

FICTIONAL FILM ADAPTATION

The Blithedale Romance (1852)

Nathaniel Hawthorne

(1804-1864)

from *Follywood* (2005)

Finlandia Baths downtown attracted men with hangovers and guilts who came in to sweat out the toxins. Ryan Eisley sitting in a towel with his back to the tile wall opened his eyes and discerned through the hot steam nearby the scrawny torso and balding head of Humphrey Bogart, the dark wet hairs on his head like gashes.

Bogart beckoned to him.

Eisley rose slowly and holding his towel around him went over and sat down in the corner at a right angle to Bogart. The man sitting on Bogey's far side, bent forward with his arms on his knees and a towel draped over his head, looked aside at Eisley with a rumpled Irish face and a toughness like a boxer going to flab. Bogey introduced Eisley to Spencer Tracy. They had met on the MGM lot years before, but Tracy would not remember. Now they nodded and sat there quietly in the steam, too enervated by heat to indulge in shaking hands, just sweating.

Bogart had a drop hanging from the end of his nose. He sounded like his voice had cracked from the heat.

"Spence says he might be interested in your script."

"How did you hear about it?"

"Baby's been talking to your wife," Bogey wiped his face with his hand. "You know how dames are. They're talking about Zenobia like she's the hottest part since Scarlett O'Hara."

Eisley sat there steaming with the two tough guys.

"I hear you've got a part for a strong woman." Tracy spoke up in a tone of understatement. "I happen to know a pretty strong one."

"A strong poison at the box office."

"Baaaa!" Tracy scoffed.

Dragging the towel off his head, he sat up paunchy with his back resting against the tile wall and his thick wavy hair all roughed up. Eisley sat back and smiled at Tracy through the steam.

"I hear she gets a lot of hate mail."

Tracy cast him a scowling pugnacious glance, "You mean a lot of male hate!"

"I thought it was political," said Eisley.

"Oh, it's political all right."

"Well," Eisley replied in a tone of what do you expect. He wiped his face in the hot steam and laughed, "She wore a flaming red dress to a Progressive Party rally for a Socialist in Hollywood Legion Stadium and read a speech written by Dalton Trumbo!"

Tracy looked defiant.

"Yeah, and she also supports the Hollywood Ten!"

"At least she didn't fly to Washington for them."

Bogey glanced at Eisley like his nose still hurt, "The press would have put her on a broomstick."

"Listen, Ryan," Tracy sat up, sounding hot. "You don't mind if I call you Ryan, do you? Well listen, Ryan. She's the best actress around. And if *she* ain't Zenobia, who is?"

"I've just had an offer from Joan Crawford."

Bogart grinned and watched Tracy, who turned on Eisley a look of priestly disdain while erupting from the gut.

"That old *crawfish!*"

"Did she grease the deal?" Bogey chuckled.

"I'm glad we're not blacklisting anybody here," Eisley grinned at Tracy. "She's talking to Harry Cohn about it."

“Hell,” Bogey sniffed. He blinked through the steam and wiped off the back of his neck with a towel. “I should have listened to Spence about actors and stayed out of politics.”

Tracy gazed into the steam with sweat rolling down his face.

“I remember who shot Lincoln.”

As soon as Eisley drove over the Hollywood Hills and reached his ranch out in the Valley, he called his agent. Moxy told him not to show the script to anybody and to leave the situation to him. Eisley hoped that Sarah would soften toward him when he told her about what happened at the Finlandia Baths, how he had furthered her plan set in motion when she told Bacall about the part of Zenobia. Instead, peeling potatoes at the sink, Sarah avoided his eyes, more affected by what he had done in the bedroom of Joan Crawford. In a tone of somber distance, she questioned him about Harry Cohn.

That surprised Eisley.

“You’re considering Crawford?”

“Not in the slightest. And if you are, then this is not going to work! Tracy will call Cohn and try to make a deal. I want to know what we could be getting into here.”

She turned away, peeling a spud. She had such a sadness in her eyes, Ryan wanted to take her in his arms and try to help her forgive him. More than anything in his life now he needed Sarah. She worked there at the sink in her plain wheat colored print dress, her brown hair pulled back at the sides exposing her ears and hanging down wavy in back, her lovely face different now. She had always been so warm and receptive. It scared him that now she would not even look at him. The frustration kept igniting his ulcer, burning his heart. He gave up for now and went down into the sunken living room and poured himself another drink from the bar.

That night after dinner, sitting on opposite sides of a fire crackling in their big riverstone fireplace, they worked on her script with professional detachment, for as long as he could stand it.

“Sarah, please.”

“Can we move on to the next page?”

“Don’t take it so hard.”

“Let’s move on.”

“It didn’t mean anything, it was just a mistake! Bad judgment on my part, I admit. I was foolish. Lies get to be a habit in this business. But Sarah, don’t you think— Aren’t you overreacting?”

She looked at him like flinging a knife.

“You’re calling me a blowfish?”

The hollow pink blowfish they found in a shop together before they were married, like a balloon with spines all over it, was still displayed on a shelf above Eisley’s desk at the studio. Zanuck recently stepped into his office and stared at the inflated puffer for a long moment. Then he glared at Eisley, harrumphed and stalked out.

“How many apologies do you want, Sarah?”

She stood up and left him there. At the top of the steps to the upper level, she turned for an exit line.

“Just one I could believe.”

Harry Cohn had built Columbia Pictures from nothing, while cultivating a reputation as the most feared and hated mogul in Hollywood, the loudest, the crudest, the meanest and the most predatory, the one who sent more people to the cemetery than any other, while concealing his generous donations and other good deeds. Cohn had no interest in politics, but he had been embarrassed by revelations that some of his most influential employees were Communists. He was feeling a lot of heat. Moxy sold him Sarah’s screenplay *Blithedale* as an anti-Communist picture, a romance starring Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn that would be good public relations and great box office in the present climate. Cohn hated controversy, but he loved stars. He could afford few under contract but compensated for the limitations of his studio by acquiring stars on loan in glittering constellations.

