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Becoming a Macho Mensch: Stanley Kubrick, *Spartacus* and 1950s Jewish Masculinity

‘The New York and Jewish origins and backgrounds of many of those associated with *Spartacus* – Douglas, Kubrick, and Curtis, among others – provide a political and cultural subtext to the film’ (Girgus 95).

‘It’s just as good as “Paths of Glory” [1957], and certainly there’s as much of myself in it.’ (Kubrick, quoted in Archer, no pp.).

Introduction

Three of the principal agents behind *Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, 1960) were Jewish. These were screenwriter Howard Fast, on whose eponymous 1951 novel the film was based; star and motivating force behind the film, Kirk Douglas; and director Stanley Kubrick.¹ This resulted in references in the film to the Exodus from Egypt, the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, as well as other issues of contemporary concern to Jews in the late 1950s such as anticommunism, the civil rights movement, intolerance, the House Un-American Activities Committee’s investigations into the movie industry and the resulting Hollywood blacklist. The film also commented on other issues of toleration - not specifically involving Jews, but other ‘minority’ races.² However, while such scholars as Geoffrey Cocks, Margaret Burton and Margaret Malamud, among others, have noted how *Spartacus* can be read as Jewish in these ways, they have done so with little recourse to the Kubrick and other archives. Consequently there is still scope to explore in more depth the underlying Jewish thematics of the film, particularly with reference to these archival materials, all of which shed significant light on the production process. In particular, they reveal that a key input was the very Jewish ideas of the non-Jewish screenwriter Dalton Trumbo who was brought on board

to beef up Fast's initial script. Yet these Jewish elements were repressed for the final film. Nonetheless, as will be shown, they were clearly evident in the production history and their subtle footprints remained. As a consequence, Jewishness was 'textually submerged' (Shohat 215) in *Spartacus* and hence detectable to those able to read the clues and/or those familiar with Fast's best-selling novel; contemporary re/viewers, as we shall see, certainly noted Jewish traces in the film.

This article will argue that Kubrick was drawn to this material, in part, because of the circumstances of his personal life, which prompted an inquiry into and reckoning with Kubrick's own identity as a Jewish man, specifically, a son, father and husband. As these considerations were initially treated by Kubrick through the prism of Jewish masculinity, I will focus on three interrelated, yet wholly and previously unexplored, elements of the Jewish male self-image in *Spartacus*: the character of David the Jew, the Jewishness of the character Antoninus, and the Jewish philosophy of 'manliness' known as '*menschlikayt*'. This philosophy privileged a Jewish posture of timidity, and denigrated conventional '*goyish*' ('un/non-Jewish/Gentile') masculinity to produce a new character type known as the '*macho mensch*' (Alpert 109). In helping to promote this new character type *Spartacus* built upon and contributed to a particular movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Hollywood whereby historical and biblical epics in which Jewish men began to feature as Jewish characters, both implicitly and explicitly, appeared far more frequently than since the first three decades of the century. Ultimately, it will contend that the underlying Jewishness of Fast's novel, Trumbo's various screenplay drafts and the interventions of Douglas and Kubrick, still penetrated through to the final screen version, even if explicit references to Jews, Jewishness, and Judaism were conspicuously absent from the film itself. These I will deal with in turn, before concluding with the importance of the Jewishness of *Spartacus* for understanding both Kubrick and his career as a whole.

A Kubrick Film

Kubrick agreed to direct *Spartacus* for many reasons. First, it offered the chance to establish himself as a major Hollywood director. Second, it was an opportunity to helm a star-studded, big-budget, box office blockbuster. And, not having made a film since 1957, he needed to feed a young and growing family. While working on *Paths*, Kubrick had met Susanne Christian (née Christiane Susanne Harlan). Shortly thereafter, she became his girlfriend and they moved in together in Munich. They married in 1958. Susanne Christian already had a young daughter, Katharina. In 1959 their daughter Anya – Kubrick’s first child – was born followed by his second daughter, Vivian, in 1960.

Kubrick surely empathised with Spartacus as a father figure. (He may well have later likened the experience of working on the studio production of *Spartacus* to that of a slave, too!) As a result, probably not un-coincidentally, Kubrick’s own personal life and the stuff of *Spartacus* uncannily overlapped. It is significant that in Fast’s novel, as well as in initial casting, the character of Spartacus’ lover and wife, Varinia, was Germanic and the German actress Sabina Bethmann was screen-tested and hired for the part, mirroring Kubrick’s own life at that time. Furthermore, Natalie Zemon Davis speculated that Kubrick was moved to end on Spartacus and Varinia’s son surviving because of the birth of his two daughters (39). Kubrick said, following the birth of Vivian:

When you get right down to it, the family is the most primitive and visceral and vital unit in our society. You may stand outside your wife’s hospital room during childbirth uttering, ‘My God, what a responsibility! ... what am I doing here?’ and then you go in and look down at the face of your child and – zap! – the most ancient programming takes over and your response is one of wonder and joy and pride (Davis 39-40).

