

FICTIONAL FILM ADAPTATION

Pierre (1852)

Herman Melville

(1819-1891)

from *Follywood* (2005)

Orson Welles arrived from the airport in a shiny black limousine sporting wide white sidewall tires, gliding in through the gate of the Easley ranch. He had flown over from Rome.

"Here he is!" Easley called out.

Desperate for cash to sustain his filming of *Othello*, Welles had suspended production, put up his company in expensive hotels until he could make enough money to meet his payroll and resorted to random acting jobs. So many people disliked him for his youthful arrogance, a saying had grown popular, All's well that ends Welles. His plight became a topic of amusement after he approached Fox studio head Darryl F. Zanuck in the lobby of a hotel on the French Riviera, threw himself down on his knees before the mogul in public view and begged, "You're the only one who can save me!" Under these circumstances, Easley had been able to negotiate a deal with Welles to act in an independent production he scheduled to shoot during a leave between assignments at the studio.

Sarah sent the kids to stay with Amy Fokes at the Fokes family's house on the far side of the valley for as long as Welles remained their guest, no more than a few weeks Easley hoped. Welles did not like to work around children and Sarah did not want him around them because of his lifestyle and unpredictable nature. Easley stepped out the side door onto the porch and went down the steps to the limousine. Welles had given up driving because it bored him, he drove much too fast and he paid too little attention to other drivers. Shorty his chauffeur hopped out, a little hunchback with receding blond hair like a cap slipping off the back of his head, curling thickly above his ears. He reached up and opened the backseat door. Orson Welles emerged, a large dark figure unfolding upward as he rose to his full height, his size increased by his black cape, high collar and waves of unruly black hair bulging up this way and that as though invigorated by inspirations and wild thoughts, a boyish man in his thirties looking dressed for the stage, for a magic act.

Easley shook his hand and they renewed their acquaintance.

Welles understated with his awesome voice, holding it in check, rich and deep and measured, hypnotic in its power. Sarah thought he had fallen in love with his voice at an early age, giving him a tendency to overact. Easley pointed out the guest bungalow and tossed a key to Shorty. So that Welles might feel more at home, he had brought in carpenters and added a sauna to the bungalow, redecorated the interior in baroque Venetian evoking the poet Lord Byron with red velvet drapes and black satin cushions, installed more full length mirrors, stocked the bar with fine wines, stuffed the ice box with steaks and snacks and filled the humidifier. On the coffee table he stacked five boxes of Upmann cigars and four new books selected by Sarah, since Welles liked to be supplied with at least three new books a day. Easley converted a bungalow to bedrooms for Shorty, for Orson's secretary Shifra Haran, for his masseuse and for a chef on loan from his favorite restaurant, Ma Maison.

Welles declared his need to rest in a voice as weary as if he had just finished creating the universe. He had not slept for days. Airplane seats were too small for him and he could never get comfortable. He bowed, then exited into the guest bungalow. For the rest of the day, every few hours Shorty knocked on the side door of the house and reported, "He's still out." Just before midnight, as Easley and Sarah were preparing for bed, another knock came on the side door, much louder! Easley opened and there stood Orson. Bright-eyed and overweight, he wore a white dueling shirt bloused at the cuffs and the wide belt and buckle of a buccaneer, as if he thought they were doing a pirate movie, but as they were soon to see from the portfolio under his arm, he knew exactly what they were doing and precisely how he thought he could improve upon their work.

They sat with glasses of wine in their sunken living room while Orson used the hearth as a stage and played himself, theatrical in his gestures, pacing and smoking a cigar, occasionally turning to the mantel to drink from his wineglass and to pour out more from the bottle. Tall with large bones in a flaccid body, he had a soft face that appeared capable of changing form, with a high forehead, a sensuous full lower lip and

almond-shaped dark eyes. He favored a head-on brooding look from under his lowered brow, the stare of a swami emanating spiritual power, holding his audience in thrall. Now and then, as he paced and deployed his voice in measured cadences, he ran his fingers back through his long unruly black hair. His performance reminded Easley that Orson had grown up a child star to his household with an early compulsion to amuse, charm and seduce. He set forth his current situation with the expansive frustration that Hannibal might have displayed explaining how his force of elephants and legions got stalled in the mountains on his way to conquer Rome. He regaled them with adventures and disasters and amusing moments, acting them out, his magnificent voice enough alone to captivate and amaze. He described filming at Mogador on the coast of Morocco and riding off into the desert with his tattooed Berber girlfriend on burros and making love with sunset turning the sand dunes orange along the sea.

That sounded true, although the genteel Joan Fontaine had told Sarah that when she played Jane Eyre with him, Welles teased her without letup by nonchalantly referring to sexual exploits too fantastic to believe, in language that took her breath away. Wanting to play leading men despite a tendency to put on weight, Welles had spun a legend of himself as a prolific lover, boasting that during the war, having been rejected for service due to his unstable health, he was virtually the only man left in Hollywood and slept with every beauty there. His first wife had been useful for awhile in a marriage of mutual convenience that neither of them had taken very seriously, then he fell in love with Rita Hayworth, the hottest female star at the time, who soon divorced him for neglect and infidelity. With a heavy sigh, Orson confessed that he let her make the final cut because he loved her too much to go on hurting her.

As he listened, Easley could not help recalling his first wife Fay, a dancer like Hayworth who resembled her in a general way, though her red hair was natural whereas Hayworth's was actually dark. If it were not for their estrangement, Hayworth could have played the dark lady in this picture opposite Welles. Compared to him, Easley felt like a model husband and he wished that Sarah saw him that way instead of susceptible to Welles as another corrupting influence. She had to agree that Orson would be the ideal actor for the part. He knew that she wanted to influence him somehow through this script and he suspected that she agreed to Welles in part because Orson did not like being directed, he always thought he knew best and he would challenge Easley, even try to take over the picture. He had never disagreed so much with Sarah before about various issues in a script and she probably expected Welles, notwithstanding some of her opinions about his personal life, to weigh in with her on aesthetic questions. She would have all his authority on her side, one of the great names in the world, the boy wonder of stage and radio, also known as the monstrous boy, who created a national panic by reporting an invasion from Mars, then made what critics were calling the greatest movie ever, inspiring superlatives and jealousy and hate, the most ambitious director since Erich von Stroheim and the most complete film maker since Charlie Chaplin, who by comparison seemed to Easley a mere cartoonist.

