywood research of any kind, I was ignorant of the trade papers as a primary source of movie lore, whether or not a particular film went into production, and whether it was released when the project was completed. At the time, I was moving back to the UK to complete a doctoral dissertation in ancient history; the momentum to follow up on that advice was lost.

Another decade went by before my interest was rekindled—this time by Douglas’ autobiography *The Ragman’s Son* (1988) and its chapter on “The Wars of Spartacus”. Within that 31 pp. narrative were details of *The Gladiators* project not before known except by those who had been in contact with the principals, or those who had learned of its promising development and reluctant demise through the media, especially the entertainment world’s trade papers such as *Variety*. No one else until then, as far as I knew, had decided that documenting *The Gladiators* project was a worthwhile research effort, not even as one of Hollywood’s “Greatest Movies Never Made”.⁹ At that time I was living in the USA, on leave of absence from the American University of Beirut, and the chance to undertake such research seemed at hand. The logical place to start, so I thought, was with Douglas. He had just published his recollections of making *Spartacus*. I wrote to him in late February 1989, asking if he would be willing to make his own files available as a head start on my investigating *The Gladiators*. He responded most graciously:

“Yes, several people have contacted me about doing an extensive book on *Spartacus*. It’s a fascinating story, and it is not easy to tie together all the elements because each player in this saga says things from his own point of view ... I have boxes of files. I hesitate to let people use them because sometimes letters or other papers are misleading ... You sound like the right guy who could do a good, honest, story on this subject [the

⁷ Douglas to MacAdam 14 July 1978.

⁸ Cook to MacAdam 26 July 1978.

⁹ Much later, through Duncan Cooper, I learned of David Chandler’s unfinished book *The Year of Spartacus* (1960), which was a planned ‘insider’ account of the making of that film. For its important witness to independent knowledge of *The Gladiators* project, see Chapters 2-4 below.

rivalry with *The Gladiators*]. If you're ever out here [Los Angeles], I hope we can arrange to sit down and talk about it."¹⁰

Unfortunately, my life thereafter became too complicated to undertake that scope of research,¹¹ even though I was now aware that UA's Arthur Krim, Yul Brynner, director-designate Martin Ritt, and Abe Polonsky, were all part of the effort to screen the Koestler novel. Brynner had passed on in 1985, and he would be joined by Ritt in 1990 and Krim in 1994. Polonsky died in 1999. Producer Paul Radin, then unknown to me, passed away in 2001. I was frustrated because Kirk Douglas, and his *Spartacus* producer Eddie Lewis, had left large stores of papers from their company Bryna Pictures, as well as oral histories and interviews concerning their work on *Spartacus*. Neither Yul Brynner, nor his producer and partner in Alcione Films, Paul Radin, nor their production company Alcione, nor Arthur Krim, had left any personal or business papers which would have contained information concerning *The Gladiators*. Ritt left press clippings and two important letters. Much later I learned that Polonsky had left behind his personal *Journal*.

My interest in the creative origin of Koestler's novel *The Gladiators* began to overshadow my curiosity about the abandoned attempt to film it. The centenary of Koestler's birth in 2005 prompted my commemorative essay on the novel that I footnoted above. That same year, I made e-mail contact with the family of artist/novelist Edith Simon, who had translated *The Gladiators* from Koestler's German MS. During the next five years, my interchanges with Koestler biographer Michael Scammell led to the discovery that the original German typescript of *The Gladiators* had survived WWII. Recovery of the novel's original text, and Simon's drawings, prompted me to write and publish more essays and commentaries about both.¹²

¹⁰ Douglas to MacAdam 6 March 1989. Douglas and I exchanged other letters over the next three decades. My last communication from him was a response of 16 August 2019: 'I hope your book is a great success. I look forward to reading a copy once it's completed.' Alas, that was not to be.