Eisley liked the fact that Harry Cohn did not tend to meddle with talent, giving directors more freedom than the other moguls did. As to the script, however, Cohn insisted upon a change that Sarah considered preposterous. He did not want a dame to drown herself and get stabbed in the heart by a probing hook.

Zenobia could not die.

“That reverses Hawthorne,” Sarah protested.

They were in the den going over the script, Davin and Karen playing outside in the bamboo with Boffo, he in his desk chair and she in the armchair, with sunlight coming in the patio doors and the bristling shadow of a yucca on the wall like a cluster of swords raised in defiance.

“Can’t you rewrite it?”

"Hawthorne believed he was expressing truths that came from God. Would you ask me to rewrite a bible?"

"We've always done that in Hollywood."

"I feel like a Judas. This is why I changed the title. I knew we couldn't be faithful unless we did it ourselves."

"Do you want the deal or not?"

Sarah also pointed out that Katharine Hepburn was neither dark nor voluptuous, conventions Hawthorne used to represent Zenobia as unredeemed and dominated by the material opposed to the spiritual, prompting Eisley to explain the emphasis in movies on how everything looks rather than on what it means. Sarah wanted the dark Olivia de Havilland to play Zenobia opposite her real sister the blonde Joan Fontaine until Eisley told her that, although Olivia otherwise would be fine in the role, she and her sister and rival did not get along at all, that Olivia would never agree to play with her. Finally, because Hepburn was the best available actress for the part and was written into the deal, Sarah sighed with resignation and revised the script, accommodating a skinny redhead.

Eventually, they sat down with the actors at a conference table in one of the sound stage buildings downtown at the Columbia studio. Eisley sat at the head. On one side of the table sat Sarah, Tracy, Hepburn and Fontaine, on the other sat David Niven, Vincent Price, Thomas Mitchell and Walter Brennan.

"You won't need me very long," said Brennan in his crotchety rasping voice that dragged in gravel and screeched like a pump handle, as if he had been born an old curmudgeon. "All I do is stand around smokin' a corn cob and shakin' my head at you folks."

"We'll let you out early," Eisley promised.

"Walter is well schooled," Hepburn concurred.

Katharine Hepburn had thin red lips, a sharp face and precise speech conscious of inflections, with a tone of tactful superiority. Eisley considered her enunciation pretentious, as if every script was Shakespeare. Sarah thought it might work in the case of Hawthorne. Hepburn liked to wear slacks and platform shoes that increased her height by four inches to help her intimidate the men she had to deal with in the business, while using her feminine wiles as well. She had a reputation as so contrary, so outspoken and so combative that as an actress on Broadway she had often been fired before plays opened. She wore her politics like her platform shoes. Her mother had been a suffragette who regarded all nonradicals as dull. What Hepburn considered radical and intellectual was exemplified by her close friend the Communist pixie Donald Ogden Stewart. In a script he wrote for her, Stewart nicknamed her Red. Eisley hated fighting with women, whereas Red enjoyed winning confrontations with men. He allowed that she had spirit all right, though what kind remained a question.

"I want to know how you see your characters," Eisley said to the actors. "Walter has spoken. You're the protagonist, David."

"Oh?" said Hepburn. "I thought Zenobia was the protagonist."

Tracy chuckled, "You're the *an*-tagonist."

"It does depend upon one's perspective, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Kate," Niven smiled. "You see, Coverdale is a poet. A very minor one, to be sure--nonetheless, a narrator by nature. But he's just a lonely bachelor. Charming, but a sad chap really."

"And a bit ridiculous," added Eisley.

"Yes, I'm just an observer of life. The Victorians believed that most people needed to marry in order to grow up. Even to save their souls. Truth is, I'm a damned failure, really."

"I'm his contrast," Hepburn intoned solemnly.

"You're not married," Tracy reminded her.

"Well no, but--otherwise."

"Otherwise she and I have an affair!" Vincent Price exclaimed with delight in his lispy voice. "Ongoing it seems!" Price raised his eyebrows like a rogue, though in real life a faithful husband fond of cooking and gardening. "We might even be secretly married! We're partners on the stage--magicians and hypnotists. I am *Westervelt!*" He laughed wickedly, "The Western World going to the devil!"

Eisley glanced at Sarah, glad she did not glance at him.

"Your usual role, Vincent," Hepburn nodded.

"Those two are dangerous," Thomas Mitchell smiled forward with his arms on the table, a kindly older man with plump cheeks and a gentle manner. "They mistreat my poor daughter Priscilla."

"I wouldn't say mistreat," Hepburn differed.

"Tom, did you notice," Sarah put in, "your eyepatch switches from one eye to the other during the story?"

"Yes, that doesn't make sense," Hepburn objected.

"I think it's to show that he's like the human race," Sarah offered. "He tends to see with only one side or the other."

"My," Hepburn frowned at Sarah. "How comp-li-cated."

Eisley lit a cigar.

"Joan, who are you?"

Fontaine had been cast as Priscilla in particular for her posture and smile. She had a natural inclination to look humble, even cringing, perhaps from growing up the younger sister of Olivia de Havilland, upper class yet abused. Sarah felt comfortable with Fontaine because she did not have a record of affairs with her directors, preferring moguls and playboys. With her refined manners and soft voice, Fontaine explained her role as the working girl, the poor seamstress.

"Isn't she perfect for it!" Hepburn exclaimed.

"We're all perfect here," Tracy smiled. "This is Blithedale."