The historical figure and plight of Spartacus and his fellow slaves also appealed to Kubrick. It was a clear choice in part because of its underlying left-wing and anti-

McCarthyite sentiments,³ and in part because Kubrick's sympathies lay with the outcast and the ostracised. Kubrick told the *New York Times* in 1960:

It concerns the outsider who is passionately committed to action against the social order. I mean the outsider in the Colin Wilson sense--the criminal, maniac, poet, lover, revolutionary. The protagonists of 'Paths of Glory', 'The Killing' [1956] 'Spartacus' and my next film, 'Lolita' [1962], are all outsiders fighting to do some impossible thing, whether it's pulling a perfect robbery or saving innocent men from execution by a militaristic state or carrying on a love affair with a 12-year-old girl (Archer no pp.).

At some point he had independently read Arthur Koestler's version of the Spartacus story, *The Gladiators* (1939).

Motivated by these concerns, as the archival production documents reveal, Kubrick was able to set his stamp on anything that was not nailed down (much to the annoyance of Douglas, Trumbo, the Production Code Administration and the National League of Decency). Two major examples, of which there are many, were the removal of all but two lines of Spartacus' dialogue during the first 30 minutes and the orchestration of the climactic battle scene and its particularly gruesome shots of fighting, mass killings and mutilation. (Archer no pp.).

Consequently Kubrick was certainly willing to put his name to the script (Trumbo, memo to Edward Lewis, 21 Sep. 1960, Box 24, Folder 8, DT/WHS). In fact, Kubrick wrote to production aide, Stan Margulies, expressing his worry that Anthony Mann was receiving too much credit for his initial work on the film. 'I am extremely concerned that it be perfectly clear that Tony Mann did only 1 sequence in this film, the mine sequence. Or put it this way – that it's my film but 1 sequence'. He then urged Margulies to check 'exactly how many shooting days he did not counting tests or weekends.' He continued, 'Press people asked me

over here how much of the film I did? I should be extremely depressed if this point were not absolutely clear to the American press and the Foreign as well!’ (Kubrick, memo to Stan Margulies, 21 Oct. 1959, Box 33, Folder 9, KD/WHS). He later said, ‘I directed the actors, I composed the shots, and I edited the movie’ (Phillips and Hill 374). Furthermore, in an interview with the *New York Times*, he boasted:

It’s just as good as ‘Paths of Glory’, and certainly there’s as much of myself in it. I don’t mean to minimize the contributions of the others involved, but the director is only one who can authentically impose his personality onto a picture, and the result is his responsibility – partly because he’s the only one who’s always there (Archer, no pp.).

Kubrick also gave his active assistance to the film’s restoration in 1991.⁴

David the Jew

At this time, the mid- to late 1950s were a period in which filmmakers, both Jewish and otherwise, began to introduce a wider range of Jewish themes and characters, including the Holocaust and Israel, into their films in a fashion not seen since the 1920s (Erens, Friedman). After what Henry Popkin called ‘the great retreat’ (51), *Jews as Jews* began to appear on the screen with more frequency. Explicit Jewishness was observable in such historical and biblical epics as *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1956), *Ben-Hur* (William Wyler, 1959) and *Exodus* (Otto Preminger, 1960). Consequently, by the late 1950s, there had been a pronounced growth in the observable Jewishness of film stars such as Douglas and Curtis, leading to an increased willingness to point it out, or vice versa, the increased willingness of people to point it out led to a growth in observable Jewishness (Kaufman). In March 1960, for example, comedian Lenny Bruce publically outed both Douglas and Curtis when he commented ‘Even the Vikings are Jewish’ (11). British newspaper *The Jewish*

Chronicle opened its review of *Spartacus* with the words, ‘Two of Hollywood’ leading Jewish stars, Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis, combine with a glittering cast [...]’ (F.H.S. 38).

Spartacus also fit into Hollywood’s so-called ‘Israeli period’ which lasted from the early to mid-sixties. The key film sparking this cycle was, of course, *Exodus*, itself an adaptation of Leon Uris’s hugely successful 1958 novel *Exodus* which, according to Paul Breines, promoted a fantasy of the muscular ‘New Jew’, the modern warrior reborn in violence from the ashes of the gentle old-world shtetl Jew, and providing a counterpoint to the Holocaust’s images of Jewish weakness, victimhood and passivity (54-59). Like *Exodus*, tough and muscular Jewish men pervaded Fast’s novel. Fast constantly stressed how Jews had a reputation for their *sica*-fighting skills (107). One whole chapter was devoted to the viewpoint of ‘David the Jew’, whom Fast described as ‘lean, hawk-faced, thick bitter lips, and green eyes in a clean-shaven, tanned face and head’ (107). David is the last fighter to be crucified and not Spartacus whose body is never identified.

