Bradford G. Boyle
[redacted]
English 215

THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN:
THE MUSICAL SCORE, THE SETS, AND THE MAKEUP

The Bride of Frankenstein, produced by Universal Studios in 1935, is perhaps the finest horror film ever made, and certainly one of the greatest sequels ever filmed. Much has been written about this genre classic, mostly about James Whale's masterful direction or Boris Karloff's portrayal of Frankenstein's Monster. But in this article I will instead concentrate on three aspects of The Bride of Frankenstein that are not usually discussed: the musical score, the sets, and the make-up.

The musical score for Bride was composed by Franz Waxman and contributed to the film's greatness enormously. The score was quite an improvement over the first Frankenstein film's (produced by Universal in 1931) which had no score, except for short pieces of music composed by David Broekman. Perhaps the best piece by Waxman in Bride was the music written for the film's climatic creation scene. The music conveyed the frenzied excitement and helped the viewer feel the massive life-creating power of the electricity. Waxman's score, like many aspects of the film, is at times humorous. A good example of this are the "wedding bells" included in the music heard during the scene in which the Monster

meets his bride. Waxman's score for Bride proved to be so popular that parts of it were later used in Universal's popular serials Flash Gordon (1936) and Buck Rogers (1939).

The Bride of Frankenstein's sets, created by Charles D. Hall, played a major part in uptaining the film's eerie and gothic atmosphere. Some of the sets, most notably the German village, were created by Hall for the original Frankenstein. Many of Hall's sets were gigantic and complex- one forest scene came complete with a working waterfall! His graveyard sets were particularity effective: who but a dead man would ever venture there? His huge forest sets built for the scenes in which the angry mob gives chase to Frankenstein's Monster were composed of bleak, naked trees--conveying the Monster's sense of fear and alienation. In contrast, the trees found in the scene when the Monster rescues the girl from drowning are green (we presume) and full--signalizing the Monster's feelings of love for this pretty, innocent face. As you can see, Hall's sets did play an important part in setting the film's atmosphere. But perhaps the most famous sets used in Bride still pop up once in a while in modern-day films: the electrical devices built for the creation scenes. They have become a vital part of all Frankenstein films--an institution, if you will. Also built for the original Frankenstein by Kenneth Strickfaden, they actually worked: artificial lightning popped and crackled and sparks flew every which way. Interestingly enough, several of

these were also used in the Flash Gordon serial.

But perhaps the greatest thing to be found in Bride is the make-up. Paul Jensen puts it well in his book, Boris Karloff and his Films (he was discussing the 1931 Frankenstein, but the same holds true for Bride): "If any single element can be said to determine the success of Karloff's performance, and of the whole picture, it is the make-up."[4] Created by the head of Universal's make-up department, Jack Pierce (although James Whale helped contribute to the concept), the makeup became the Frankenstein Monster. No other version of the Monster would ever seem quite right after Pierce's. Pierce tried to model his make-up from what a man made from the dead would look like. The reason for the Monster's flat head, Pierce notes, is that the easiest way for a surgeon to place a brain into a skull is to cut the skull "straight across like a pot lid"[3] and plop the brain in. Pierce's reason for giving the Monster long arms, gigantic hands, feet and face are interesting: "...I read that the Egyptians used to bind some criminals hand and foot and bury them alive. When their blood turned to water after death, it flowed to their extremities, stretched their arms to gorilla length and swelled their hands, feet, and faces to abnormal proportions. I thought this might make a nice touch for the monster, since he was supposed to be made from the corpses of executed felons."[3]

Added to the Monster in Bride were burns on his face and

hands, a large cut on his cheek and a mangy wig. Putting on the make-up was an all day chore. Karloff arrived on the set at 6:00am and was ready for filming at 1:30pm. Elsa Lanchester's make-up, while easier to apply, was also effective. Presumingly Frankenstein (and Pretorious) had gained some experience in creating life, since the Bride was not as disfigured as the Monster. For some scenes, Elsa Lanchester was wrapped from head to foot in linen--some two miles worth. Pierce modeled her after the Eygptian queen Neffertiti. He gave her a mass of dark hair that stood erect from her head. To this he added white streaks up both sides. Her eyebrows were like a vampire's: high on the forehead and pointed. Scars from her recent operation covered her neck. In full costume, she almost matched the Monster in stature- nearly seven feet. She was, as Don Glut puts it, "weirdly attractive."[1] Pierce, who had also done the superb make-up on Karloff for 1932's The Mummy, later went onto create one of the greatest make-up jobs ever done- turning Lon Chaney, Jr. into The Wolfman (1941). Personally, I believe Pierce's make-up jobs were largely responsible for the continued success of Universal's monsters. He was truely an artist of genius proportions.

All in all, these three usually overlooked elements of Bride were an important part of the picture. But I do not mean to steal any credit from any of the other elements of this great film. Carlos Clarens sums it up in his book An

Illustrated History of the Horror Film: "The Bride of Frankenstein still stands today as a very fine example of what truely gifted people can do within the limitations of a commercial and emerging art form."[2] Amen.

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[2] Clarens, Carlos. An Illustrated History of the Horror Film. New York, 1967.

[3] Jensen, Paul M. Boris Karloff and His Films. New York, 1974.

[4] "Oh, You Beautiful Monster." New York Times (March 31, 1935.)

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