¹¹ The protracted civil war in Lebanon made returning there impossible, and it was necessary to find an alternative teaching position, and resettle my family, in the USA. Douglas' generous offer was a much-regretted missed opportunity; some documents on the making of *Spartacus* are still in his library at home and not within the Douglas Collection at the WCFTR in Madison, WI.

¹² MacAdam, "From *Der Sklavenkrieg* to *The Gladiators*" (2017); "Illustrating *The Gladiators* Pts. 1 & 2 (2017); "New Light on Translating Arthur Koestler's *The Gladiators*: Unpublished Correspondence from the Edith Simon Archive," *Translation & Literature* 29 (2020). 220-232.

I did not take up the search for independent information on *The Gladiators* until I stepped down from four decades of teaching in 2011. That same summer, locating, verifying, and purchasing a copy of the long-lost screenplay for *The Gladiators* became one major event in a longer quest to resurrect the history of the failed film project. For details about that endeavor, see my portion of the Preface to Vol. 2 Another was obtaining access to Polonsky's personal *Journals*, now archived at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research (Wisconsin Historical Society at Madison). Those handwritten notes have been helpful in providing a specific context for his now almost-forgotten work on *The Gladiators*.

Just a year after my happy discovery of Polonsky's script, Kirk Douglas published his memoir *I Am Spartacus* (2012), a portion of which provides some additional documentation of the rivalry with *The Gladiators*. Once again, though, Douglas implied that any threat it posed to *Spartacus* ended in late October 1958. Nevertheless, he makes it clear, through an acknowledgment of producer Edward Lewis' major role in *Spartacus*, that a *number* of factors threatened that project: "I especially want to thank my producer, Eddie Lewis, who brought me [Fast's novel]. *There were many days when neither of us thought that Spartacus would get made.*"¹³ As this backstory narrative will demonstrate, *The Gladiators* posed a major threat until several months after the release of *Spartacus* in October 1960.

More research success came from my online probe into the Martin Ritt Collection on file at the Margaret Herrick Library, Beverly Hills, CA. Ritt had saved clippings from *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter* about plans to film *The Gladiators*, and they became the basis for the detailed *Timeline* in Appendix 1 of this volume. Also in that small cache are two critically important letters (neither fully published with commentary until now) that shed bright light on the shadowy dynamics of this film project in its early (May 1958) and later (September 1959) stage, respectively. From the Arthur Koestler Archive at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland I retrieved copies of a few letters exchanged by that author with Paul B. Radin, at that time VP of Alcione and producer-designate of *The Gladiators*. These escaped the research net of his two most recent biographers, the late David Cesarani, and Michael Scammell. Polonsky

¹³ *I Am Spartacus* 206. Emphasis mine. With the death of Lewis in July 2019 at age 99, and Douglas in February 2020 at age 103, an 'insiders' view' of this film rivalry is now totally gone except for unpublished documents such as Douglas' interviews with David Chandler in 1960, and the memoirs that Lewis mentioned to me as a work in progress in 2012.

never mentioned his role in scripting *The Gladiators* to his biographers Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner.

Other breakthroughs came in the summer and autumn of 2014. With the aid of the Margaret Herrick Library staff I made contact with Abe Polonsky's son Henry Polonsky in Los Angeles, who has expressed continued interest in this project. He looked through his father's personal papers for any documents relating to Abe's nearly two-year involvement with *The Gladiators*. He found none. Shortly after that, I made contact with the late Michael Sisson in London. Sisson pointed me to a portion of literary agent A.D. Peters' collection of personal and business papers in the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas (Austin). This proved immensely helpful as a supplement to several letters exchanged between Peters and Koestler in 1957 when the sale of the movie rights to *The Gladiators* was being negotiated by Peters in Hollywood.¹⁴