If Fast made frequent and detailed references to Jews in his novel, these were amplified by Trumbo in his various draft screenplays. Trumbo expanded the role of David and magnified his Jewishness. Under Trumbo’s penmanship, David became a rabbi and one of Spartacus’s trusted aides, a brother-in-arms. A draft of the battle sequence highlights his importance:

In the immediate foreground a slave soldier sits erect, his head bowed forward as if in prayer. The shifting balance inside his congealing body causes him abruptly to topple over sidewise with a shocking THUMP. At this moment our CAMERA begins to TRUCK FORWARD. We see the body of David the Jew, transfixed by a spear through his chest (‘Scene outlines (battle scenes and others)’, n.d., Box 39, Folder 18, KD/WHS).

Trumbo even has David organize a mass marriage ceremony preceding the final battle sequence. In considerable detail, Trumbo painted a very Jewish scene, which consisted of a fabric roof place on four poles to represent the temple, beneath which is another smaller wedding canopy. Beneath that is an altar on which a seven-branched Menorah is standing. David wears a tallit. He chants in Hebrew and invokes 'Talmudic law'. He makes a speech in which he compares the slaves to the Hebrews of the Exodus: 'Behold us here in the wilderness – a little company of slaves' ('Revised Final', 16 Jan. 1959, Box 38, Folder 16, KD/WHS). Kubrick rejected this marriage scene, however, because, according to Trumbo, it reminded him of the marriage of Adolf Hitler to Eva Braun ('NOTE #2: The mass-marriage', n.d., Box 24, Folder 8, DT/WHS). But it might well have been because Trumbo's vision was full of anachronistic images, either demonstrating little understanding of the historical development of Judaism, or betraying the presumption that a mainstream American audience would not know either. Fast objected for this very reason. Even Geoffrey M. Shurlock of the Production Code Administration advised caution on these points: 'It would be well to get competent technical advice regarding the portrayal of David, the Rabbi' (letter to Kathryn McTaggart, 14 Aug. 1958, PCA).

Although David played a much bigger role in Fast's novel, as well as in Trumbo's various drafts, his explicit Jewishness was eventually rendered invisible on screen in the finished film. While the character remained, he is never referred to by name, and with little actual dialogue the only clue to his Jewishness was the actor who played him: Harold J. Stone.⁵ The downplaying of David's central role in Fast's novel and Trumbo's scripts allowed for the concomitant growth of Spartacus as a subsurface Jewish character. Douglas wrote, 'My role of Spartacus was a myth. It didn't exist. I came up with the idea of combining his character and the character of David the Jew' (370). One clear example of this change is that in the film David is not the last slave to be crucified (he is the penultimate one)

– that honour is reserved for Spartacus. In this way the extant Jewishness of David was absorbed by Spartacus, rendering David a pallid version of the character as sketched in the novel and draft screenplays.

Through palimpsest, performance and casting, those who were familiar with Fast's novel were now invited to read Spartacus himself as Jewish. The novel provided various clues to reading Spartacus in this way. Spartacus was a 'Thracian' and, as Fast pointed out in his novel, Thracians were 'a grouping or profession more than a race, for there were numerous Jews and Greeks among them – who were most desired at this time. They fought with the *sica*, a short, slightly curved dagger, the common weapon in Thrace and Judea, where most of them were reunited' (105). Furthermore, 'in the sporting language of the city of Rome and in the common slang of the arena, a Thracian was anyone who fought with the *sica*. Thereby, the Jew was a Thracian' (Fast 133-4).

Douglas's Jewishness certainly motivated him to make *Spartacus* in the first place. As he recalled:

Looking at these ruins, and at the Sphinx and the pyramids in Egypt, at the palaces in India, I wince. I see thousands and thousands of slaves carrying rocks, beaten, starved, crushed, dying. I identify with them. As it says in the Torah: 'Slaves were we unto Egypt.' I come from a race of slaves. That would have been *my* family, *me*' (357).

Douglas therefore desired, according to Elley, 'a Roman variation on the let-my-people-go-theme' (110). As a result, Spartacus very much reads like a Moses-like liberator who, having killed the overseer, leads the slaves out of captivity and into a Promised Land he will never see (Elley 110-1; Wyke 69). In another nod to Moses, of whom it is written 'no one knows his burial place to this day' (Deut 34.6), the whereabouts of Spartacus' grave are also unknown. And some of the publicity of the film posed Spartacus in a Moses-like fashion, standing with a burning touch ('Let my people go!') while the battle rages around him

(Hughes 77). Catholic viewers certainly upheld this reading, detecting Jewish traces in the film; a National League of Decency reviewer, Elizabeth Schmitt, for example, referred to Varinia (Jean Simmons) as ‘a proud young Jewess’ (USCCBC).

