Trumbo Does It Again: 'Spartacus' Is Soft-Sell Propaganda.

By George Lakoff, '62

SPARTACUS, a 12 million dollar spectacle now winging forth blood at the Astor, is a toned-down version of Howard Fast's Martian novel about the Roman slave revolt. Screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, formerly one of Hollywood's top ten Communists, seems, ironically, to have stripped Fast's novel of most of its Marxist themes and to have replaced them with themes more acceptable to an American audience.

Rather than to overthrow Rome and to set up a new society in its place, the slaves in the movie want merely to liberate themselves and to return to their respective homelands. They seek a limited goal, rather than a far-reaching reform. Of course, they lose to the Roman legions, but they give them a good fight and die as martyrs. The movie ends happily as Spartacus, hanging crucified from a cross, sees his wife and son escape to freedom.

Jean Simmons as Spartacus' wife, Varinia, is sweet, demure, and delightfully feminine — not at all like the knife-wielding peasant woman of Fast's novel. Kirk Douglas in his boat-neck toga seemed like Mat Dillon with a sword. Still despite all of his concessions to the American taste and all the Hollywood schmaltz, Trumbo seems to have had the last word.

In his exegesis of Fast's novel, Trumbo has shifted the political spotlight from the conflict between Rome and the slaves to the struggle in Rome between the republicans and the aristocrats. The republicans are reminiscent of the modern capitalists. They have won freedom for themselves and have attained to a high standard of living, but their economy and indeed their whole way of life depends upon the slaves, who might represent downtrodden workers, but more likely depict citizens of underdeveloped countries. The republicans refuse to ameliorate the conditions of the slaves, and when the slaves revolt, the responsibility for putting down the rebellion falls on the republican government.

When the slaves defeat the republican army, the aristocratic general stages a coup d'état and Crassus, the richest of the generals, becomes dictator. In a modern setting, Rome and Crassus might be France and De Gaulle.

The compassion that Gracchus, the republican leader, comes to feel for Varinia is indicative of the class solidarity that the republicans under a dictator might achieve with the slaves. At the film's end, the viewer sees diabolical Crassus as the bad guy and avuncular Gracchus as the good guy, and the viewer identifies with the republicans.

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N.Y. Pro Musica and I Solisti Di Zagreb Perform Sunday

Two distinguished musical groups, the New York Pro Musica and I Solisti Di Zagreb, gave MIT students an excellent opportunity to become acquainted with less familiar areas of music last Sunday.

Both these groups, for all their genuine dissimilarities, serve the common function of filling a musical gap; the first a gap in time, the second a gap in dimension. The New York Pro Musica, making its second appearance in Kresge Auditorium, has for some years been giving programs of Elizabethan and Jacobean music for groups in size between solo and chamber groups and the modern symphony orchestra.

Noel Greenberg and his highly trained organization met with an enthusiastic reception for their exclusively English program of Elizabethan and Jacobean music. One disadvantage of so specialized a repertory is that, to the untrained ear, it all seems to have the same, antique “flavor,” forever charming and relaxing that flavor may be. But each of the Pro Musica musicians was expert enough in this field to make the individual pieces fresh and vital, and it was a pleasure to see them perform this music with such relish and enjoyment.

The Solisti Di Zagreb, a string chamber orchestra of twelve led by the talented cellist-conductor Antonio Janigro, appeared before a large audience Sunday night at Symphony Hall. Throughout the evening, their skill was apparent in music that ranged from Corelli to Britten. Perhaps the high point of the concert was the Bercehitt ‘Collo Concerto, with Jazigro as soloist.

— Harry W. McGraw, '62

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