

She was married to Charles Laughton from 1929 until his death in 1962. She was trained as a dancer by Isadora Duncan. She wrote two memoirs, *Charles and Me* 1939, and *Elsa Lanchester Herself* 1983.

UNA O'CONNOR (Agnes Teresa McGlade, 23 October 1880, Belfast, Ireland—4 February 1959, New York, New York, heart ailment) was one of the great shriekers in film. She appears in two roles in *Bride of Frankenstein*—as the primo prominent shrieker in the Frankenstein part of the film and as the maid who walks the Afghans in the literary intro. Some of her other films were *Witness for the Prosecution* 1957, *Adventures of Don Juan* 1948, *The Corpse Came C.O.D.* 1947, *Of Human Bondage* 1946, *Cluny Brown* 1946, *The Bells of St. Mary's* 1945, *The Canterville Ghost* 1944, *This Land Is Mine* 1943, *Random Harvest* 1942, *The Strawberry Blonde* 1941, *The Sea Hawk* 1940, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* 1938, *Rose-Marie* 1936, *Father Brown, Detective* 1935, *David Copperfield* 1935, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* 1934, *The Invisible Man* 1933, and *Dark Red Roses* 1929."

The literary critic and long-time Buffalo resident Leslie A. Fiedler wrote: "I have a special fondness for James Whale's "Bride of Frankenstein" because it is the only one of many retellings of Mary Shelley's novel that lets me laugh. All horror fiction and drama runs the risk of stirring in its audience, along with the gasps of terror, chortles and giggles. And the Frankenstein story has been especially risible ever since Whale and Boris Karloff turned Mary Shelley's sensitive and super-intelligent "monster" into a clumsy, inarticulate dolt with bolts in his head. Whale, however, manages to make those chortles and giggles contribute to rather than undercut the horrific impact of the story by allowing to be born the Bride of the Monster, whom Dr. Frankenstein begins to create in the original novel but then aborts before it reaches full term. With the help of an extremely talented make-up man and Elsa Lanchester, one of the great comic actresses of the world, he portrays her as a creature who, though vicious, is humorously cute and finally somehow endearing; thus making it possible for me for once to laugh at a horror show without feeling guilty."

From James Curtis, *James Whale: A New World of Gods and Monsters*, Faber & Faber, 1998:

For *The Bride of Frankenstein* Karloff again submitted to the torturous routine of becoming the Monster, a four-hour makeup job made somewhat more bearable by a rubber headpiece Jack Pierce fashioned to replace the buildup of cheesecloth and collodion used on the original. The Monster's face had to show the ravages of fire, which Pierce accomplished with some carefully rendered scars and an abbreviated wig. ("All the fetching bangs and forelocks of the synthetic man are gone," moaned the *New York Times*.) The result, painted a concrete blue with chartreuse highlights around the eyes and forehead, shuffled onto the set on the morning of January 2, 1935. (237)

A blue mimeo of Balderston's fourth draft of the screenplay was submitted for review on July 23, 1934. Joseph I. Breen predictably responded with objections to dialogue in which Frankenstein and his work were compared to God, and to one scene in which the Monster watches through a window as a young couple make love. Breen cautioned against the Monster's use of the word "mate" at any point in the story, as well as any material "which suggests that he desires a sexual companion." (235-236)

"No one knows what the subconscious mind really is," [Whale] said, "but we are all afraid of it. The mind conjures up fear through sight, through sound, and through mental pictures, and of the three, the latter is—to most intelligent people—the most potent. What people see on the screen in a so-called 'horror picture' is the equivalent of these ghostly pictures of the mind." (238)

"He was charming," Jack Latham remembered of Thesiger. "He was, of course, ugly as sin, which he resented, but God knows he was great in the part." Thesiger would sit on the set doing needlepoint between takes. He made full issue of his gayness—in contrast to Whale's reserved and studied mannerisms—and dubbed himself "the stichin' bitch." Upon his arrival in Hollywood, he set up a gallery of his paintings and needlework in his hotel room—with a price clearly marked beneath each item. (240)