While that evidence was being assessed, several related factors happily coalesced to provide a correspondingly useful "outsider" view of how and why the attempt to film *The Gladiators* ultimately failed. Among them was making contact with two kindred spirits, film historian and film restoration consultant Duncan Cooper, whose essay on the controversial role of Koestler's novel in the filming of *Spartacus* is featured in Vol. 2, and Spartacus legend enthusiast John Bokina. They share my interest in any and all aspects of the historical Spartacus, the sustained and formidable slave revolt he inspired, and the vast array of literary, political, ideological, commercial, and other manifestations of his legacy.¹⁵ That initial triad of "Spartacans" was augmented by the serendipitous coincidence of discovering that Fiona Radford had recently earned a doctorate at Macquarie University (Sydney, Australia) through her dissertation *The Many Legends of Spartacus* (2012), an in-depth study of the making of that movie.¹⁶ She enthusiastically agreed to contribute a detailed commentary on Polonsky's screenplay (see Vol. 2).

¹⁴ Search success was tempered by some failures. What never surfaced is Polonsky's 100 pp. film treatment for *The Gladiators*, and a 1959 letter from Ritt to Polonsky with script revision ideas suggested when full production was greenlighted for the second time.

¹⁵ Bokina declined to contribute to this project for the very good reason that his own research is now encapsulated in *Images of Spartacus*, to be published in 2021 by Yale University Press.

¹⁶ Cooper and Radford have each added a personal account of their interest in Spartacus lore and legend. Cooper's appears below in this Preface to Vol. 1, and Radford's in the Preface to Vol. 2.

The blacklist era is a constant background reality throughout this volume and its companion. In both, the figure of Abe Polonsky looms large. Threat of exposure hung over everyone forced to work underground to make a living in the entertainment industry, and Polonsky was no exception. Neither was Dalton Trumbo, whose scripts for *Spartacus* and *Exodus* opened the doorway leading to full screen credit to other (but not all) fellow blacklisted. His breakthrough came with the support and encouragement of producer Kirk Douglas and director Otto Preminger, respectively. But in researching and writing this two-volume study, it also became evident to me that others in Hollywood (producer Jerry Wald at Fox Studios, and UA head Arthur Krim), also played a role in helping *Spartacus* make it to the finish line. There is circumstantial but plausible evidence that both men made key decisions at critical moments to delay production of *The Gladiators*, thus giving its rival *Spartacus* the best chance to be financially successful and thereby break the blacklist.

Henry I. MacAdam

Unlike my co-author Henry Macadam, I became gradually aware of *Spartacus* as an historical figure, or the subject of a novel and a motion picture, only when I was in high school. When the film premiered in New York City in October 1960, I saw the huge billboard for the film with portraits of all its main stars while driving down Broadway past the Demille Theater with my parents. This led me to wonder who this *Spartacus* was, and whether he might have had something to do with the ancient Greek city of Sparta.

The next year, as a freshman at Princeton University, I saw *Spartacus* when it was playing there. But I missed the first (and the best) hour of the film, and thus I still had no idea what the picture was about. As I watched the last 2 ½ hours unfold, the plot rang a familiar bell. This was another of those WWII resistance movies from the 1940s that I had seen so often on TV as I was growing up on Long Island. It was the freedom-loving good guys against the tyrannical bad guys. Only to my shock this time, the good guys lost and were slaughtered. Those who survived were crucified.

It was a “prequel story” of the Second World War set during the Roman Republic, in which the Roman “Nazis” won, and went on to rule the world for the next half millennium. One of my roommates, who had seen the whole picture, later filled me in on the events of the first hour of the film. But I was so discouraged by the downbeat ending that I refused

to go back and see the entire film for another decade. Over the next few years, Bantam Books put out at least ten printings of the paperback edition of the Howard Fast novel, with drawings of Kirk Douglas as Spartacus on both covers, but I shunned them as well.