Though critical of Welles, overall Sarah considered him a martyr punished for trying to be an artist in Hollywood, blacklisted in effect. She could not help feeling sorry for him. To the contrary, Easley thought his misfortunes were largely his own fault, that Welles had driven his career the way he drove a car. He divided his attention, tried to do too much at once--multiple projects simultaneously in different media--and he had left town before making the final cuts of films, causing long delays, lost faith and mutilating changes by studio producers. Now he was seen as too artsy and unreliable, reinforcing contempt for art in Hollywood.

"I never had any discipline, you know." Orson held out empty hands, then wrung them, shuffling his feet and sweetly appealing to Sarah from under his brow with troubled eyes. "From the time I first spoke from my crib, I was treated as a genius."

Easley pulled the cigar from his mouth.

"We can only pay you as an actor."

Welles burst into laughter.

"That is all I can ask," he conceded. He reached into his portfolio and pulled out his tattered copy of the script and handed it to Sarah. "Though I did take the liberty of making a few suggestions, since you both are dreamers like me. We have to be dreamers to be doing tragedies, don't we. But Larry Olivier made a great hit out of *Hamlet*, now didn't he. So there's hope for us too!" He lowered his voice as if to his secretary. "When you have a fresh copy, I'll take another look at it tomorrow."

Sarah looked up, "Tomorrow?"

"I made a few sketches as well--just a few--if you don't mind the presumption." He pulled a whole big heavy sheaf of storyboard drawings from his portfolio and laid them in Easley's lap. "Just the scribbling of a humble actor."

Sarah sat shaking her head.

"Mr. Welles, I'm not sure that I can--"

--Call me Orson, Sarah. Please."

"I need time to study all these changes."

Welles stiffened and turned to Eisley, voicing disapproval in a deep portentous tone, "You know, I must get back to Rome!"

"Of course," Eisley nodded, exchanging glances with Sarah. "We'll have a fresh copy to you tomorrow."

"I think we should go through my sketches first."

Sarah glanced at the clock.

By the time Welles had presented his sketches of sets and costumes and camera setups, Sarah had gone to bed and the grandfather clock in the corner stood at twenty minutes after four. Eisley started getting irritable, his ulcer burned and he finally told Welles that he had to sleep. They would meet again at noon. After they parted for the night, Eisley put on his pajamas and went to take some pills in the bathroom. He tossed them down with a glass of water as the lights of the limousine came past the window, headed out the driveway toward the city. When he slid into bed and turned out his lamp, Sarah surprised him in the dark.

"He's fat," she said.

"Overweight."

"It makes him look too old for the role."

"He promised me he'll be ready by shooting time. He's taking diet pills and Dexedrine. He'll use a brace."

"I feel like I need one myself. Against him."

"We'll work it out."

After he rolled over onto his side to sleep, Eisley thought with some excitement of how much attention their star would bring to their picture. Welles had become such a widely known figure as an entertainer and as a campaigner for Roosevelt that he almost ran for the Senate from California, but said he gave up that idea because he would not be able to carry Los Angeles due to opposition from the Communists and their many liberal supporters in Hollywood. He had been subjected to a hate campaign against him by Communists while he was directing *Macbeth* in Harlem with a black cast and once he disrupted a Communist Party symposium by heckling and hooting from the rear of the auditorium until he got thrown out, experiences that gave new meaning to his report of a hostile invasion from the Red Planet. Nevertheless, because of his associations in the theater, and due to his caricature of newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst in *Citizen Kane*, some in the press were calling Welles a Communist. Eisley had only agreed to risk making this picture because Sarah implied that it might save their marriage. Afraid of provoking a subpoena, in the paranoid atmosphere of the Blacklist and possible atomic war, he took a gamble by casting the controversial Welles. He hoped that such a big name would attract enough attention to their picture to enhance the box office and not enough hostility to hurt it. He defied the industry fear of a dark movie, especially a costume drama, and agreed to do Sarah's tragedy because it had no apparent political significance, it was removed in time and perfect for Orson Welles.

At noon the next day they sat down around the conference table in the den and began going over the script, with Shifra Haran as stenographer, a sly willowy girl. She provided Welles with pills and other supplies from an immense accordion folder. Shorty brought in sandwiches on a tray and then an evening meal prepared by the resident chef from Ma Maison, king crabs with fish St. Pierre, big rich mogul crabs that cracked like human bones. Welles ate three, driving the discussion even while he ate, pushing them on, wanting to get back to Rome. Eisley sat back, for the most part, and watched poor Sarah struggle with the overpowering Orson Welles. He always made it a policy not to disagree with her over one of her scripts unless he felt compelled. He stayed out of her argument with Orson as much as he could, listening to them both, then making a decision as producer, often subject to change on the set. He wanted the most for his investment and agreed so consistently with Welles that Sarah sagged in her chair. More orator than writer, Orson wrote best for his own voice. To him, as to most directors, a story was only raw material, even a classic--to be devoured, transformed and made his own by telling it in a new way. Fidelity bored Orson. For him the truth of cinema was in the beauty and magnificence of original staging and performance.

"Sarah, Sarah, Sarah," the frustrated auteur sighed back in his chair with a weary dignity. His failures and humiliations had reduced his arrogance, though not his impatience. "You're too intellectual for the movies. You could write all the ideas of all the movies, mine included, on the head of a pin! It's not a form

in which ideas are very fecund, you know. It's a form that may grip you or take you into a world or involve you emotionally--but ideas are not the subject of films."

Sarah tried to contain herself. "This book is full of ideas!" she protested. "This is Melville!"

"No longer, my dear." Orson lit a big long cigar. "Now it's a film script. A different species. If you try to breed literature with film, they will beget a dull beast."

"Olivier's *Hamlet*?" pled Sarah.

"Shakespeare is exceptional in every way," his voice rose. "This book, though influenced by Shakespeare, is not great verse. It is not verse at all! And though by Melville, it is not *Moby-Dick*!" Losing patience, Welles raised his mighty voice from calm to booming oratory. "This tortured book is a ponderous bore! Even the sex is dull! To get away with this, I say we had better put on a show!"

Sarah looked to Ryan for support.

After midnight Welles got up and left, saying he would not be back to the house for any more conferences.