Douglas was also ‘a passionate supporter of Zionism and Israeli independence’ (Baxter 133). This was showcased in his earlier role as a traumatized death-camp survivor in *The Juggler*. ‘After bouts of violence and flight across the country, he finds love and prospect of recovery on a northern border kibbutz, the redemptive qualities of Jewish rural settlements in the Galilee later being a theme also in *Exodus*’ (Goodman 211). It helps to explain the parallels between *Spartacus* and *Exodus* which Trumbo began working on while he was finishing up on *Spartacus*. It also explains the depiction of Spartacus’ army as, in Pauline Kael’s words, ‘a giant kibbutz on the move’ (Malamud 145). Baxter attributes these sequences to Douglas who, in order to ‘emphasise the *gemütlich* nature of life in the slave army, and to suggest parallels with the flight out of Egypt [had] insisted on some sentimental cutaways of frolicking children, affectionate oldsters, young lovers, family picnics and free gladiators exercising traditional crafts’ (148).

Kubrick allowed this material to remain intact. Although Kael asked at this point, ‘Is Kubrick dozing at the controls?’ (Malamud 145), some of it may well have been attributable to Kubrick. In a postscript to his *The Gladiators*, which, as mentioned above, Kubrick had read, Koestler had written

among the numerous cranks, reformers and sectarians whom his horde must have attracted, Spartacus chose as his mentor and guide a member of the Judaic sect of the Essenes— the only sizeable civilised community that practised primitive Communism at that time, and taught that ‘what is mine is thine, and what is thine is mine’ (no pp.).

Certainly, Dalton Trumbo, along with various critics have suggested that the import of Koestler's ideas into the film was Kubrick's idea (Cooper, Radford), hinting that, like Douglas, Kubrick shared some affection for the Zionist project.

Antoninus ('the Jew')

The removal of the explicit Jewishness of David the Jew also allowed for the further exploration of Jewish masculinity through the introduction of a character that did not appear in Fast's novel: the Greek slave boy Antoninus who becomes like a son to Spartacus. It is nowhere identified in the film that Antoninus is Jewish; however, as with the character of Spartacus, the casting of the Jewish actor, Tony Curtis, in the role – which was specially created for him (Douglas 369) – is the first clue towards uncovering Antoninus' Jewishness. Curtis was born Bernard Schwartz in 1925 at the same Flower Hospital in Manhattan that was part of the medical school at which Kubrick's father trained (Cocks 26). What is more, as played by Curtis, Antoninus provides 'a token urban component' (Braden 178) in that 'he speaks the American urban ethnic idiom' (Hark 170n.7). Here 'urban' suggests his Jewishness. *Time's* reviewer in 1960 also felt as much when s/he wrote, 'Antoninus is played by Actor Curtis with 'an accent which suggests that the ancient Tiber was a tributary of the Bronx River' (102). The Bronx is also where Kubrick grew up and the cameraman Russ Metty made the connection between ethnicity and that particular district of New York when he would say (in reference to Kubrick), 'Let's get that little Jew-boy from the Bronx off the crane' (LoBrutto 185).

Kubrick and Curtis bonded in a way that anticipated the director's relationship with Peter Sellers on his next two films. Curtis recalled, 'We were about three years separated in age, and we had an excellent relationship' (Hughes 69). Christiane Kubrick added that Kubrick 'loved Tony Curtis, because they had lots in common' (Bogdanovich 1999). Cocks

notes that when Kubrick ‘was unhappily dealing the lack of directorial control and the intimidation and arrogance of established actors and technicians, many of them Gentile, on *Spartacus*, his first and last big-budget Hollywood assignment, he found refuge in friendship with Tony Curtis’ (26). As a result, Radford speculates that Kubrick concentrated more on Antoninus who, ‘after the breakout, *Spartacus* seems to value just as highly as Varinia [Jean Simmons]’ even to the extent that there ‘was a plan to give Antoninus more of Varinia’s part at one stage’ (no pp.).

Consequently, where David’s Jewishness was rendered non-explicit by the final shooting script, those traces that did remain (and which had not been sucked up by *Spartacus*) were absorbed into the character of Antoninus who, as a result, certainly reveals some stereotypical Jewish traits. Antoninus is a poet and a scholar who taught his master’s children. He is also a singer and performer of magic tricks. He is thus defined by his intellect, possessing what is known, approvingly, in Yiddish as *Yiddische Kopf* (Jewish brains). This is emphasised when *Spartacus* and Antoninus first meet. Fingering Antoninus’ fine white linen tunic, *Spartacus* inquires with some scepticism (assuming, as many anti-Semites do of Jews, that Antoninus has not done a hard day’s work in his life): ‘What kind of work did *you* do?’

Antoninus: Singer of songs.

Spartacus: Singer of songs? But what *work* did you do?

Antoninus: That’s my work. I also juggle.⁶

Ironically, despite *Spartacus*’ initial cynicism, Antoninus’ intellectual, non-physical, role is continued by *Spartacus* who, initially, refuses to let him fight (‘An animal can learn to fight. You won’t learn to kill; you’ll teach us songs’), and uses him as his eyes, reading key documents for the illiterate slave leader. Ultimately, *Spartacus* symbolically adopts Antoninus as his son. Thus, if *Spartacus* can be read as conceptually Jewish, then Antoninus becomes his symbolically Jewish son.