"Well I can't be perfect to you if you reject me, now can I," Hepburn bantered with a sly innocence. "I'm perfect in my own way, though, aren't I. Yes. Aren't I, Spence?"

"Of course you are, Pinky."

"Well I think this is shallow! I want to die! That's what I'd feel like doing," her voice trembled. "If I lost a great love!"

"That would be a scene all right," Tracy nodded.

Sarah agreed, "It diminishes her tragedy and the meaning of it all if she just shrugs and walks away."

Hepburn raised her chin, affirming a revolutionary principle, "I think we should be faithful to the original!"

"Thank you, yes!" Sarah clapped her hands.

Seeing his wife so happy, Eisley began to like Hepburn.

"Yes, I should die!" Hepburn stiffened herself. "I must! Spence will search for me in the black water, using that pole with the hook on the end. I'm under there--somewhere," her voice trembled away into the unknown. "He probes until he hooks me," she clutched at her breast, rent by the hook! "They pull me out, all pale and dead and horrible! Spence falls to his knees and weeps! I've been stabbed in the heart!"

"Bravo!" cried Vincent Price. "Die again, Kate!"

"And then your funeral," Tracy encouraged her.

"Ah yes, the grief! Spence will feel so guilty."

"That's easy," Tracy looked down.

"I agree with Kate," said Niven.

"Yes, I must die," Hepburn braced herself. "Zenobia requires it!"

"Can she die, Ryan?"

Just then a voice thundered down that filled the building.

"THERE WILL BE NO DEATH!"

Hepburn shrank down in her chair, Fontaine clutched the table and Tracy looked up at the ceiling like a priest in awe.

"Why, thank you, Lord!" croaked Brennan joyfully.

Vincent Price burst into laughter, then covered his mouth with his fingertips. Apparently the almighty had wired the sound stage to his desk intercom. After that, a greater discretion prevailed around the table. Now and then Tracy looked up casually around the building, up past the catwalks and arc lights, as though expecting another commandment through the public address system. Hepburn had red in her cheeks, Fontaine cringed looking sorry and Sarah had been disappointed again.

These performers all were cast to a large extent as types, and since all had played versions of their roles before, in some cases many times, Eisley thought he would get the most from them by allowing them a lot of freedom within the discipline of the script. When he consulted Sarah, she was all business, with a subtext of anguish, as though stifling a desire to tell him off. He was afraid she might walk out on him. He told her how much he appreciated the way she insisted on the script as written. By playing the enforcer, she gave him more freedom to play the encouraging director, allowing the actors to be creative but resisting the temptation to become a nice guy, in order not to lose command. As usual he rehearsed the actors to a peak, then filmed each scene in one or a few takes. Tracy worked that way too and would refuse to do more takes if he felt that he had done his best.

There were so few settings in this picture that Easley could shoot in continuity, with lots of back projection, especially of the farmland at Blithedale. Most of the sets were as simple as for an off-Broadway play, deliberately opposed to the industry ideal of high production values, which emphasize luxury and the material world. With much attention to lighting and lenses, Easley tried to compose some frames like pictures by the American allegorical painters contemporaneous with Hawthorne. He consulted with his cameraman Sal Dante on setups, lenses, color and how to imitate characteristics of a stained glass window. He arranged to have the title *Blithedale* appear on the screen in the florid script common at the time in women's magazines, on a background of meadow and flowers, with bunnies hopping about, a grassy dale that Dante found in Beverly Hills, idealized in a Victorian style.

Yellow daisies in the meadow dissolve into a night view of yellow gas lamps on a performance hall, a facade brightly lit, with a marquee acclaiming Westervelt and Zenobia in *Magic of the Veiled Lady*. A sign on a building identifies the city as Boston. The theater crowd is dressed in formal clothes of the middle nineteenth century, the men in black suits, many in top hats, the women in veiled hats and gowns with bulging skirts. The camera follows a gentleman entering the hall. It is David Niven as Coverdale the poet, removing his top hat from a wavy yellow wig in the hairstyle of the time, his yellow sideburns and mustache elongated.

Inside, with an air of aloof curiosity, he selects a seat, bows and excuses himself, then enters the row and sits down. The purple curtains part, revealing a large white screen with a figure seated in front of it veiled in white. Westervelt and Zenobia emerge from opposite wings and bow to loud applause, he in tails and black tie with a long pointy mustache, she in a flaming red dress with a hothouse flower in her auburn hair. Sarah had reminded Hepburn of her New England heritage, of what red would imply about her at that time in Boston, and that some people would compare her to Bette Davis in *Jezebel*, but Hepburn insisted on red as though she had some kind of statement to make. After preliminary tricks with cards and ribbons, the two magicians take written questions from the audience. Coverdale scribbles on a pad and then passes his note to an usher in the aisle.

With invocations of the spirit, melodramatic gestures and dramatic flair, Westervelt and Zenobia hypnotize the figure draped in white. The audience gasps as a golden aura starts to glow on the screen behind the oracle, enveloping her in holy light until she glows like sunlight in a cloud. She appears to float, as ethereal as a disembodied soul. The magicians read the questions from the audience aloud, then put them to the oracle, whose replies are too faint to hear. Westervelt and Zenobia lean close with ears cocked, then interpret the Veiled Lady for the audience with vague riddles and sententious pronouncements.

When his name is called, Coverdale has a skeptical look. Zenobia reads his question aloud with great solemnity.

“Will the Blithedale experiment succeed?”

Westervelt leans close to the Veiled Lady for a moment, drums roll in the pit, then the magician straightens and spreads his arms as if to embrace the audience in the balcony.

“Human nature *will prevail!*”

He gives such emphasis to prevailing that the crowd erupts into cheers and applause for this prophecy.