In the morning, Shorty summoned Eisley to the guest bungalow, where Welles informed him that he hated fighting and consequently would not be able to work with Sarah. Eisley tried, but could not change his mind. Over succeeding days and nights in the bungalow, excluding Sarah entirely, the two men fought about sets and camera setups. Welles heaped disdain on convention and wanted more dreamlike strangeness, whereas Eisley insisted on sustaining an illusion of objective reality.

Eisley made a show of continuing to consult with Sarah, but she could see where she stood. He rehearsed his cast and began shooting at the Universal Studio on the near side of the Hollywood Hills not far from the ranch, where he had been an extra in westerns during the thirties. Now as an independent producer, he wanted to exploit Orson Welles to the fullest, but at the same time, as the director he wanted this picture to be his own, a prestige feature with the class of Shakespeare. He hired Sal Dante as director of cinematography and reduced costs by filming in black and white and by using some existing sets at Universal. He accommodated Welles to the extent of going along with many elements of his set designs and some of his extreme camera angles, expressionistic in the style of his *Citizen Kane*, but Eisley used more cuts and closeups, shorter takes, a faster pace and a meditative voiceover by Welles.

The title *Pierre* appears on a background of gray clouds roiling and bulging high in accelerated motion with a glow of sunlight through them above dark mountains topped by rockfaces and slabs like broken monuments and headstones. Opening with resonant celestial trumpets, the music throughout the film is symphonic, a philharmonic orchestra playing majestic and brooding passages, first from Beethoven. The camera pans down from the mountain peaks over stony crags and declivities into a valley with a village, then approaches the main street lined with tall elm trees, in the light of a summer morning. A small herd of cows moves across the road, followed by two barefoot boys. Their rustic clothes, a horsedrawn carriage in front of a shop, hitching posts and drinking troughs indicate the middle of the nineteenth century. Orson Welles is the figure strolling into the village along the middle of the road, the happy young Pierre, wearing a blousy white shirt with a black satin vest and black trousers that make him look both formal and darkly romantic, his shirt wide open at the neck and his hair blown slightly about by a breeze machine.

Pierre strolls through the village to a picturesque little cottage all draped by vines and flowers, enclosed by a white picket fence, where he calls out softly for Lucy. Momentarily she appears, peering down from an upstairs window surrounded by flower blossoms, the actress Anne Baxter. She is made up as a conventional pretty ingenue, in a modest robe with her light blonde hair all springy ringlets that bounce when she moves her head. Eisley composed the shot to resemble an illustration of a romance in a popular women's magazine from that period, sentimental and frilly, with a long take in soft focus that turned Baxter into an angel. Welles had directed Baxter in one of his films and they seemed to get along well, but as an actor Orson always got so distracted by the other players and especially by beautiful women that he asked that whenever possible he be shot speaking his lines to an empty set or to the back of a double. He preferred to act alone. Eisley asked him to play the scene like Romeo to Juliet in the balcony, though she was not there.

The first time Eisley ever watched Anne Baxter on a set at Fox, he developed an infatuation for her that revived as soon as he saw her again and he had to be careful not to spend too much time with her when Sarah was around. The always cheerful Baxter made him feel upbeat. She had a buoyancy, a sweetness and an ardent sincerity that went deeper than such qualities in most actresses. Her mouth and teeth were small, her voice breathless with tenderness and excitement. Baxter was married, true, but only to an actor, a relationship usually considered open in Hollywood.

Yet of course he still wanted Sarah.

"I need you there," he had to beg.

They were standing at the side door of their house in the Valley all ready to leave for the studio one morning soon after he started to shoot. Sarah had dressed to go along as usual, then she balked.

"For what? You took my script away!"

"I just need you to be there. I still need your judgment on lots of things, Sarah. Even if I can't always follow it."

"Don't you see, he keeps rewriting just to have control!"

"We knew he'd do that."

"I didn't think he'd change so much."

"You'll get screen credit, Sarah. I'm the producer."

"At least you could fight for me a little."

"I'm fighting him constantly."

Though he felt badly about it, Easley had to admit to himself that he did not entirely regret that Sarah had been nudged aside. He had enough to do contending with Orson. While she was busy at wardrobe, he dropped in to see Anne in her dressing room and discussed her character.

Dissolve to a shot of Pierre Glendinning's ancestral home outside the village, white and elegant with high gables. Pierre sits at the breakfast table with his mother, played by the very arch Agnes Moorehead. Sarah protested that according to the story, Pierre's mother is beautiful and seductive, hence slightly perverse, like the captivating genteel matriarchal society she represents to a man such as Pierre, who resembles her in looks and some traits. Orson wanted Moorehead, however, his mother in *Kane* and his lover when he played *The Shadow* in what became the most popular daytime radio series. Easley went along with Moorehead because he wanted to avoid the incest theme and thought she looked perverse enough in her own way. Orson's real mother, who died when he was nine, had been a strong advocate of women's rights, yet as a bohemian she imposed no discipline on her son. She doted on him while his father turned into a negligent alcoholic. Orson resembled his beautiful mother in looks and talent, but he did not resemble Moorehead physically. Hence the portrait on the wall behind him of Pierre's late father General Glendinning, the godlike hero of the American Revolution, is actually an enlarged photo of Orson himself in makeup as an older man.

The perfect father, declares his mother.

Mary Glendinning compares her son to Romeo and reminds him of the tragic consequences of disobeying one's parents and marrying against their wishes. Pierre begs her pardon, gets up and kisses her on the cheek, then goes out to ride his white horse around the estate, visiting tenants. The regal widow strolls through a hallway hung with portraits of family heroes while her voiceover proceeds in soliloquy, as queen of her domain. She pauses in the huge living room with its great stone fireplace to focus on the paintings centered on a wall side by side, one of men signing the Declaration of Independence and the other of women signing the Resolutions at their Seneca Falls Convention.

"A noble boy, and docile," she murmurs to herself, her face soft at first, then gradually turning stony with resolution, her eyes narrowing, pride lifting her chin. "A fine, proud, loving, docile boy. His little wife to be, his Lucy, will not estrange him from me, for she too is docile--beautiful and reverential, and most docile. How glad I am that Pierre loves her so, and not some haughty creature with whom I could never live in peace." She picks up from a table the old General's baton with an eagle on its end, "This is his inheritance, this symbol of command. I swell out just holding it! Now I almost wish Pierre otherwise than sweet and docile to me, seeing that it must be hard for a man to be an uncompromising hero without ruffling any domestic brow. Pray God he remain all docility to me and yet prove a mighty hero to the world!"