Furthermore, according to Trumbo, Antoninus possessed a ‘somber, feminine beauty’ (DVD). Although this might seem to play against the tough macho type discussed above, the queer, feminine and sissy Jew was very much a key part of Jewish self-characterization over the centuries and became a key way in which Jews defined their own masculinity (Boyarin). This is underlined by the fact that where Antoninus is the subject of Spartacus’ fatherly affection, he is the object of the homosexual desire of the Roman general and politician Marcus Licinius Crassus (Laurence Olivier). Given to him as a gift, Crassus chooses Antoninus as his body servant because of his youth and beauty. He wants to engineer an opportunity to seduce him. Trumbo even worried about the ‘homosexual implications of the Antoninus death scene, and the kiss, especially given Crassus’ presence’ (DVD). Curtis’ previous cross-dressing role in *Some Like it Hot* lends weight to this interpretation.

Menschlikayt

The introduction of the character of Antoninus also facilitated another Jewish strategy underlying *Spartacus*, namely, the emphasis placed on the differences between the Romans and the slaves. The film constantly contrasts the wholesomeness of Spartacus and the slaves with the licentiousness of the Romans, in particular Crassus. The character of Antoninus allowed Kubrick/Douglas/Fast/Trumbo to highlight this distinction even more. Where Spartacus is a model of restraint – he refuses to rape or even touch Varinia when she is first offered to him – Crassus inter alia indulges their every desire. Where Spartacus marries and fathers a child, Crassus is childless, attempting the homosexual and potentially underage (as suggested by Crassus’ repeated use of the term ‘boy’) seduction of his slave Antoninus.

Significantly, when Crassus makes his move on Antoninus, he uses the following food analogy:

Crassus: Do you eat oysters?

Antoninus: When I have them, master.

Crassus: Do you eat snails?

Antoninus: No, master.

Crassus: Do you consider the eating of oysters to be moral and the eating of snails to be immoral?

Antoninus: No, master.

Crassus: Of course not. It is all a matter of taste, isn't it?

Antoninus: Yes, master.

Crassus: And taste is not the same as appetite, and therefore not a question of morals.

Antoninus: It could be argued so, master.

Crassus: My robe, Antoninus. My taste includes both snails and oysters.⁷

Knowledge of *kashrut* (the Jewish dietary laws) here introduces extra critical commentary on the scene. According to the laws of *kashrut*, seafood is only kosher if it has fins and scales. Consequently, all shellfish (indeed anything with a shell) is forbidden. The symbolic or allegorical interpretation of the *kashrut* laws has it that fins and scales on a fish are signs of endurance and self-control; the lack of them can be construed to mean wild, impetuous abandon. Shells here stand as a code for wantonness and excess. Thus the metaphor of 'snails and oysters' hints at Crassus' warped sexuality, licentiousness, and narcissistic, libertine all-consuming but entirely self-directed passions (Tatum 132-3). Crassus' turpitude, as expressed through his sybaritic and *treyf* (explicitly non-kosher) tastes indicates the feelings of Jewish repugnance towards Crassus and the Romans.

The emphasis placed on the distinction between the Romans and the slaves was part of the film's wider strategy in which a series of binary opposites are pitched against one another as if in gladiatorial combat, namely Romans vs. slaves, civilization vs. barbarity, and deviancy vs. heterosexuality, and '*goyim naches*' vs. *menschlikayt*. Denied the right to bear

arms, ride horses, duel, joust or arch competitively, Jews, in return disparagingly called such pursuits *goyim naches* (literally ‘pleasure for/of the gentiles’). *Goyim naches* was ‘the contemptuous Jewish term for those characteristics that in European culture have defined a man as *manly*: physical strength, martial activity, and aggressiveness’ (Boyarin 78). Since the word *goy* (Hebrew: singular of *goyim*, meaning gentiles) is related to that of *geviyah* (Hebrew: ‘body’), the word *goyim* can also be interpreted to mean a ‘preoccupation with the body, sensuality, rashness, and ruthless force’ (Sammons 91). Thus *goyim naches* included such bodily activities as fighting, dueling, wrestling, hunting, and sports, in particular, the Romans privileging of such bodily displays as gladiatorial fights, lions devouring Christian martyrs, chariot races, orgies, food and drink. Jews rejected these manly bodily pursuits and their attendant decadent and competitive drive ethos as *goyish*.