Finally, I opened a copy of the novel to a random page that happened to contain a description of a huge victory won by the slaves against the Romans two years into the war. My eyes were suddenly opened, and I devoured Fast's novel over the next day or so. To my surprise, there were many such battle scenes glorifying the slave army, although there had been no such slave victories shown on screen. I began to wonder where the truth lay. Fast claimed that Spartacus had fought the Romans "for four long years", but the film cut the revolt to just one. Most history books, though they admitted that Spartacus had defeated a large number of Roman armies—the count was usually nine—said his revolt had lasted only two years. A few said three.

I began historical research on the Third Slave War, reading the meager original sources: Plutarch, Florus, Orosius, and Appian. There was precious little scholarly literature in English on the Spartacus War, and I had to crawl my way through books written on the subject in French. These included a fascinating book from the late 1950s by left-wing scholar Jean Paul Brisson, still in print today, that placed the Spartacus War, and the other Sicilian slave wars that preceded it, in the context of the larger problem of agriculture in Italy during this period. I also began to read other modern novels on the subject, such as Arthur Koestler's *The Gladiators* and Maurice Ghnassia's *Arena*.

The distinguished conservative French classical historian Jerome Carcopino had written the introduction to Ghnassia's book, in which he criticized both Fast and Koestler's novels for having "twisted men and events so as to make their fiction fit their own political views."¹⁷ In the case of Fast, those were the convictions of a defender of the goals, and justifier of the sometimes violent methods, espoused by the American Communist Party, which found itself under severe attack at the time (1951) of his writing. In the case of Koestler, his novel expressed his own disillusionment with Marxism in general and Communism in particular, at least as practiced in Russia, and his growing doubts about the capacity of humanity to do away with class society through violent revolution.

Brisson explicitly agreed with Carcopino concerning Koestler's novel, which he claimed was written "without any concern for the historical truth. Whoever wishes to get an accurate idea of the historical character of

¹⁷ Ghnassia, *Arena* ix.

Spartacus must take care not to read this novel, or to try to forget what he has read in it.”¹⁸ He lauded Fast’s novel, writing that it “bears evidence of scrupulous historical research. If he [Fast] has lent to his heroes experiences or goals which are not attested to by history, he has at least deeply understood their spirit.”¹⁹ I did not believe that Koestler’s insightful recreation of the historical context and class tensions that gave rise to this rebellion, an event which not only proved threatening to Rome’s very existence, but also led to the rebels’ isolation and its army’s fatal rupture, deserved such harsh criticism. In contrast, I both felt and feared that in the effort to create a mythical hero for the ages, Fast may well have exaggerated his protagonist’s accomplishments.

I wrote to Howard Fast and asked him what sources he had used in writing his novel. He referred me to the nineteenth century clergyman and labor advocate C. O. Ward’s monumental *The Ancient Lowly* (1880), a later reprint of which he had received as a gift from one of his friends in the Communist Party. Ward’s book contained a nearly 100-page chapter on Spartacus, much of it based on a monograph written by the late nineteenth century German scholar, Otfried Schambach. It also contained lengthy chapters on the previous two slave revolts in Sicily, and on the famous Spanish peasant rebel Viriathus, who led a successful ten-year war of resistance against Roman conquest until his assassination in 139 B. C. My reading of Ward only made the gap between the versions of the Spartacus war found in modern history books, and that in Fast’s novel, yawn even wider.

About this time, *Spartacus* was being shown at the Museum of Modern Art. Stanley Kubrick had entrusted his personal print of the film to the Museum collection, where it was occasionally screened. I finally watched the complete (but still censored) version of the picture, and after a few more viewings on TV, I came to the conclusion that the gap between Fast’s uplifting novel and the depressing film based on it could be explained only by studio censorship of a number of slave victory scenes which the picture’s dialogue suggested had once been a part of it. Putting all the evidence together, I wrote a ten-page letter to Stanley Kubrick asking if at one time there had been such studio-censored battle scenes in the picture, but received no reply. Friends and colleagues suggested that I submit my letter as an article to *Cineaste*, a recently inaugurated quarterly dealing with the art and politics of the cinema, with whose founding editor, Gary Crowds, they were acquainted. An updated version of my

¹⁸ Brisson, *Spartacus* 276.