Welles had come to Hollywood a mighty voice who sounded like God, a boy genius who could do it all, so clever that his first studio contract gave him final cut, the authority to edit the final version of his pictures. Most directors spent their entire careers without getting final cut. That was often why some bold souls tried to go independent, and why so many in the business envied and hated Welles from the start and were glad when he lost final cut in his contracts and had to submit to the studios like they did. On the morning of the third shooting day, Easley found him tilted back in his makeup chair, wearing a bib. Shorty stood teetering on a stool, shaving him. Orson said that he had never shaved himself in his life. Shorty had an explosive personality, given to sudden outbursts accompanied by uncouth noises and obscene gestures. Orson tilted back his lathered chin, exposing his throat to the long straight razor.

"Careful now, Babo," he rumbled at Shorty.

"Don't call me that, Boss."

"Why do I trust you?"

"Yeah okay, Boss. Hey, I could really do ya, couldn't I, Boss!"

"Shut up and shave!"

Shifra seated nearby had been reading him his lines for the morning. She got up, poured a glass of water and handed it to him with several pills. He was suffering from chronic back pain, bronchial asthma and hay fever. He would be putting on a brace and arch supports. Eisley sat down in a lounge chair as Shorty wobbled on his stool and drew the straight razor up along the pale throat, rising to his tiptoes.

"Orson," said Eisley, "I want to assure you it's going well."

His eyes popped wide.

"Twenty takes! Who do you think you are, William Wyler?" he barked. "Plodding conventional schlock!"

"I don't think it was that many. Listen, I don't want to direct you on the set unless I have to. We're shooting from your angles, Orson. My problem is just that Pierre is still young and innocent and you're playing him sophisticated right away."

Orson pulled off his bib.

"My dear man, don't you see it's a parody? Read the book! Melville hates romantic convention!"

They made eye contact in the big mirror.

"You even look a bit like Melville," Eisley marveled. "Listen, we've just got a few more scenes of innocence. Then your alienation will be just what I'm after. It's why we had to have you for the part. Nobody can do disillusionment the way you do."

Shorty wiped off the lather with a towel.

Orson pulled a tray into his lap from the counter, full of noses in rows. He considered his own too small. The growth of Pierre would be evoked by increasing the size of his schnozz. He stuck a false nose over his real one and rolled his eyes toward Eisley.

"Ryan, my friend. I am Gulliver in Lilliput. Cut me loose!"

"Soon, Orson. Soon."

He held Eisley in a resigned stare.

"If I bomb, they'll cut my throat!"

Strangely, he seemed almost to welcome such a fate as confirmation of his authenticity, his value. Eisley began to fear that Orson might sabotage the picture the way he had been known to adversely affect the performances of rival actors by distracting them with anecdotes just before they went on before the camera. He expected another confrontation and more retakes when he tried to persuade Orson to change his style again later. He popped another Benzedrine. On the set, when they clashed, he did not try to yell over Orson. Not even from up on the camera boom. He simply fell silent, then called for the retake and moved on in his own way. Orson hated silences. He felt snubbed and grew insecure, needing confirmation of some kind from his audience, especially now in Hollywood, which had so often disappointed him and eroded his faith in people.

Pierre drives his horsedrawn carriage into the village and stops in front of a clothing shop. Inside he meets the angelic Lucy, who loads him with packages, shawls, reticule, parasol and a small hamper. After a stop to unload at her cottage, he takes her for a ride in the carriage up through the hills around the valley. They banter about their wedding. Pierre laughingly refers to her mother as a matchmaker to the nation who goes about trying to promote the general felicity of the world by making all the young people of her acquaintance marry one another. Lucy laughs with sweet good humor, though she is startled and holds on tight when, breathing the open air of the hills, Pierre suddenly cries out with a fierce delight and snaps the reins to accelerate the horses! When he finally slows down and stops the carriage at a viewpoint overlooking the valley, she is flushed with excitement, though always genteel. The background of their conversation is the popular love music from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, progressing as he drives her home.

Lucy invites him into her parlor, where George Sanders rises from a chair to greet them, waiting there with Lucy's aunt. He bows to Lucy. The typecast Sanders is playing Pierre's cousin and rival, the snob Cecil Stanly, dressed in finery with lace cuffs. Having heard of Lucy's engagement, Stanly has called to extend his congratulations. His nasal tone and manner are aristocratic, his natural expression a sneer. After he takes his leave, Pierre sits down and talks with Lucy near her easel where she paints still lifes of fruit. The presence of the aunt inhibits them. Lucy asks Pierre sweetly to please fetch her portfolio.

The music begins to ascend as he stands, gathering volume and passion as he climbs her stairs, desire rising to excitement, violins and all the strings in union yearning upward toward a peak! At the top, he

hesitates, breathing heavily. Then he ventures on into her chamber, like entering a holy place, the Victorian chapel where an angel sleeps. The decor is frilly, dainty and evocative in the way of lingerie, yet perfectly genteel, the erotic effect conveyed by a pan shot and closeups of bosom-shaped pillows, tasseled lampshade bustles and a bedcover like a satin undergarment. Pierre stares at Lucy's bed, so perfectly fresh and unsoiled, and the music reaches its climax with recurrent waves of sweetness so excruciating that he closes his eyes, tilts back his head and stands in ecstasy. When he opens his eyes again, he looks transformed. As the romantic music diminishes, subsiding sweetly, his face in closeup shows his fantasy displaced by a gradual skepticism like the shadow of a passing cloud, the onset of disillusion, the sense that reality cannot possibly measure up to his dreams.

Dissolve to a cottage in the village one evening, where the voices of women can be heard singing a folk ballad. Pierre escorts his mother inside to a gathering that crowds the large parlor and adjoining rooms, mostly women sewing by the light of many candles that flicker in the current of air through the door, women of all ages. His name is announced with his mother. In response, a darkhaired young lady sewing in the corner faints to the floor. After a brief disturbance, she is revived. It is Ava Gardner in a high-necked black dress, the sultry dark star with a striking resemblance to Welles. Both have thick black hair, sensuous lips and intense dark eyes, mysterious and mesmerizing. Both tend to look out from under a lowered brow, sneaking glances at each other. Pierre is stunned! He seems to recognize this girl. The singing resumes and he clearly wants to approach the dark beauty who is meeting his covert glances, but he is inhibited by his mother holding his arm, chatting with other women who treat her as the matriarch of the valley.