Dissolve to a shot of the street the next day, a sunny noon, then overcast, then darker. Coverdale climbs into a horse-drawn carriage in a snowstorm. To one of the several other passengers bound for Blithedale, he remarks on the cold weather for an April day. He hopes it is not an omen, as they set out to reform the world. The city behind them, a dark and smoky pile of buildings, looks dismal in whiteness blackened by industrial soot. The horses pull the carriage into the countryside through fresh snow, they enter a valley and arrive at a large white farmhouse with numerous rooms and a barracks, the Foster farm.

Coverdale follows the others into the house with icicles hanging from his mustache and snow on his nose, his eyes doubting their enterprise already. They are greeted by a large farm wife, Mrs. Foster, and her two daughters. In the parlor they shake hands warmly with everyone all around and congratulate each other on their dedication to a blessed state of brotherhood and sisterhood, a community of equals.

A door opens and in comes Zenobia.

Everyone turns to watch the celebrity except Mrs. Foster. Zenobia is wearing a plain homespun dress with a kerchief around her neck of purple silk, the pale white skin of one shoulder exposed. In her auburn hair, defying the weather, is an exotic hothouse flower. She moves from one person to another, talkative and charming. Zenobia is the most intriguing woman Coverdale has ever seen. She flatters him for his poetry, then she asks him about the philanthropist Hollingsworth. Lacking the voluptuous, Hepburn had to be fascinating through tone and gesture, acting the rebel, creating suspense with an air of being inclined to

say or do something that will shock the room. She makes a speech opposing the division of labor and then, surprising everyone, she participates with Mrs. Foster and other women in preparing supper.

Walter Brennan as Silas Foster comes in and pulls off his work boots, takes a chew from his iron tobacco box and flops down in front of the fire in his socks, his soaked clothes giving off a steam. He asks for a man to help him with the pigs. Coverdale makes a squeamish face. Getting no response, Silas tells the women they will have to do all the weeding in the garden while the men do the heavy farm work if they expect to compete with other growers at the market in Boston. He will be waking them up early. The faces of the reformers confront for the first time the realities of collective farming. Silas grumbles that three city folks are only worth one field hand. Then he spits into the fire.

Zenobia acts as hostess, ushering them all into the big farm kitchen where supper is spread on a table in the warmth and flickering light from a huge fireplace. The urbane reformers sit down with the rustics and drink tea poured by Zenobia.

Just then comes a pounding at the front door.

Coverdale goes out and opens the door upon the windy snow. There stands Spencer Tracy as Hollingsworth in a shaggy overcoat all covered with snow. His arm is around a girl in a cloak, the cringing Joan Fontaine. They come inside and the girl's hood falls back. Fontaine's blonde hair has been dyed brown to be faithful to the original story, and to the real working girl from Boston, a poor seamstress Hawthorne met at the utopian commune where he lived for awhile before his marriage, who reminded him of his wife. She looks sad and cold and sick. Hollingsworth tells Coverdale that he brought her here as a favor to an old gentleman named Moodie, her father, who thinks her health might be improved by the country life at Blithedale.

In the kitchen, the girl stops and stares at Zenobia with hazel eyes, close enough to the brown in the original story to satisfy Sarah. Zenobia stops pouring tea. The girl steps forward as if to greet her until, seeing the look on Zenobia's face, she droops and drops to her knees, clasps her hands and gazes up, imploring her.

"What does the girl mean?" cries Zenobia in a sharp tone, looking at Hollingsworth. "Is she crazy?"

"Please," the girl begs her.

Hollingsworth steps forward, helps the girl to her feet and frowns at Zenobia. "You have a cold heart!"

Zenobia turns red in the cheeks.

The encounter spurs the passion between Tracy and Hepburn, conveying an intensity beyond their words.

"You do not do me justice, Mr. Hollingsworth," her voice trembles. "I am willing to be kind to the poor girl."

Hollingsworth introduces Priscilla to the group.

"Let us conclude that Providence has sent her to us." He sounds like a minister with a warm full voice. "Let us feed her and make her one of us. As we do by this friendless girl," he puts his hand on her shoulder, "so shall we prosper!"

After lunch, Tracy disappeared.

He was known when depressed to wander off by himself and get drunk. Tracy had typecast himself socially around town as an Irish Catholic drinker with a conscience. He would not divorce his wife and Hepburn did not want to marry again anyway.

Eisley shot around him.

In the parlor after supper, the poor seamstress Priscilla is a fragile disciple sitting on a stool at the feet of Zenobia, listening to her entertain the group with her stories and wit in praise of her gender. Priscilla looks mesmerized. Zenobia is so brilliant, a rapt attraction comes over the face of Coverdale. The camera looks up to Zenobia in sharp focus, enamored by her magnetic sexuality, but it loves Priscilla with soft focus, as if she is an angel. When to applause Zenobia rises and moves among her admirers, Coverdale asks her what she thinks of Priscilla.

"She is a seamstress," answers Zenobia. "She has no more transcendental purpose than to do my miscellaneous sewing! I won't have her doing my dresses."

Priscilla overhears her contempt and bursts into tears.

Zenobia goes over to the girl and, standing above her, caresses her hair. After a moment, she moves on. Priscilla, huddled on the stool, pulls out a workbag. She proceeds to sew on a little silk purse, holding it close to her heart. According to the original story she supports herself and her father Old Moodie by making purses. Sarah informed Fontaine discretely about some professors who thought the purses

symbolized her genitalia. Therefore she must be a prostitute. Fontaine gasped and cringed, then burst into laughter. Thereafter, she kept the purse out of her lap.

They drove home that evening in silence.

"Everybody says that she'll never divorce him," Ryan said finally.

Sarah appeared to think about it.

"Well, I would."