¹⁹ Brisson, *Spartacus* 276.

letter to Kubrick was published in *Cineaste* in 1975 under the title “*Spartacus*: A Second Look.”

For perhaps fifteen years, I put my historical research about *Spartacus* on the back burner, as I struggled to pass the exams required to join the professional society of my new occupation: consulting pension actuary. In the spring of 1990, I learned that Robert Harris, who had restored *Lawrence of Arabia*, was now in the process of doing the same for *Spartacus*. I also learned that all the production documents, and multiple early versions of the *Spartacus* script, were available in the Kirk Douglas Collection at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. Here was my hoped-for chance that any surviving lost battle scenes from the picture might be found, and thus could be utilized in the forthcoming restoration. Here also was my chance to prove that they *had* existed, but had been cut by the studio.

I planned to pass on that information to *Spartacus*’ restorationists Robert Harris and Jim Katz. Encouraged by Gary Crowdus to write an in-depth article for *Cineaste* on the restoration, I plunged into the process of ordering reams of xerox copies of draft scripts and other production documents from Wisconsin. I corresponded again with Howard Fast, who ultimately met with Harris to offer what assistance he could. I interviewed Harris at his workplace in Westchester, NY (joined by Gary Crowdus and another *Cineaste* editor), and subsequently I wrote two lengthy articles which appeared in *Cineaste* shortly after we attended the restored film’s premiere in New York in April 1991. One, titled “Who Killed *Spartacus*?”, focused on the censorship imposed by Universal against the clear intentions of all the filmmakers at Bryna Productions.

The other, titled “Dalton Trumbo vs. Stanley Kubrick: Their Debate Over Arthur Koestler’s *The Gladiators*”, concerned screenwriter Dalton Trumbo’s battle to prevent Kubrick from introducing a sequence of new scenes that reflected the main thesis of the Koestler novel, which degraded the moral stature of the revolt by placing the blame for its failure on the shoulders of the rank and file slave rebels themselves. Also included were excerpts from our taped interview with Harris, and the ten-page first part of Trumbo’s now famous eighty-page “Report on *Spartacus*,” entitled “The Two Conflicting Points of View on *Spartacus*.” Trumbo’s report was a devastating critique of the first rough cut of the film, and of the many changes to the script made by Kubrick with Douglas’ approval, shifting its theme from what Trumbo termed the “Large *Spartacus*” to what he called the “Small *Spartacus*”. Trumbo’s “Report” had convinced Kirk Douglas to order the shooting of a series of retakes and additional scenes to bring the Large *Spartacus* back into focus.

My research uncovered a series of battle montages inserted into several versions of the ever-changing script, written as the picture was actually being shot, as well as production documents in which Trumbo pleaded that those scenes (or the equivalent) be included in the picture. But I failed to find any smoking gun proving that they had ever been shot, something Harris claimed the continuities he showed us of the versions screened for preview audiences, and later for the press, proved had never happened. In fact, as I learned from him, all the censored or unused scenes shot for the picture had been junked by Universal in 1975. His restoration looked and sounded beautiful, and contained snippets of film censored for sex or violence as well. This included a two-minute homosexual seduction scene that both the studio censors, and the Catholic Church, were unwilling to allow on screen. Nevertheless, in terms of content it was essentially the same picture I had seen twenty years before.