Instead, a code of *menschlikayt* was developed, as a means of articulating Jewish superiority through a refusal to share the aggressive values of the Jews’ oppressors. Deriving from the Yiddish term *mensch* (literally ‘man’), meaning a decent, upstanding, ethical, and responsible person with admirable characteristics, *menschlikyat* is the Yiddish expression referring to ethical responsibility, social justice, and decency for others expressed in kindness. *Menschlikayt* emphasized the moderate, meek, timid and intellectual values of *Yiddishkeit* (Jewishness/Jewish culture). *Menschlikyat* critiqued the values of the predominant *goyische* masculinity and its *goyim naches*. Yiddishist Irving Howe defined it as ‘a readiness to live for ideals beyond the clamor of the self, a sense of plebeian fraternity, an ability to forge a community of moral order even while remaining subject to a society of social disorder, and a persuasion that human existence is a deeply serious matter for which all of us are finally accountable’ (645). The Yiddish writer Leo Rosten described a *mensch* – the term at the heart of *mesnschlikayt* – as follows:

1. A human being. ‘After all, he is a *mensch*, not an animal.’

2. An upright, honorable, decent person. ‘Come on, act like a *mensh!*’
3. Someone of consequence; someone to admire and emulate: someone of noble character. ‘Now, there is a real *mensch!*’

The hero of Uris’ *Exodus*, Ari Ben Canaan, provided the template of what Rebecca Alpert called the ‘macho mensch’ (109). According to Alpert, the macho-mensch ‘displays three characteristics: he is an outstanding athlete; he is an ethical human being who displays his virtues through gentility and kindness; and he is demonstrably connected to his Jewish identity, marking his *menschlichkeit* through the attributes of loyalty and bravery.’ He is also a ‘conqueror with a conscience’, combining his power with morality (ibid.).

Certainly, this definition applies to Spartacus as depicted in the film, which goes to great lengths to articulate the difference between the ‘animal’ and the ‘mensch’. Trumbo pointed out how ‘Spartacus begins as an animal and becomes a man,⁸ that is he becomes conscious of other than himself, that the essence of manhood is to rise above the petty ambitions of one’s self with something larger, with mankind as a whole’. As the producer Edward Lewis put it, Spartacus begins as a ‘beast of burden’ and the film ‘dramatize[s] his growth as a man’ (DVD). Trumbo described their ‘efforts to make Spartacus a human being, a man of nobility, a humane leader’ (DVD). Even Mann, before he was fired, implored Douglas to ‘Play him [Spartacus] with a spark of decency, of humanity’ (Baxter 129).

Spartacus begins the film, in the words of Trumbo, as ‘a powerful, filthy, brutalized animal’ (DVD). All he can do is bite the ankle of a guard when he seeks to assist a fellow slave. Furthermore, when he is transported to the gladiatorial school, he (along with the other new gladiators) is branded, a practice that was only used on animals in ancient Rome (Winkler 169 n.31). ‘I’m not an animal!’ Spartacus soon exclaims. In this statement, not only does Spartacus resist the Romans’ dehumanising tactics, but also it reveals him to be a *mensch*. The context in which he utters this line certainly illustrates his *menschlichkeit* for it is

when he is first paired with Varinia and exercises restraint. Later, when Spartacus discovers the gladiators forcing two captured Roman noblemen to fight to the death, he first, contemptuously, addresses the captives: ‘Noble Romans! Fighting like animals’. He then turns on his comrades, rebuking them ‘like Moses scolding the reveling Israelites’ (Cyrino 116): ‘I swore that if I ever got out of this place, I’d die before I’d watch two men fight to the death again [...] What are becoming – Romans?’ He asks ‘Are we animals?’ Davis points out how such attitudes were rare in the Roman world of Spartacus’ era, ‘except among small communities such as the Jews of Rome’ (32). Spartacus was clearly following the advice from another film from the same year, *The Apartment*, directed by Billy Wilder, whose work Kubrick admired:

Dr. Dreyfuss: Be a mensch! You know what that means?

C.C. Baxter: I’m not sure.

Dr. Dreyfuss: A mensch - a human being!

Dreyfuss’ advice echoes Douglas’ character’s response in his previous film with Kubrick, *Paths of Glory* when an officer compares his troops’ behaviour to that of animals: ‘Well, they never learn, it seems. They get in a tight spot under heavy fire -- gang up every time -- herd instinct, I suppose. Kind of a lower animal sort of thing.’ Dax (Douglas) responds, ‘Kind of a human thing, it seems to me. Or do you make a distinction between the two, Major?’

Spartacus equates Roman-ness with animality and resists both.

Indeed, any awkward or uncomfortable facts that contradicted the image of Spartacus as a mensch were suppressed in order to preserve his reputation. Even a tough hero such as Spartacus was expected not to be fully macho or *goyish*. Kubrick wrote, at the time, ‘it is essential for Spartacus to be motivated by a simple, straightforward positive belief in the goodness of man, together with a faith in the eventual ascendance of human dignity. He must

not be motivated by negative rationalizations of the slaves [sic] plight' (letter to Eddie Lewis and Sam Jackson (Trumbo), Box 24, Folder 6, DT, WHS). Trumbo later wrote to Kubrick:

You talked to me the other day about the character of Spartacus. What was it, really? I thought about it until I saw the film for a second time. I suggest you get over to the projection room and look at the first hour all by yourself. That's what Spartacus's character is! You conceived it, you created it, you directed it, you shot it – it's all yours, and it's all there, and it's wonderful. Spartacus is gentle. For having characterized him thus, we are all in your debt. We must not depart from that basic characteristic of our hero: Spartacus is gentle! ('Report on *Spartacus* (after having seen the film, n.d., Box 27, Folder 6, DT/WHs).