Ryan glanced aside at her with an ache of regret, not for what he did, but for how she felt about it. In profile against the window of the station wagon, orange trees flashing past, she looked still a simple farm girl, keeping him decent, providing his stability and truth and the first real family he had since his mother died when he was ten. He ached to regain the loving rapport that had kept them together and made him happy. He missed her. Sarah meant everything to him, aside from his career. She had a spirituality that his first wife lacked and she was the smartest woman he ever met, though Hedy Lamarr was amazing. At night, hair darker, Sarah also looked a lot more voluptuous than Hepburn.

He took his eyes off the road.

"You're everything I believe in, Sarah."

She looked away out the window.

"I told you at the start," she paused to calm her breathing. "That I couldn't be a Hollywood wife. One of those wives like Virginia Zanuck or Evelyn Keyes or Mrs. Spencer Tracy."

"You know I never wanted that."

"How do you think Tracy rationalizes what *he's* doing?"

"Sarah, don't," he corrected his steering.

"He seems to be suffering for it."

"Yes, he is! He certainly is."

"Do you think Kate says to herself, it's better that two people be happy than that three people suffer?"

"She loves him, Sarah."

"So does Mrs. Tracy."

"All right," he looked ahead, "I deserve that."

He resented that, actually. He never had a big affair, went out and got drunk or frequented whorehouses like Tracy. Of course he would try to stay faithful, but he could not promise it would absolutely never ever happen again. Not in this business, that would be another lie.

"What if Mrs. Tracy committed suicide?"

"Oh for God sake!"--he almost lost control of the car! "Knock it off, Sarah! That's a different situation!"

"I just wonder now, what else you've done."

He felt himself chill.

"There's nothing else," he lied.

Coverdale comes down with a cold and stays in bed the first day at Blithedale. Closeup of his head on the pillow, covers pulled up to his nose with a nightcap on his yellow wig.

Through a partition separating the beds in a common sleeping room for men, Coverdale hears the voice of Hollingsworth in prayer. Then the philanthropist comes around the partition in black pants and a clean white shirt with a black tie blooming at the collar, his hair in long dark waves. Hollingsworth looks like a Puritan. He speaks openly to Coverdale about his disbelief in Blithedale, saying that he considers their communal experiment contrary to human nature and led by those who want to reform others before they reform themselves. He has his own plan for reforming the world--the rehabilitation of criminals. With sympathy and tenderness, he asks Coverdale to join him and be his lifelong friend, but the younger idealist declines. Coverdale is skeptical of Puritans and more liberal on penal reform. Hollingsworth becomes the nurse of Coverdale, who sees him as overbearing. Every day, also, Zenobia brings the weak poet a bowl of gruel she has made herself, wearing a fresh expensive hothouse flower in her hair. She always gives Hollingsworth such bewitching looks, Coverdale becomes annoyed. She asks the invalid how he liked the romance she loaned him by George Sand. When she has left the room, he tastes her cooking and makes a sour face.

"Witch's brew!"

One day Zenobia encounters Priscilla in the room and she tells the little seamstress to take a walk. Priscilla brings Coverdale a correspondence from Margaret Fuller. Closeup of a periodical on his bed called *The Dial* with a topic on the front, Transcendentalism of Margaret Fuller. With a jealous glance at Zenobia, Coverdale tells Priscilla that she reminds him of Fuller in her spirituality, whereas Zenobia reminds him of

Fuller in her pride. Zenobia casts him a haughty look. The seamstress responds with a spirited independence that brings a smile to his face. Priscilla proves a tonic and he is back on his feet the next day.

Spring has come to Blithedale, with abundant flowers and birds and bunnies hopping about, a back projection of the dale in Beverly Hills, expanding to a pan shot of Coverdale feeding the pigs their sour mash, averting his disgusted face away from the smell. Hollingsworth is plowing behind a team of horses, Priscilla is weeding in the garden and Zenobia is supervising. The seamstress has blooms in her cheeks and looks playful and merry. Though still fragile, she is growing stronger.

Slow dissolve to a maypole behind the big white farmhouse, its brightly colored ribbons furling and rippling in a breeze. Zenobia and Priscilla come frolicking with baskets of flowers they have gathered. The seamstress has not fully recovered from her unhealthy upbringing in the city, she has weak legs and runs falteringly, often falling on the grass. They both sit down on a blanket and Coverdale sits near them hugging his knees, watching Zenobia stick flowers in Priscilla's hair, then an ugly weed. Hollingsworth arrives in dusty work clothes toting a hoe over his shoulder, Priscilla runs to meet him and then they recline on the blanket and listen to Zenobia telling stories that fascinate Coverdale. Hollingsworth pulls the weed from Priscilla's hair and casts it aside.

Zenobia remarks with annoyance that Priscilla has become very wild since her recovery, intoxicated by the fresh country air and ready to scamper up a tree like a squirrel.

"It is quite ridiculous, and provokes one's malice, almost, to see a creature so happy--especially a feminine creature."

"She seems to me like a butterfly," says Coverdale.

Through the weeks thereafter, Priscilla grows still wilder, more spontaneous and effervescent. Her animal spirits wax high, she is full of mischief and plays little pranks. She cannot cook, she breaks crockery and she proves herself no ideal homemaker, yet she excels at the art of the needle, and while performing her duties on the farm she continues her small business manufacturing purses. Zenobia gives her lectures on how to behave.

"When our pastoral shall be quite played out, Priscilla, my worldly wisdom may stand you in good stead!"

Zenobia leads Hollingsworth into the woods, looking up into his eyes. Their increasing intimacy is observed from a distance by Coverdale, spying on them from behind trees and shrubs. At twilight he is strolling along the edge of the woods near the house. He bumps thump into Moodie in a shabby frock coat, with a cane and a patch over his left eye. The old man inquires about his daughter Priscilla and whether she is being well treated by Zenobia. Just then the seamstress appears in a window of the parlor, looking out. She tries to draw Zenobia closer, but the older woman pushes her away with a haughty look, as from a queen to a servant. Huffing with anger, Moodie adjusts his patch over his right eye. He shakes his cane at Zenobia, then strides away.