In the village church, Pierre sits beside his mother in a pew near the front. Lucy is seated just across the aisle with her aunt. She smiles at him, sweetly innocent and happy. They listen to Reverend Falsgrave preach on charity. Closeup of Pierre, thoughtful and somber as a faint image emerges into definition and overlaps his face, the mysterious face of the dark girl matching his in double exposure, imploring him. Fade to Pierre writing at his desk at home. A black woman servant in an apron brings him a letter. He glances at it, considering whether to read it. He almost crumples it up. Instead, he frowns and unfolds it, as the camera looks over his shoulder. The handwriting is a childlike scrawl with tearstain smudges, a plea for his help.

"I am thy sister, Isabel."

Pierre looks up from the letter in shock.

He stuffs it into his jacket over his heart, goes out to the stable and saddles his white horse. Then he rides off toward the hills. Cut to him riding down a hill above a lake, to a shack almost covered with moss and vines. He knocks, the door opens and there stands the mournful girl in a plain shabby dress. With tears in her eyes, she greets him as her brother.

Gazing at her, he wonders how this can be.

Isabel narrates in a sad voiceover and the photography turns expressionistic, using Orson's setups and designs, with extreme camera angles representing the perspective of a child in a wild and frightening world. She was raised in poverty by an old couple and barely learned to read. Eventually she was taken to the estate of Cecil Stanly, where she worked as a milking maid, until he took advantage of her. When she resisted Stanly's advances, he dismissed her. Now she has no position, her reputation has been ruined and men are harassing her. She must leave this place.

"God called thee, Pierre! Not poor Bell."

She bows her head.

"Oh, my dear sister!" He sits beside her, embraces her and kisses her forehead. "Up, up, Isabel! Take no terms from the common world, but do thou make terms to it and demand thy rights!"

She looks up from weeping.

"Please, brother. Hand me the blue guitar."

He gets the instrument from the corner.

She plays it for him in a trance of ecstatic improvisation, strumming and humming with her black hair falling over her face, swaying with abandon, looking unconscious, wild and free! Pierre watches her in awe, falling under a spell.

"I will redeem thee, Isabel!"

Pierre in a closet of his bedroom at home opens an old trunk. He takes out a small framed portrait. Cut to the dining room where he stands holding it up, comparing it to the large portrait on the wall, the small one of his father as a happy young bachelor with a roguish look, in reality Orson himself, versus the large one of his father as an older man like God in uniform looking so upright and good, also Orson. Pierre frowns and strokes his chin. He wonders aloud whether the strange dark girl is in fact his sister, or if Stanly

lied to Bell about her parentage when he took liberties with her. Then he wonders if he would feel so inclined to help her if she were less beautiful than Ava Gardner.

Reverend Falsgrave comes to dinner that evening.

Pierre sits with his back to the portrait of his godlike father as his mother discusses her firing of their servant Delly Ulver, who has just given birth, having disgraced herself with a married neighbor who sacrificed one woman and ruined another. Mary Glendinning calls such men even more detestable than murderers. Pierre asks Reverend Falsgrave whether he thinks the legitimate child of an erring man should shun the illegitimate child. What would the Savior do? Falsgrave answers that even Delly's own parents have disowned her. Pierre notices a cameo brooch pinned over the minister's heart, representing the union of a dove with a serpent. He argues with his mother on behalf of Delly.

Mary Glendinning pushes up from her chair.

"Beware of me, Pierre!"

Furious, she flings her fork! He ducks as it flies over his head! The silver tines impale her own portrait on the wall, side by side with her late husband's, vibrating in her bosom!

At Lucy's cottage in the village, Pierre sits with her in the parlor. The aunt glances in from the next room. Pierre explains his predicament and begs for Lucy's forgiveness. Honor requires him to marry another. Lucy shrieks, she clutches at her heart and runs upstairs! Pierre hangs his head, dissolving into a shot of him driving a horsedrawn wagon down a hill to the shack beside the lake. On the slope just above the shack is a small fresh mound of earth, marked by a small cross. Isabel admits him. Inside, the servant girl Delly Ulver lies on the narrow bed, weeping in grief. Pierre loads their bags into the wagon and assists Isabel up into the front seat, then he helps Delly up into the rear as she sobs into a handkerchief. Long shot of the wagon as Pierre snaps the reins.

The horses pull them over the hill.

Fade to a dark night and Pierre pulling up the reins in front of The Black Swan Inn. He registers as man, wife and servant maid. The three travelers dine by candlelight, Pierre maintaining a brotherly distance from Isabel, while also exchanging looks and glances with her that increase the sexual tension between them. Upstairs, after kissing cheeks goodnight, they enter separate rooms, Isabel with Delly. Early the next morning, at the front desk Pierre sells his wagon to the owner of the inn. Then the three board a coach for the city. The overcast sky is threatening. After a montage of travel shots, at last the hooves of the horses clatter on stone cobbles and the wagon bounces and rattles into New York City.

"Master Pierre?" Delly speaks from a depth of sorrow, "It feels not as soft as the grass."

"No, Miss Ulver," replies Pierre. "The buried hearts of some dead citizens have perhaps come to the surface."

Street gas lamps form islands of light in urban gloom. From rat level, looking up at tall dark buildings, drab and sinister with no sky in view, the monumental cityscape is a maze of stone. When the coach arrives at the terminal, they transfer their luggage to a horse-drawn cab. Thereafter, the surly cab driver makes their search for lodgings difficult by disregarding Pierre's instructions. Eventually, in desperation, Pierre leaves Isabel, Delly and the luggage in a police station while he goes to call upon his cousin Cecil Stanly at his city house, to ask for help. A black male servant returns to the front door and says that Mr. Stanly declines to see Mr. Glendinning. Pierre turns angry and forces his way inside. In a drawing room with dazzling bright chandeliers, he confronts his cousin, who smugly declares that he does not know Pierre. Outraged now, Pierre tries to pounce on him but is restrained by servants, who throw him out of the building onto his knees.

