

FICTIONAL FILM ADAPTATION

“Up in Michigan” (1921)

Ernest Hemingway

(1899-1961)

from *Follywood* (2005)

On the black screen in silence, the title emerges in simple white letters, *Women in Hemingway*. Then the smaller title *Up in Michigan* appears, dissolving into a high aerial view of a village in the wilderness with a dock extending into a bay.

The camera tracks slowly over a vast forest with clearings in farmland and descends into the town, little more than a main street like a thousand other logging towns. The houses along the street are sheltered by elm trees. Waves are lapping at the shore. The sound of a hammer clanging on iron displaces birdsong and a pan of the street using deep focus shows the blacksmith shop opposite the schoolhouse at the near end and a church at the far end. At ground level we find the source of the clanging hammer and come to a stand looking in through the doorway of the blacksmith shop, where Humphrey Bogart in a leather apron and a big dark mustache is pounding on a length of glowing hot steel.

He hangs up his heavy apron and crosses the lot to a washbasin outside a house, where a girl appears at the kitchen door, shyly observing. Zoom to closeup of Bacall watching him through the screen door, an innocent with big eyes in a clean gingham apron, her hair pulled back above her exposed ears and falling down behind. Sarah thought of the girl as her own daughter, like Karen could be one day. Closeup of the blacksmith's hairy arms showing white above the tanned line as he soaps himself. Cut back to the girl in profile, her face expressing a furtive pleasure.

Dissolve into a montage of the girl washing dishes, cleaning and cooking for her employer the large Mrs. Smith. In the evening, the blacksmith comes over to the house, reads the paper and talks shop with Mr. Smith. The girl peeks out at him while he eats. Early one fall morning he goes off deer hunting in a wagon with Mr. Smith and another man. While he is gone, the girl languishes in bed at night and tosses around unable to sleep. Then one day, at last, she sees the wagon coming back down the road and she runs to meet it. The three men return with beards and three deer, stiff thin legs sticking out the back of the wagon. The blacksmith looks like a wild mountain man as he unloads a buck with big antlers.

He nods hello to the girl.

“Did you shoot it?”

“Yeah. Ain't it a beauty?”

He lifts the stiff deer onto his back and carries it to the smokehouse. The young girl, as a beauty herself, looks disappointed and frustrated by the anticlimax of his return.

That evening, from the kitchen, she overhears the men out in the front room passing a jug. They talk about deer and whiskey as if they are on the same plane with women and elixir. They come into dinner acting respectable and the girl sits down and eats with them and Mrs. Smith. The blacksmith has shaved off his beard and looks clean. After supper, they go out into the front room again and pick up the jug. The girl clears the table with Mrs. Smith, then sits down in the kitchen near the stove, pretending to read a book while she listens to overhear the blacksmith. The Smiths go upstairs for the night. Then the other man leaves the house.

Now she is alone downstairs with the blacksmith. He comes into the kitchen with his hair ruffled, unsteady on his feet, and the girl looks down at her book. He comes slowly around behind her chair. Closeup of her face, anticipating his touch. He reaches up slowly to touch her--cut away to a shot of a teakettle just starting to whistle. The industry censor would not permit him to slip his arms around her, let alone put his hands on her breasts, one of many situations where an iceberg principle was imposed by the Production Code. Her virginal face, in soft focus, is frightened yet hopeful. The blacksmith appears to be holding her tightly, but his hands cannot be shown. As he bends to perhaps kiss her neck, the camera pulls back until through the doorway the jug becomes visible overturned on the floor. With deep focus, through a second doorway in the far background, the camera discerns a deer head on a wall.

The blacksmith invites her to go for a walk. The girl takes the whistling kettle off the stove, then gets her coat from the peg on the kitchen wall. They go out the back door into the dark and walk down the road through the trees with his arm around her. Every few moments they stop and he kisses her for the brief time permitted by the censor, who allowed no excessive or lustful kissing. They proceed down the dark road to the warehouse at the dock on the bay, where the camera notices a canoe tied at the bottom of a ladder and offers the perspective of a romantic paddle out into the bay. On the dock near the shelter of the warehouse, the blacksmith pulls the girl into a rough embrace.

There is no moon.

Dark clouds fill the sky and water is lapping as her gaspy ambivalence is magnified on the sound track. They are dimly backlit by the bay, silhouettes involved in something that could be either embracing or wrestling. The censor would not permit a scene of sexual intercourse fully clothed or otherwise, forcing Sarah to cut explicit dialogue and to transpose the action from horizontal to vertical, changing the outcome. The best she could devise, wanting above all to avoid a comic effect that would offend the censor, was to have the girl sustain her ambiguous struggle with the powerful hairy drunken blacksmith until he faints at her feet like a Victorian maiden, then curls up into a fetal position and belches.

Closeup at dock level of the girl's heels from behind, together like the heels of a matador, while avoiding any reference to bullfighting, considered an immoral sport by the Production Code. She stands close to his curled body, looking down at him long enough for a viewer to wonder if she will kick his butt into the bay. Instead, she kneels. Closeup of the blacksmith's face with its thick dark mustache as she kisses him on the cheek. He begins to snore with his mouth slightly open. She rises and walks to the edge of the dock and looks down at the water, shivering. A mist is coming up from the bay. Closeup of her misty eyes as she walks back to where the blacksmith is curled up. She lifts his head and shakes it! Weeping softly, she pleads with him to please wake up.

The unconscious male curls tighter.

Finally she takes off her coat, leans over with a movement like unfurling a cape and covers him with it. She tucks it around him carefully. Closeup of his face mashed down on the dock with his hair sticking awry. From this low vantage and keeping his face clear in the foreground, the camera looks up to her as she starts back along the dock. She stops and looks back at him lying there, her face luminous in the dark sky. With deep focus the camera keeps his loutish face in the frame while showing the girl as she climbs above the mist to the house where he will have to face her in the morning. Her figure is the last image to fade, climbing upward.

Michael Hollister
from Chapter 10
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.