The next day Coverdale, feeling excluded by the love triangle of his friends, takes a walk in the woods. Dante used lighting to give the woods a sinister atmosphere of shadows and lurking dangers. Along the path, the timid liberal encounters Professor Westervelt. The showman with the long mustache is wearing a cape and carrying a stick with a handle carved into the head of a serpent. His smile discloses a gold band around his upper false teeth. As they chat, Westervelt lauds the superiority of Zenobia over Priscilla as a model of womanhood. Parting from Westervelt, the poet retreats deeper into the woods and climbs a pine tree. He perches up there, observing nature. After awhile Westervelt and Zenobia pass by under the tree, like an unhappy married couple, quarreling over the money they need and what to do about Priscilla. Zenobia does not want to betray the girl, but Westervelt urges upon her that Priscilla is her rival, her enemy.

That evening in the parlor Zenobia entertains with a reading, then she tells the legend of The Veiled Lady, calling her the candlelight image of one's self. The Lady is trapped by a jealous rival she supposed to be her friend, who casts a spell over her like a veil, thereby delivering her to an evil magician to be his slave forever. At the climax, Zenobia flings a veil of white gauze over the head of Priscilla, saying, "Ah, the dear little soul!" Priscilla bows her veiled head. Hollingsworth gets up from his chair, strides over, grabs the gauze and flings it aside.

On Sunday afternoon, Hollingsworth and the others picnic at a large high rock in the woods. Coverdale in a voiceover notes that the rock was named Eliot's Pulpit after a Puritan evangelist who preached the gospel there to Indians in their native tongue. Hollingsworth climbs up to the pulpit and discusses his philosophy for awhile in a warmhearted genial way, then he comes down and reclines with them upon the grass. Zenobia rises and argues passionately for the rights and superiority of women. When she turns her

accusations on Coverdale, he agrees with her eagerly. He even goes so far as to declare that the ministry and all government should be given over completely to women. When Priscilla modestly disagrees, Zenobia accuses her of being a product of male domination. Hollingsworth defends Priscilla and affirms the traditional roles of the sexes, arguing that Zenobia and her followers are too antagonistic.

“You despise women,” declares Zenobia.

“Despise women?--*No!*” cries Hollingsworth. “Woman is the most admirable handiwork of God, in her true place and character. Her place is at man’s side. Man and woman complement each other like the head and the heart. If we abandon that principle, we will tear society apart with conflict and hostility!”

Eisley peered aside from the camera boom to see if Sarah would look at him during this speech, but she kept watching the actors. She had softened Hollingsworth’s conservatism, toning down what pleased the women Hawthorne knew, so as not to offend women today. Eisley pointed out to her that Hollingsworth is not criticizing women for entering the work force. Priscilla is in the work force. Nevertheless, on the issue of rights even the scholarly Sarah could not help but judge the past by standards of a present culture that valued Zenobia for her liberation more highly than Priscilla for her virtues, especially in Hollywood.

Zenobia leads Hollingsworth on a walk away from Eliot’s Pulpit, deeper into the woods. The camera, like Coverdale, spies on the two from a distance. Hepburn presses his hand to her bosom and speaks to Tracy with increasing passion. Dissolve to the pasture later, where the two men are repairing a low stone wall, lifting and replacing heavy rocks. The philanthropist says that Zenobia has promised him financial backing for his reformatory and he renews his appeal that the poet join him in his plan to reform Blithedale. Coverdale asks what is to become of Priscilla. Hollingsworth grows angry at the implied reproach. By now angry himself, Coverdale refuses to join Hollingsworth. They resume lifting stones up onto the wall, on opposite sides, not speaking to each other.

Fade to the long dinner table, where members of the community are wearing plain homespun clothing except for Coverdale, who is formally attired, with a satin cravat. He explains in response to Zenobia that he is going on vacation for awhile, for his health. Silas Foster teases him for giving up so soon on reforming the world. In the parlor, Coverdale bids goodbye to Priscilla, who is busily sewing on a little silk purse, holding it close to her heart. He asks her if he might have it as a keepsake. She assents, if he will wait until it is finished. Alas, he cannot dally. It will soon be dark. Outside, a delivery man ties his horse to the hitching rail and carries through the front gate a small box with an oval opening in the side that displays an exotic hothouse flower, arriving on time for Zenobia’s evening performance.

In the city, the photography changes from color to black and white, as Coverdale registers at a hotel. In his room he sits by the fire with his feet up, reading while it rains outside. He sleeps in a big high-posted bed, wearing his nightcap. Dissolve into a dream in blurred focus. He is floating in space on a low narrow bed with Hollingsworth and Zenobia on either side as they bend over him across the bed and kiss each other with a passionate squirming intensity while Priscilla in the distance fades to a glow and melts away. Coverdale sits upright in bed. The peak of his nightcap is poking straight up, then it bends over limp.

The next day he is standing at a window of his room, looking out at the backsides of a range of buildings that appear to be luxurious residences and boarding houses. While gazing down into a window, he is startled to recognize Priscilla, her head bowed, apparently sewing on one of her purses. Then through the adjacent window he sees Zenobia, dressed in a fashionable gown. Westervelt appears, notices Coverdale and nods to him. The Professor beckons to Zenobia, who acknowledges Coverdale with a dismissive gesture and lets down a curtain over her window.