Along the street, he passes through a gauntlet of taunting prostitutes and finally makes it back to the police station. The place is overcrowded with vomiting drunks, whores, homeless people in rags and an assortment of beggars and petty criminals. He finds Isabel getting mauled by a whiskery derelict and throws him aside. The door bursts open with a roar! More arrested suspects pour inside. A riot breaks out! Pierre fights his way through the mob, pulling along Isabel and Delly. They lose their bags in the brawl. At shabby lodgings nearby, a skeptical desk clerk mocks Pierre for having no luggage, but rents him rooms.

They cross the threshold.

"Mark this, Isabel," declares Pierre, looking at her with a new regard. "We are equal here. I do not stoop to thee, nor thou to me. We both reach up alike to a glorious ideal!"

They take separate bedrooms and Pierre maintains his brotherly pose, while exchanging looks with her of ambiguous love. In the scenes that follow, he begins trying to make a living as a writer of children's books, sitting day after day at an old desk by a lofty window, desperately scribbling away.

When acting for other directors, Orson was known to take vacations from the set every few days. In this instance, however, he kept working straight through, stopping each day only because of union regulations, due both to his eagerness to return to Rome and to his fascination with Ava Gardner, though the gossip columnists were reporting her involvements with the singer Frank Sinatra and with a matador in Spain. Easley stood beside Sal Dante going over his list of camera setups when he overheard Orson talking to Ava. The two sat relaxing in their canvas chairs, he demonstrating cape technique with gestures, she in costume as Bell, smoking a cigarette. Just then Shorty came around in front of Orson and delivered to him a stack of white handkerchiefs.

"Clean snotters," he said loudly. "You been swappin' so much spit in the backseat, I done a laundry for snotters."

Ava smiled and blew Shorty a kiss of smoke. Many women drawn into the orb of Orson enjoyed Shorty, whose reputation as a rake exceeded that of his charismatic boss.

"Be off!" Orson boomed—"Go!"

Shorty departed.

"I pay him bonuses to keep his mouth shut." Orson threw up his hands, "It does no good."

"Let's go!" Easley clapped his hands twice.

Orson rose as Pierre.

A panoramic shot of the city zooms down to the lower end of Manhattan, to an old apartment building on a dismal street. Closeup of the name engraved in stone above the entry, Apostles Manor. In a long take with Mahler mournful on the sound track, Pierre huddles over his desk in a frenzy, scribbling with a quill. A montage of shots depict him trudging sadly down the gloomy stairway of the building with an envelope under his arm, or trudging back up again empty-handed, with dim shafts of light beaming down from high above. Now and then he passes a cheerful old gentleman in conventional attire. They tip their top hats to each other, and then, occasionally, always initiated by the cheerful gentleman, they pause to exchange a commonplace or two.

The overly cheerful gentleman is played by the British comic actor Alastair Sim, who is a physical caricature of both Benjamin Franklin with his bald crown fringed by long straight graying hair and Ralph Waldo Emerson blithe and aloof, embodying, according to Sarah, either a synthesis of practical realism and utopian idealism, or an expedient compromise, incorporating the head of the one with the face of the other. His face is humorously ugly, long with crooked gapped teeth and doleful eyes that can bulge so large they float in their sockets like ping pong balls, or luxuriate under heavy lids with the sly reticence of a schemer. One day he hands Pierre a pamphlet, *Realism and Idealism*, by Plotinus Plinlimmon, Ph.D., Professor of Popular Philosophy. Thereafter when they pause in the stairwell, Plinlimmon engages Pierre in discussions of principles argued in his pamphlet.

"Compromise, my boy!" is his advice.

Dissolve to Pierre slumped in an armchair holding his head up with one hand, a dark shape in a bare dark room lit only by two candles, one beside Isabel strumming her guitar and one by the sink for Delly washing dishes. When she finishes playing a ballad, Pierre looks up. He tells her that he is trying to write an adult book, one that will make them enough money to live comfortably, a serious book that presents the truth about life, a great book, not like popular romances. Her music inspires him, yet he also feels a creeping despair and struggles to go on.

He is writing in his bedroom one day when a knock at the door interrupts him. He gets up, unlocks and Isabel hands him a letter, apologizing. The camera looks over his shoulder as Lucy reads her letter to him in a voiceover, sweetly anguished and breathless. She has terrible news. Cecil Stanly hired a detective, informed Pierre's mother that her son was living in sin and complained of it as a disgrace to their family. In her grief, Mrs. Glendinning disowned Pierre, willed her entire estate to Stanly and died of heart failure. Lucy came to the city hoping to sell her paintings. Cecil introduced her to patrons and art gallery owners, but then, when she declined his proposal of marriage, he turned against her. Now she is desperate for a place to stay. She begs Pierre to tell Isabel that she is merely a cousin, she asks no more. Pierre sits down heavily at his desk with the letter and holds his head.

Lucy arrives wearing the plainest of clothes, carrying a bag with her easel and portfolio under her arm. She looks transformed without makeup, her hair no longer in ringlets, now natural and free. Her paintings are no longer still lifes of fruit, they are cityscapes and portraits. She contributes a tiny income to the household by sketching affluent strangers down in Washington Square Park, shown with the Roman arch and the city visible in the background. At first, Isabel is wildly suspicious and jealous, but Pierre treats both women like sisters, as equals, and Lucy is so sweet, the two women soon get along well enough to share a

bed. The chastity of Pierre is suggested by his heavy nightclothes, shots of closed doors and sounds of clicking locks.

Long into the night, he scribbles with his feather by candlelight, his dark hair wild and eyes alight. He blinks, rubs his eyes and shakes his head as if he is dizzy. The dark head of Isabel emerges from his in double exposure to a place beside him, looking into the camera from under her brow with the same inspired expression as Pierre. Then the bright head of Lucy emerges from his in double exposure and moves to his other side. Pierre is centered between the earthy Isabel and the heavenly Lucy. Slowly the three parallel faces overlap into one in a triple exposure, then slowly they part and rearrange, each of them in turn occupying the center with the others on each side, until the three are resolved again into one. Pierre sighs in sublimation. He resumes writing with a renewed vigor, his feather trembling. Through the lofty window by his desk, leaves on an elm tree branch wither and fall in time lapse. Finally the branch is bare. White flakes are falling past the window and covering the branch as Pierre huddles at his desk in a heavy overcoat with a dark knit whaling cap pulled down over his ears, scribbling in fingerless knit gloves, his hand shaking. Now and then he pauses to look up and blink and rub his eyes, as if he is going blind. Slow dissolve to a shot of him outside, trudging with difficulty through the snow, falling to his knees in a drift, then struggling up to his feet again and staggering onward.