Soon afterward, I went to work for the Federal government and moved to Washington, where I continued my research on the film and the history behind it. I conducted phone interviews with many of the surviving key participants in the making of the picture, and ordered more documents from Wisconsin. These provided hard documentary evidence, as well as definitive eye-witness confirmation by *Spartacus* editor Robert Lawrence, that there had been battle scenes or at least a battle map montage. As the result of a struggle between the filmmakers and the studio, those scenes had gone into and out of the picture over several months while it was being edited. In 1994, I submitted the results of my research to *Cineaste* in a third follow-up article titled "*Spartacus*: Still Censored After All These Years." Although Gary Crowds could not find space for the entire article, nearly two thirds of the text was published in *Cineaste* as a long letter to the editor. Not long afterwards, I posted the entire article onto the newly created Internet Movie Database as one of the three user reviews of *Spartacus* online at the time.

I was later contacted by Martin Winkler, a classicist interested in the ancient world on screen, who taught at George Mason University. Under his auspices, I gave a lecture on the film to his class, and later a short presentation at the National Gallery of Art following a screening of *Spartacus*. Aided by friends at work, I was able to scan my first two essays into my computer and later submitted updated versions of all three to The Kubrick Site, an online website of film scholars' and Kubrick aficionados' writings on that great director's films. Combined and updated versions of my essays were later published as the first two chapters of the scholarly collection, edited by Professor Winkler, titled *Spartacus: Film and History* (2007).

About this time I was contacted by the Australian classicist Fiona Radford, who was writing her doctoral thesis on the making of *Spartacus*. When she asked for my help in obtaining various documents written during the film's production, I was happy to oblige. Next, I was approached by Henry Macadam, who also was seeking help with several articles he was writing concerning how the production of *Spartacus* enabled Dalton Trumbo to break the blacklist. I joined his group of "Spartacans" which included John Bokina, hard at work on a book about the literary and cinematic tradition surrounding Spartacus, and somewhat later, by Radford. Under MacAdam's guidance, I composed a *Timeline* of Dalton Trumbo's campaign to break the blacklist between 1958 and 1963, and uploaded it to the *Academia.edu* website. I revised and enhanced my essay on the final campaign and final battle of the Spartacus War, and placed a series of versions of it on that same website. Together, we also assembled and submitted a detailed proposal to Steven Spielberg, co-signed by John Bokina and Martin Winkler, for a reconstruction of *Spartacus* that would include the lost battle scenes, using additional footage from the film's trailer and action stills from the Universal archives.

During this period I learned of MacAdam's lifelong interest in Koestler's novel, and of his discovery of Abe Polonsky's heretofore lost screenplay for a film based on it. I eagerly read the Polonsky script written for that unmade film. Though more of a fan of the Fast novel and the film based on it, I understood MacAdam's passion to publish the script and the backstory of how *The Gladiators* had indeed almost made it before the cameras on several occasions during or after the production of *Spartacus*. We learned how the effort to film *The Gladiators* had lasted years longer than Kirk Douglas admitted in his two accounts of the making of *Spartacus*, and how outside intervention by another studio had frustrated a later effort just as pre-production of *The Gladiators* moved into high gear. I became fascinated by the subject, and determined to learn whether in fact the picture had been the victim of foul play rather than just of the hesitancy or waning interest of its star and executive producer, Yul Brynner.

Together MacAdam and I delved through the online archives of *Variety* and the *New York Times* for clues and signposts to the progress and survival of *The Gladiators* project. Radford transcribed the entire Polonsky screenplay, and created a detailed and enlightening commentary which is the highlight of Vol. 2. I also became MacAdam's partner in analyzing the implications of what we found in the archives regarding the intentions and actions of the key players: Brynner, Arthur Krim, head of

United Artists, Martin Ritt, the film's director, Paul Radin, its producer and driving force behind the effort to make it, and Abe Polonsky, the author of several extant drafts of the script. We also examined the activities of a host of other players whose actions or lack thereof directly impacted the fate of the production. Many of my thoughts found their way into a series of endless emails between the two of us, some of which became paragraphs in this book when MacAdam sat down to write and revise it. At that point, it became clear to both of us that the narrative backstory that emerges in Volume 1 is very much a joint endeavor.

Duncan Cooper