Coverdale is offended and pays a call on Zenobia, presenting his card to a servant. Her apartment is opulent, full of rich furnishings and art, with a grand chandelier. The hothouse flower in her hair has been replaced by an artificial flower made of jewels. When he refers to Hollingsworth, their banter turns into a quarrel. Coverdale remarks that Hollingsworth has certainly shown a great tenderness for Priscilla. Zenobia turns pale and encourages Coverdale to take an interest in the seamstress. He replies that he would have been an ass to fall in love with her.

Zenobia calls Priscilla into the room.

The friendless girl is dressed in pure white, set off by a gauzy fabric like a veil, her eyes dark and hair shadowy. She accepts Coverdale’s handshake with feeble interest, as if she is disappointed in him. With a sad look, she says that Hollingsworth told her to go along with Zenobia. Westervelt enters, smiling with his false teeth, an apparent gentleman with his polished manners and lispy distinction. He summons the ladies to a carriage. Coverdale again extends his hand to Priscilla, but she does not respond. Instead she sighs and accepts the arm of Westervelt. The three leave the poet standing there abashed and go out to a carriage on the street.

Fade from the bright luxury to a dim saloon where Coverdale inquires about Moodie. Eventually the old man comes in like a shabby ghost in a threadbare suit, with a handkerchief tied around his neck and the patch over his right eye. Coverdale sits down with him in a booth and orders wine and oysters. Moodie reveals that he is the father of both Zenobia and Priscilla. They are half sisters. He was once a wealthy man, but he committed a crime and lost everything. After his imprisonment, he disappeared in shame and was presumed dead. His wife died and his first daughter Zenobia was adopted by a rich uncle and raised in luxury and privilege. Old Moodie stands to inherit everything the uncle left Zenobia if he appears to claim it, which he now intends to do because Zenobia has mistreated her sister, poor Priscilla.

This evening the marquee on the bright performance hall reads Westervelt and Zenobia in *Magic of the Veiled Lady*. Coverdale enters and notices Hollingsworth in the audience. He sits down behind him. When the curtains part, revealing the Veiled Lady all in white in front of the big white screen, like a spirit, Coverdale leans forward, puts his hand on the shoulder of the philanthropist and whispers into his ear.

“What have you done with Priscilla?”

Hollingsworth jerks as if stabbed in the back, writhes around in his seat and glares at Coverdale. He says nothing and turns back around. At the point in the program when Westervelt and Zenobia take questions from the audience, Hollingsworth bows his head into his hand, overcome by despair, or in prayer. All at once he stands, dressed in Puritan black. He makes his way to the aisle and strides with the authority of a minister up onto the stage.

The Veiled Lady rises.

“Come!” Hollingsworth beckons to her. “You are safe!”

With a shriek, she throws off the veil!

She runs to him and he wraps his arm around her. He escorts her out of the hall through a side exit as the audience jeers and boos and stomps the floor! The caped Westervelt flaps his arms in an effort to calm them. With a look of tragic pride, Zenobia sits down in place of the Veiled Lady, like a queen on a throne.

Fade from black and white to color photography of the grassy dale in Beverly Hills, with a pan shot of bunnies and birds and other flighty creatures. Coverdale strolls along the road in formal clothes with a satin cravat and a walking stick. Fiddle music is heard. He stops and listens for a moment, then he climbs over the stone wall and sneaks into the woods toward the music and laughter.

The fiddling grows wilder.

Through the birch and other trees, he spies people dancing and reveling in an orgy of embraces. Marie Antoinette is playing shepherdess again, as she did in the palace gardens at Versailles, but the queen of this masquerade is Zenobia in her red dress, wearing the flower of jewels in her hair and a red eyemask with a beak. The fiddling grows ecstatic. The pan includes a Pied Piper, a courtesan in a toga with stars in her hair, the Marquis DeSade in black leather and lace, a clergyman wearing a goat’s head, and a heavysset grandpa in uniform and thick mustache like Stalin. It is no surprise that the fiddler in a red body suit wearing horns and a tail turns out to be Westervelt. Leaning against a tree nearby, the farmer Silas Foster smokes his corncob pipe and shakes his head.

Coverdale bursts out laughing.

The fiddling stops. The revelers turn and detect the intruder. They all chase after him through the woods and he runs away with awkward dignity, holding his top hat on his head and ducking branches. Eventually he escapes and sits down under a birch to rest, panting and gaspy. From this prospect, after awhile, he sees Zenobia strolling along the path with a girl who is straining to hear every word, apparently her new disciple.

We make a final visit to Blithedale.

The community has dissolved and the farm has returned to Silas Foster and hired field hands. The one house the utopians built, of the many planned, has been sold to a married couple. A white picket fence surrounds a modest dwelling about the size of those in the postwar tracts filling up the San Fernando Valley a century later, big enough to represent the fulfillment of a dream. The driver of his carriage waits behind the horses while Coverdale goes through the white picket gate and up to the front porch. Hollingsworth opens the door. He welcomes Coverdale with a hearty handshake, more humble now and deferential. Priscilla is sitting in the parlor knitting booties, looking radiant and pregnant, more healthy now than ever. Hollingsworth serves tea. He gives lectures now, but their livelihood depends mainly upon Priscilla’s income as a seamstress and a stipend from her father Old Moodie.

As his carriage pulls away, Coverdale looks back through a rear window with the oval shape of the opening in Zenobia’s flower box. In this updated modern adaptation, Zenobia does not actually love Hollingsworth and so does not drown herself over losing out, consequently he does not care as much about

her either and displays no sense of guilt except for his betrayal of Priscilla. The couple stand happily on their front porch, each with an arm around the other, waving. Coverdale in the carriage sets aside his top hat, uncovering his heart. He confesses that, all along, he too has been in love with Priscilla! Closeup of him peering back at her out the oval rear window, receding until his face is no bigger than a wilting hothouse flower.

Up on the camera boom Easley yelled, "That's a wrap!"