Kubrick had emphasised to Lewis and Trumbo (20 Nov. 1959) that it was 'essential for Spartacus to be motivated by a simple, straightforward positive belief in the goodness of man, together with a faith in the eventual ascendance of human dignity. He must not be motivated by negative rationalizations of the slaves [sic] plight.' Thus, as Cyrino points out, 'the film resists any glorification of violent rebellion, focusing instead on a hero who becomes inexplicably more pacifist as the film continues' (116). For example, Hark notes how *Spartacus* 'disingenuously elides the process by which the slaves amass a looted fortune of 50 million sesterces in order to buy transportation out of the country' (161). Furthermore, the film's stress on the love story between Varinia and Spartacus domesticates Spartacus by focusing on his role as a husband and father (in keeping with the gender roles and family values of the 1950s), further distracting attention from his political and revolutionary successes, but it also has the effect of humanising him, emphasising his role as both a real and symbolic father, and of being a *mensch* (Futrell). This is cemented when Spartacus kills Antoninus: as a mercy killing in order to prevent a lengthier torturous death by crucifixion, it is an act of (Jewish) love rather than (Roman) violence for its own sake.

Kubrick the Jew

The precise reasons for the downplaying of the Jewishness of the David character are not clear. One explanation might be that, as Fiona Radford points out

Fast was brought back on board in June-July 1959, possibly at Kubrick's instigation. (This perhaps accounts for Fast's apparent fondness for Kubrick). Fast became involved in the screenwriting process again after someone (possibly Kubrick) uncovered his script, leading to the incorporation of some of his ideas in the final film' (no pp.).

Another reason, Cocks suggests, was narrative and box-office economy (100).

According to Trumbo, it was because Kubrick was a guy who is a Jew, and he's a man who hates Jews. He has said to me that the Jews are responsible for their own persecutions because they have separated themselves from the rest of humanity. He has said this to me in relation to the slaves and Spartacus ('Notes', 23 Aug. 1959, Box 24, Folder 8, DT/WHS).

In this light, it is significant that Kubrick's personal life had certainly undergone some profound changes in the years immediately preceding *Spartacus*. Kubrick's new wife, Christiane, was not Jewish. After two failed marriages to two different Jewish women – he divorced his first wife Toba Metz in 1955 and legally separated from his second wife, Ruth Sobotka, in 1958 before finally divorcing her in 1961 – Kubrick had finally rejected and moved beyond the heredity faith of his family to 'marry out'. His marriage to a gentile woman meant, in Orthodox halachic terms at least, that his children would not be Jewish. Through *Spartacus*, Kubrick may have been seeking to legitimize his love for a non-Jewish woman who, in turn, would help him shed his own sense of Jewish outsidership, or reinforce it yet further. In this respect, the very famous and public union of the Jewish-American playwright Arthur Miller and 'the most sought-after woman in America, the actress cum sex-

bomb' (Freedman 142), Marilyn Monroe, the year before Kubrick met Christiane, in 1956, may have provided a very public role model for Kubrick as it did for other Jewish-American writers and intellectuals of his generation (viz. Norman Mailer, Philip Roth, and Woody Allen among others). Jonathan Freedman suggests, for example, that 'the Miller-Monroe conjunction represents an important and neglected stage in the Americanizing process', emblemizing 'the desire of assimilating Jewish men to break out the spaces in which they had been contained' (137).

Not only was Christiane not Jewish, she was also born German. As a gentile German who spoke very little English, she provided a major contrast to Kubrick – a Jew from the Bronx. What is more, she grew up in the Third Reich while the Holocaust was happening. She recalled how, 'I was the little girl who moved in where Anne Frank was pushed out' (LoBrutto 147). Possibly based on these experiences, around that very time, Kubrick began drafting a script set in Nazi-occupied Holland during the Second World War in which a young German woman observes the Jews' suffering (Kramer 10). For Trumbo, Kubrick's marriage to Christiane was essential to understanding *Spartacus*. He wrote:

Stanley, who is thirty years old, has married a German. The question in my mind is this: Did he marry her because he loved her or did he marry her because he wanted to marry a German girl in order to punish the Germans (through her) for what they had done to the Jews. Therefore we have the problem about Stanley which is terribly important in relation to this picture. What is he trying prove? It may be that he is a more devoted Jew than any other. It may be that he is the essential renegade ('Notes', 23 Aug. 1959).

Even more significantly, Christiane was the niece of Nazi filmmaker Veit Harlan who, in 1940, had made the notorious Nazi propaganda film, *Jud Süß* which showcased the

perversed, seductive, aggressive, dangerous, yet feminised, Jewish figure of Joseph Süß Oppenheimer. Kubrick became interested in Christiane's family background. Christiane recalled:

Stanley took a great interest in my catastrophic family background. We spoke about it a great deal. People asked him, "How could you marry a German woman, especially one with a background like that?" I thought a lot about the fact that no one could have taken a greater interest in my family background than Stanley, who understood that I came from the other side, which was the opposite of his [background]. But he also knew that my generation could plead innocence: I was very young during the Holocaust, though at the same time old enough to remember everything (Karpel, no pp.).