He pushes a thick envelope into a mail slot.

Then he returns, trudges up the stairs to his room and lies face up on his cot, still wearing his overcoat and cap, giving him the contour of a whale, breathing up spouts of steam into the cold winter air. Outside through the lofty window, the snow melts off the branch. Pierre is standing in the main room, with Isabel seated in the corner sewing. He opens his mail and reads a letter from his publisher, Steel, Flint & Asbestos. They accuse him of fraud. Upon the pretense of writing a popular novel, he accepted a cash advance and then delivered a blasphemous tragedy. Their attorney has been instructed to vigorously pursue recovery of their advance plus the costs of setting manuscript in type before his swindle was discovered. Cut to a shot from rat level, the feet of Pierre in his dark worn boots and the letter fluttering to the floor.

He is lying on his bed as though dead.

All appeals from Isabel and her knocks on his door go unanswered, until he hears the voice of Lucy in distress, sobbing and distraught. He goes out to her. Tearfully she tells him that Cecil Stanly came to the park with two friends in a coach, to be sketched. Cut to Stanly seated on a park bench with his knees crossed, in a fur-lined coat and tall beaver hat, leering at Lucy while she sketches his portrait. His two aristocratic friends loiter nearby, tipping their hats to passing ladies in fashionable dress. Stanly tells Lucy that he has become a critic. He remarks that Pierre should confine himself to writing for children, but if he ever should manage to publish anything adult, Stanly would be pleased to give him a review that he deserves. In the meantime, he would be honored to become Lucy's patron, if she understands his meaning. He will set her up in a hotel and solicit wealthy clients to sit for her. She will live a life of luxury and pleasure. Lucy stops sketching and clutches at her heart as she declines.

Stanly bristles with anger, calls her a woman of the street and refers to Pierre with threats and lashings of hate!

"He will never leave us alone," says Pierre.

With a dark resolve he plunges into his bedroom, pulls out a brace of pistols and loads them with powder and bullets. Isabel is tending Lucy as Pierre stalks past them and out of the flat. Cut to a shot looking down the dim stairwell to a landing where Plotinus Plinlimmon is on his way up. The heavy pounding of feet above him coming down the stairs makes the cheerful gentleman look up. Then his face drops in alarm, his mouth as if something is ghastly, his eyes popping round and white in the sockets. Shot from the professor's perspective up the stairs, Pierre thunders straight down toward the camera in his overcoat, hatless and wild-haired, a mighty rage bulging his eyes under a lowered brow, manifestly a man who does not intend to compromise.

The cautious Plinlimmon steps back as if from a monster and tips his hat.

Out in the street Pierre is shot from a low angle that makes him appear taller and stronger than before. Throughout the shoot Eisley has photographed him from slightly above, except when he rode his white horse, the angle Orson preferred as a rule because it made him look younger and leaner in his brace, in the proper lighting and makeup and sucking in his cheeks, whereas now his jowls add just a hint of decadence.

Pierre marches through the park.

Curbed beyond the Roman arch is a luxury coach, where Cecil Stanly stands like a dandy with his two aristocratic friends, surveying young ladies. Stanly notices Pierre coming toward him. He pulls off his top hat and hands it to one of his friends, then he takes a horsewhip from the driver and sidesteps, gliding out

into the street with a haughty bravado, languidly manipulating his wrist enough to ripple the whip. They confront one another in the middle of the great avenue as passersby scream, withdraw and back away. Isabel and Lucy come running through the park toward them. Long shot through the Roman arch of Pierre standing braced in the street with his feet spread, forming another arch. Stanly is rat-sized, snapping his tail. Zoom through the stone arch and the human arch to a closeup of Stanly dressed as a British officer in a white periwig. Behind him in back projection are rank after rank of occupying British troops with rifles held at the ready, bayonets pointing at Pierre, a clip from a Revolutionary War epic, as he recalls his godlike grandfather. Sarah thought of the Redcoats as the equivalent of Reds, but refrained from that comparison. Stanly lashes out, cracking his whip like a slave overseer, leaving a gash across the cheek of Pierre!

Pierre gestures at Isabel and Lucy to stay back.

The whip slashes across his face again! He loses his balance and drops to one knee. Stanly pulls back the whip to strike again. Pierre jumps up, crosses his wrists, pulls out the pistols from each breast of his coat and fires them both into Stanly! The cad reels backward, flinging the whip into a wriggle through the air like a snake. One of his friends pulls out a small pistol, but the other stops him. Pierre is shown from behind with his arms hanging straight down at his sides, the pistols dangling. After a few seconds, moving only his wrists, he flips the pistols away.

Isabel and Lucy rush to each side of him.

Dissolve to a dungeon in city prison, where twilight is falling in bars across the floor. Pierre sits in the gloom with his back against the wall looking older, his face in despair.

"It is ambiguous," he ruminates. "Had I been heartless toward Bell, then would I have been happy for life."

The turnkey arrives with Isabel. After the lock clicks behind her, she kneels and embraces Pierre. They seem closer than ever before as they coil together.

Then, Pierre rises.

"Be not deaf to me, ye stony walls!" he booms. He glowers straight into the camera, then he squints as if into a mirror. "Now we see how subject virtue is to villainy." He turns to Isabel, "Now they will have us in their stony court, to mock and vilify. Now shall all I did for good be damned and those I love be all the worse!" Pacing, he swells. "The world does not advance collectively to Truth, but only here and there some individuals do. They leave the rest behind, cutting themselves adrift from their sympathy and making themselves liable to be regarded with distrust and hate. Expediency is folly to God. And so also, conversely, the heavenly wisdom of God is an earthly folly to man. This world worships compromise and mediocrity. It hath but whip and scorn for all contemporary grandeur! At the helm of my soul, I saw the rocks, but I resolved to sail on! I am the fool of Truth! Shall I drag my angels down to Hell with me?"

"Live, Pierre!" cries Isabel—"Live!"

His voice descends to the bottom of it all.

"Now, my liberty. The poison, Bell."

She shrinks from his hand. He rips open her bodice and takes out a vial from between her breasts and drinks.