Cheers, applause and whistles erupted from the company and crew! The horses pulled the carriage through the double doors and out of the building. Easley looked across the set at Sarah just as his bouquet of red roses was delivered to her arms. People clapped for her, but when Sarah read his note she looked disappointed and trapped. She sprang from her canvas chair with a gesture like throwing off a veil and ran from the set.

Corks popped!

The caterers poured champagne and tables were filled with refreshments provided by Harry Cohn, plenty of wine and beer and spaghetti bolognese and other manna from above. According to custom, the actors and Easley as director gave presents to the crew and to each other. Every day throughout the weeks of shooting, Hepburn had bought lunches for everyone, delivered to the set in wicker baskets on the theme of *Blithedale*. Now she had changed into tan slacks and a white blouse and removed the jewelry from her hair. She stood chatting with Tracy, enough Priscilla in her after all to give him top billing in all their pictures together.

Static crackled overhead.

They all looked up as if to heaven, toward the amplification system that had decreed there would be no death. From high above, a philharmonic orchestra began to play a waltz that resounded through the building, quickly gaining momentum. David Niven bowed to Joan Fontaine. They began to dance, both of them members of the close-knit British community that often gathered in Beverly Hills, then Tracy, with a discretion as if he barely knew her, joined them by dancing with Hepburn, both of them in pants, waltzing round and round the set. Sipping champagne, Easley noticed Sarah making her way back, avoiding cables snaking on the floor. It pained him now that he had not run after her. He did not go far enough in his note, he held back and expressed himself in too conventional a way. He knew that she felt disappointed, because there was no full recognition of how destructive pride can be. She looked sorry to have embarrassed him in front of everyone and returned with a veiled expression. She gave him a faithful smile, then kissed his cheek.

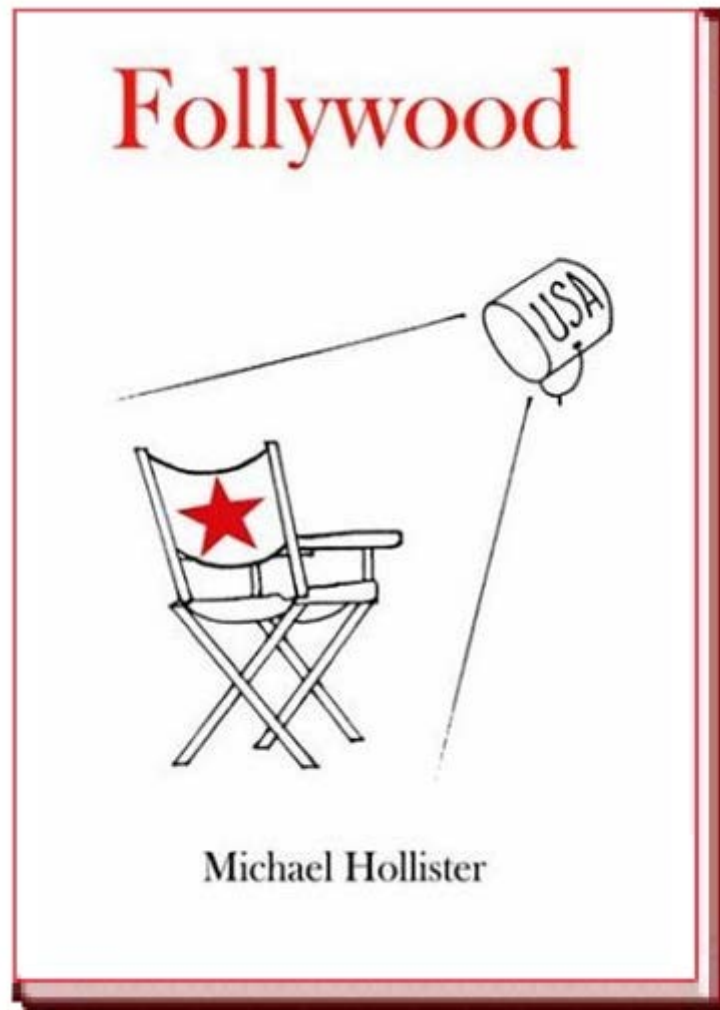
He held her in his arms, "You feel voluptuous."

"Shall I wear a flower in my hair?"

"Come," he beckoned to her.

She smiled at him askance, with a wry look, yielding for now to his masquerade. Then he led her over and they joined the dance, waltzing round and round among the stars.

Michael Hollister
Chapter 14
Follywood (2005)



Follywood dramatizes the 1940s and 50s, with deep focus on directors, writers and politics. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the young 20th Century Fox director Ryan Eisley films a documentary on women working in a defense plant, where he meets Sarah. They marry and settle down on a ranch in the San Fernando Valley with their two kids and their dog Boffo.

The Eisleys go on to make independent films adapting American classics, while Sarah tries to overcome Ryan's infidelities with scripts and actresses. Just after their film *Women in Hemingway* is released, the U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities resumes investigating Communist influence in Hollywood, provoking their stars John Huston, Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall to fight back by joining a delegation of stars who fly to the hearings in an airplane named Star of the Red Sea. Some suspect the Eisleys are Communists and the hearings could end their careers. They hope to clear themselves by producing the anti-Communist film *Blithedale*, starring Tracy and Hepburn.

The Eisleys become involved on both sides of the Blacklist scandal, as Sarah resists the Communists who control the Screen Writers Guild and Ryan fights the conservatives who try to impose a blacklist on the Screen Directors Guild. Like the nation, their marriage is threatened by disloyalty and the prospect of war. Orson Welles takes over their *Pierre*, then Josef Stalin courts Judy Garland in their *Flowering Judas*. Their lives interwoven with their films, the Eisleys dramatize the dominant political and aesthetic conflicts in Hollywood.