Kubrick met her family and relatives, including Veit Harlan, in 1957. Christiane recalled how Stanley drank a big glass of vodka beforehand and was much shaken afterwards. He told her, 'I'm standing here like Woody Allen looking like ten Jews' (*Harlan*). This encounter prompted some self-reflection on Kubrick's part. According to Christiane, 'Stanley of course asked himself the same questions: if I had been in his position, what would I have done?' (*ibid.*). Kubrick even wanted to make a film about the making of *Jew Süß*.⁹

Arguably, this meeting also triggered Kubrick to reconsider his own Jewishness and Jewish masculinity, in particular his status as a Jewish son, father and husband. Given this interest in Jewish masculinity, Kubrick was probably attracted to the prospect of working with such male Jewish actors as Douglas and Curtis. Both stars were at the forefront of publically redefining the image of the weak, passive, ineffectual and intellectual Jew into the image of the tough, macho Jew during the 1950s, providing a counterpoint to such images as *Jud Süß*. In his letter to Lewis and Trumbo Kubrick referred to 'their beautifull [sic] builds' (Box 24, Folder 6, DT/WHS). Douglas had previously appeared in such films as *Champion*

(Mark Robson, 1949), *The Juggler* (Edward Dmytryk, 1953), Kubrick's own *Paths of Glory* and *The Vikings* (Richard Fleischer, 1958). In the latter film he had starred alongside Curtis who had earlier featured in *The Black Shield of Falworth* (Rudolph Maté, 1954), as well as *Some Like It Hot*, in which he dated Sugar Kane Kowalczyk, played by Marilyn Monroe, who as mentioned above, was at that time, married to Jewish playwright Arthur Miller. As we have seen, Monroe and Miller's marriage provided a model template of sorts for Kubrick.

Conclusion

Despite the restrictions, in the adaptation of *Spartacus* Kubrick began to articulate those interests that not only defined the rest of his oeuvre but were also among the key concerns among American Jews in the 1960s, in particular a concern with Jewish gender, masculinity, manliness and ethical behaviour, embodied in the new character type of the macho-mensch. This material is clearly still present *Spartacus*, even if not explicitly Jewish, and with an all-star cast of Jewish and Gentile actors Kubrick succeeded in producing a blockbusting epic that had something to say about Jewishness as well. Yet, because of the fraught nature of the adaptation process, containing a myriad of conflicting interventions -- Fast, Trumbo, Douglas and the big name British cast -- Kubrick's individual vision was not as wholly defined as he may have liked. Instead, Kubrick had to wait to be freed of studio control and the influence of others' dominant opinions to more fully articulate his authorial voice. Nonetheless, traces of the underlying Jewish thematics remained beneath the surface of *Spartacus*. Their hidden presence, and the reasons for their non-explicitness, have much to tell us about Kubrick's biography and career and indicate the directions that he would take in adapting his future films.

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¹ To this list we can add co-star Tony Curtis, titles and battle sequence designer, Saul Bass, and Editor Irving Lerner.

² Kubrick used this subject-matter in order to preach a liberal message; however, for reasons of length, this article cannot include any detailed consideration of them.

³ Spartacus, the historical figure, has long fascinated Jews. Jewish Spartacists have included Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogisches, and Paul Levi.

⁴ There are various different versions of the film, including that shown to the National Legion of Decency in 1960, the version released in 1960 and the restored version of 1991.

Unfortunately, the most widely available version is not the original 1960 release but the restored version on which this analysis is based. It is difficult to know what the original release version actually looked like because it has been overshadowed by the restored version.

⁵ Stone was born Harold Jacob Hochstein. A third-generation actor, his father was Yiddish actor Jacob Hochstein.

⁶ Is this a sly nod to one of Douglas' previous roles? One could also argue that Saul Bass' assignation of the image of open hands for Antoninus obliquely invokes that of the Jewish priestly blessing.

⁷ This scene appeared in the version shown to National Legion of Decency and Production Code Administration reviewers but was cut from the 1960 released version. It was restored in 1991 (with Kubrick's participation). It is to this version that I refer.

⁸ It should be noted here that 'man' can be translated back into Yiddish as *mensch*.

⁹ Jan Harlan recalled: 'Stanley Kubrick wanted to make a film about this era, the normal course of daily events when producing a film in Berlin. What was it like? A production meeting at 8am, budget, costumes, the whole thing, casting. He wanted to know, wanted to make a film about how this all took place. What was it like? At what point did Goebbels intervene? When was the OK required for each scene of the script? What were these discussions like? What influence was applied? What conversations were held? Revealing things like that' (*Harlan*).