Moments later, Lucy comes in a rush with the jail guard.

When she sees the two on the floor inside the cell, she shrieks and grabs the bars! She sobs the name of Pierre and her hands slide down the bars as she crumples to her knees. The guard unlocks. A shot straight down from the ceiling shows Pierre in his white dueling shirt flat on his back with his arms straight out to the sides. Isabel is nestled under his left arm, with her own arm thrown across his breast and the empty vial still held in her limp fingers, looking darker in the dimness, like a black woman with her black hair vining across his face. One of his eyes is staring blankly upward.

"All is o'er!" Lucy looks into the camera with glistening eyes and a brave resilience, "And ye knew him not!"

"Print that!" Eisley yelled.

Everyone on the set broke into applause.

He came down from the boom and shook hands all around and thanked them all. The caterers had laid out a feast and he was starved. He went over and picked out some cold cuts. Orson had his limousine waiting outside, already packed for his flight back to Rome. Before making an exit, in his cape and Italian suit with pinstripes like thin prison bars, he came up to Eisley, who turned from the long table eating lamb on a toothpick.

They shook hands.

"You're going to cut them, aren't you," Orson teased with twinkling eyes, as if he knew all along and wanted to show that he would compromise when he had to. "My erotic scenes."

"Nooo," Eisley said.

Orson chuckled in delight, with Shorty tugging at his sleeve, "You're going to defy the Production Code?"

"There was no film in the cameras for those scenes, Orson."

"*What!* Oh for-- The sex is in the text!"

"We can't get away with what they did in the Victorian Age."

Orson scowled and raised his voice, "All that a waste?"

"A waste? You didn't enjoy kissing Ava?"

At that, Orson had to smile.

"So that's why there were no retakes. And I thought I was perfect!" he roared with laughter. "My God, did she know?"

Shorty pulled hard on his sleeve.

"Of course not," Eisley said. "I did it for you and the crew. All that chastity was driving the boys crazy. Tell me now, after all. You didn't mind taking a little direction, did you?"

Orson looked upon him with a stony eye.

"It's like taking a little poison."

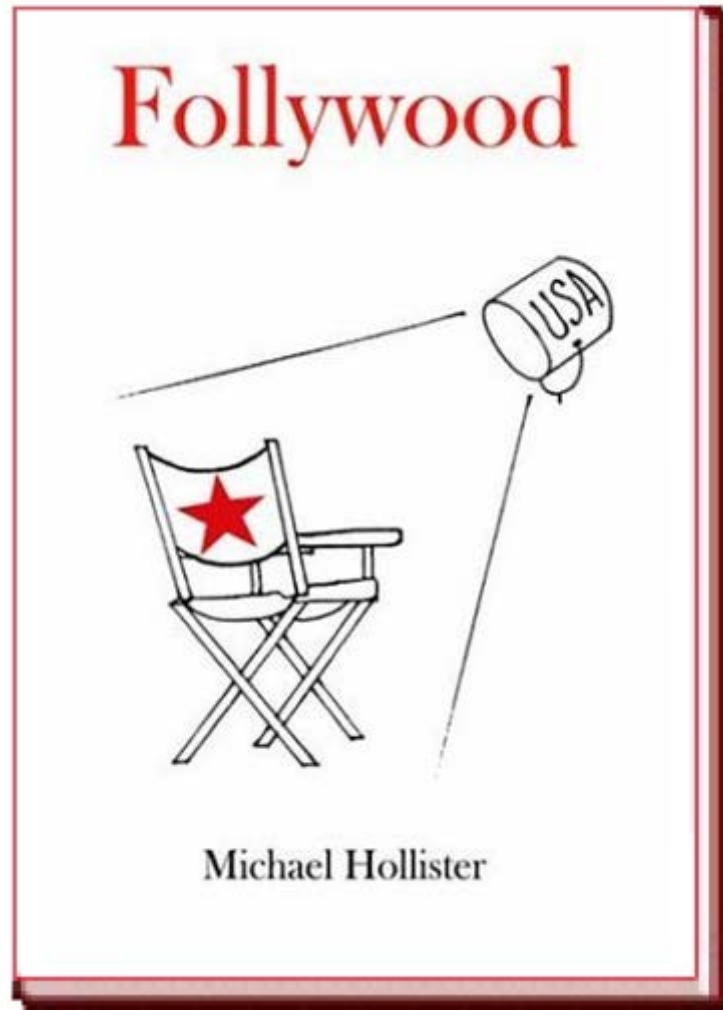
Eisley had a more difficult time with Sarah, who felt more than hurt by getting pushed out of the way while he dueled with Orson. They had such a fight over the ending that at one point Eisley reminded her that she had the final cut in their marriage. As always, she wanted to be faithful, while he wanted to make a popular movie, one that gave women some hope. He had scripted the survival of both Isabel and Lucy, so that in the end he could compromise with Sarah by allowing Isabel, at least, to die with Pierre in accord with the psychological allegory. He felt like Plinlimmon, but he did not intend to be such a fool as Pierre.

He lived in dread of a bomb.

For luck, he treated Boffo to some of the steaks they bought wholesale for Orson and had left over. He moved his desk from his den into the guest bungalow, leaving the Venetian brothel decor as the rooms had been redone for Orson. Anne Baxter proved to be a faithful wife, adept at deflecting overtures, and Eisley respected her for that. In respect for Sarah, he brought no actresses or other women to the bungalow, only his secretary Lily Dooch. He used the sauna, read in the big red armchair, smoked the Upmann cigars that Orson left behind and turned his attention to a formula romance he had just been assigned to direct at Fox. At the box office, *Pierre* had only a little more success as a film than it ever had as a book in the United States, where audiences disliked unhappy endings, but it did much better in Europe.

After that over the years, Orson grew larger, his flesh imprisoning his spirit, and Eisley saw him only in television commercials toward the end. He heard that Orson considered having some fat cut off, but feared that he would be mutilated like his films. Starved for opportunities to direct, he swelled with the century to a girth of such magnitude that a publicist who saw him partially unclothed referred to him as a beached white whale. Such a waste. The last Eisley heard, Orson had produced a postmodern approach to *Moby-Dick* for the London stage, ordering a different course every night, stuffed full of adlibs and starring himself as a corpulent Captain Ahab.

Michael Hollister
Chapter 16
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.