For Karloff, Mescall used a short lens placed close and low to accentuate height. For Thesiger, he reversed position and filmed from above, appropriately distorting the character's head. Mescall performed admirably, although the Monster's makeup gave him fits: "Karloff's makeup was blue-green in color," he said, "and to register this photographically, the light on him was projected through blue filters...the makeups of the others were pink or reddish in tone, and lights of a corresponding shade had to be trained on their faces, while the blue lights had to be shielded from them...no matter where the characters moved in the scene, each constantly had to be in the rays of lights of the proper color." (243)

[about the scene where the bride is electrified into life] "In a sequence of this sort," said Kent, "where so many cuts are required, the burden of constructing has to be the editor's. Procedure is slow and one has to feel his way through an abundance of film. The lengths of the cuts are important. The gadgets and paraphernalia interspersed with the subject must be used interestingly so as to avoid repetition. An effort is made to hold the audience's attention to the extent that they forget they are watching nothing but film. The director can, and does, have a say as to its overall length. The sound effects are an important factor, but in my opinion the most valuable contribution to this sequence was made by Franz Waxman for his imaginative music score." (245)

James Whale would go on to make another ten features, some artistically and financially successful, but never again

would he achieve such a perfect harmony of inspiration and control, nor would he ever again make another film more highly esteemed or more frequently revived. For with *The Bride of Frankenstein*, James Whale had truly created his masterpiece. (252)

[The note Whale wrote just on May 29, 1957, shortly before he drowned himself in his swimming pool:]

To ALL I LOVE,

Do not grieve for me. My nerves are all shot and for the last year I have been in agony day and nights —except when I sleep with sleeping pills—and any peace I have by day is when I am drugged by pills.

I have had a wonderful life but it is over and my nerves get worse and I am afraid they will have to take me away. So please forgive me, all those I love and may God forgive me too, but I cannot bear the agony and it [is] best for everyone this way.

The future is just old age and illness and pain. Goodbye all and thank you for all your love. I must have peace and this is the only way.

Jimmy

from the entry on Whale in *World Film Directors*, ed. John Wakeman NY, '87:

American, born in England, sixth of seven children. Took pains to expunge working class background traces. Cartoonist. Infantry commission at outbreak of WWI. Served in trenches on Western front, captured on a night reconnaissance, sent to POW camp at Holzminden near Hanover, took up acting to stave off boredom. On return to England took stage roles, worked in provincial repertory. Met Charles Laughton in *The Man with Red Hair*, lifelong friendship. Whale directed *Journey's End* in 1928 w/ young Laurence Olivier, surprise hit made Whale famous. Well-received in Hollywood. Directed dialogue for *The Love Doctor* and Howard Hughes' *Hell's Angels* (1930).

Signed w/ Universal where he did all his best-remembered films. Snatched *Frankenstein*, explained that "of 30 available stories, it was the strongest meat and gave me a chance to dabble in the macabre. I thought it would be amusing to try and make what everybody knows is a physical impossibility seem believable for sixty minutes. Also it offered fine pictorial chances, had 2 grand characterizations, and had a subject matter that might go anywhere." Produced in 1931 "generally agreed to be "the most famous of horror films, and deservedly so." (John Baxter) Inspired casting of Boris Karloff. Whale said later "Karloff's face has always fascinated me, and I made drawings of his head. Adding sharp bony ridges where I imagined the skull might have joined. His physique was weaker than I could wish, but that queer, penetrating personality of his, I felt, was more important than his shape, which could easily be altered."

...Initially reluctant to provide a sequel to *Frankenstein* but persuaded by Universal. "The result is considered by most critics Whale's finest and most stylish film. In *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), his sardonic humor and delight and extravagance are ideally blended with his mastery of the visual macabre. With virtuoso confidence, he skillfully switches mood from one moment to the next, setting the ambiguous tone in a tongue-in-cheek prologue in which Elsa Lanchester, as Mary Shelley, outlines the Frankenstein story to Shelley and Byron. Much of the film's humor hinges on Ernest Thesiger's outrageously idiosyncratic performance as Dr. Pretorius, imperturbably offering the monster a cigar as it lurches menacingly out of the shadows. Virtually all the human participants, in fact, are caricatured; only the monster, as Roy Edwards, pointed out, "receives none of the director's gibes. . . . In comparison with his dotty human entourage he remains curiously noble, sad, and pathetic.""

...*The Bride of Frankenstein* broke box-office records, and Whale attained the height of his prestige as the studio's star director....Whale's own attitude to Hollywood, and his eminence within it, was one of amused fascination: "That they should pay such fabulous salaries is beyond ordinary reasoning. Who's worth it? But why not take it? And the architecture! And the furnishings! I can have modernistic designs one day—and an antiquated home overnight! All the world's made of plaster of paris!"

from Kim A. Woodbridge's Mary Shelley web site, www.desert-fairy.com/maryshel.shtml:

Mary Shelley spent the greater part of the summer of 1816, when she was nineteen, at the Chapuis in Geneva, Switzerland. The entourage included her stepsister, Claire Clairmont, Shelley, Lord Byron, and John Polidori, Byron's physician. Lord Byron rented the Villa Diodoti on the shores of Lake Geneva, which John Milton, the author of *Paradise Lost*, had visited in the 1600's. Rousseau and Voltaire had also resided on these shores. Mary considered the area to be sacred to enlightenment.

The weather went from being beautiful and radiant to melodramatically tempestuous. Torrential rains and incredible lightning storms plagued the area, similar to the summer that Mary was born. This incredible meteorological change was due to the eruption of the volcano, Tambora, in Indonesia. The weather, as well as the company and the Genevan district, contributed to the genesis of *Frankenstein*.

All contributing events that summer intensified on the night of June 16th. Mary and Percy could not return to Chapuis, due to an incredible storm, and spent the night at the Villa Diodati with Byron and Polidori. The group read aloud a collection of German ghost stories, *The Fantasmagoriana*. In one of the stories, a group of travelers relate to one another supernatural experiences that they had experienced. This inspired Byron to challenge the group to write a ghost story.

Shelley wrote a forgettable story, Byron wrote a story fragment, and Polidori began the "The Vampyre", the first modern vampire tale. Many consider the main character, Lord Ruthven, to be based on Byron. For some time it was

thought that Byron had actually written the story but over time it was realized that Dr. Polidori was the author. Unfortunately, Mary was uninspired and did not start writing anything.

The following evening the group continued their late night activities and at midnight Byron recited the poem, Christabel by Samuel T. Coleridge. Percy became overwrought during the reading and perceived Mary as the villainess of the poem. He ran out of the room and apparently created quite a scene. This incident undoubtedly affected Mary, leading to feelings of guilt that contributed to the story ideas she later developed.

For the next couple of days Mary was unable to begin her story. The poets dropped theirs but Mary persisted in her creative endeavor. She felt that her ambitions and her value were at stake and attempted to turn the pressure and frustration into creative energy.

On June 22nd, Byron and Shelley were scheduled to take a boat trip around the lake. The night before their departure the group discussed a subject from de Stael's *De l'Allemagne*: "whether the principle of life could be discovered and whether scientists could galvanize a corpse of manufactured humanoid". When Mary went to bed, she had a "waking" nightmare:

I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life...His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away...hope that...this thing...would subside into dead matter...he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains...

The next morning Mary realized she had found her story and began writing the lines that open Chapter IV of *Frankenstein* - "It was on a dreary night in November"- She completed the novel in May of 1817 and it was published January 1, 1818.

Join us next week, Tuesday, February 6, for Luis Buñuel's classic film of a dinner gone surrealistically awry, EXTERMINATING ANGEL

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