

the composition by John L. Balderston. Adapted from the play by Peggy Webling. From the novel *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. Associate Producer: E.M. Asher. Scenario Editor: Richard L. Schayer. Continuity: Tom Reed. Photography: Arthur Edeson. Supervising Editor: Maurice Pivar. Editor: Clarence Kolster. Art Director: Charles D. Hall. Recording Supervisor: C. Roy Hunter. Set Designer: Herman Rosse. Makeup: Jack P. Pierce. Assistant Director: Joseph A. McDonough. Technician: William Hedgcock. Special Electrical Effects: Kenneth Strickfaden, Frank Graves & Raymond Lindsay. Technical Advisor: Dr. Cecil Reynolds. Music Director: David Broekman. Original Music: Bernhard Kaun. Property Master: Eddie Keys.

Colin Clive (*Henry Frankenstein*), Mae Clarke (*Elizabeth*), John Boles (*Victor Moritz*), Boris Karloff (*The Monster*), Edward Van Sloan (*Dr. Waldman*), Frederick Kerr (*Baron Frankenstein*), Dwight Frye (*Fritz*), Lionel Belmore (*Herr Vogel, the Burgomaster*), Marilyn Harris (*Little Maria*), Michael Mark (*Ludwig*), Arletta Duncan, Pauline Moore (*Bridesmaids*), Francis Ford (*Man at Lecture/Hans, the Wounded Villager on Hill*), Robert Livingston (*Henry Frankenstein in closing scene*), Mary Sherman, Otis Harlan.

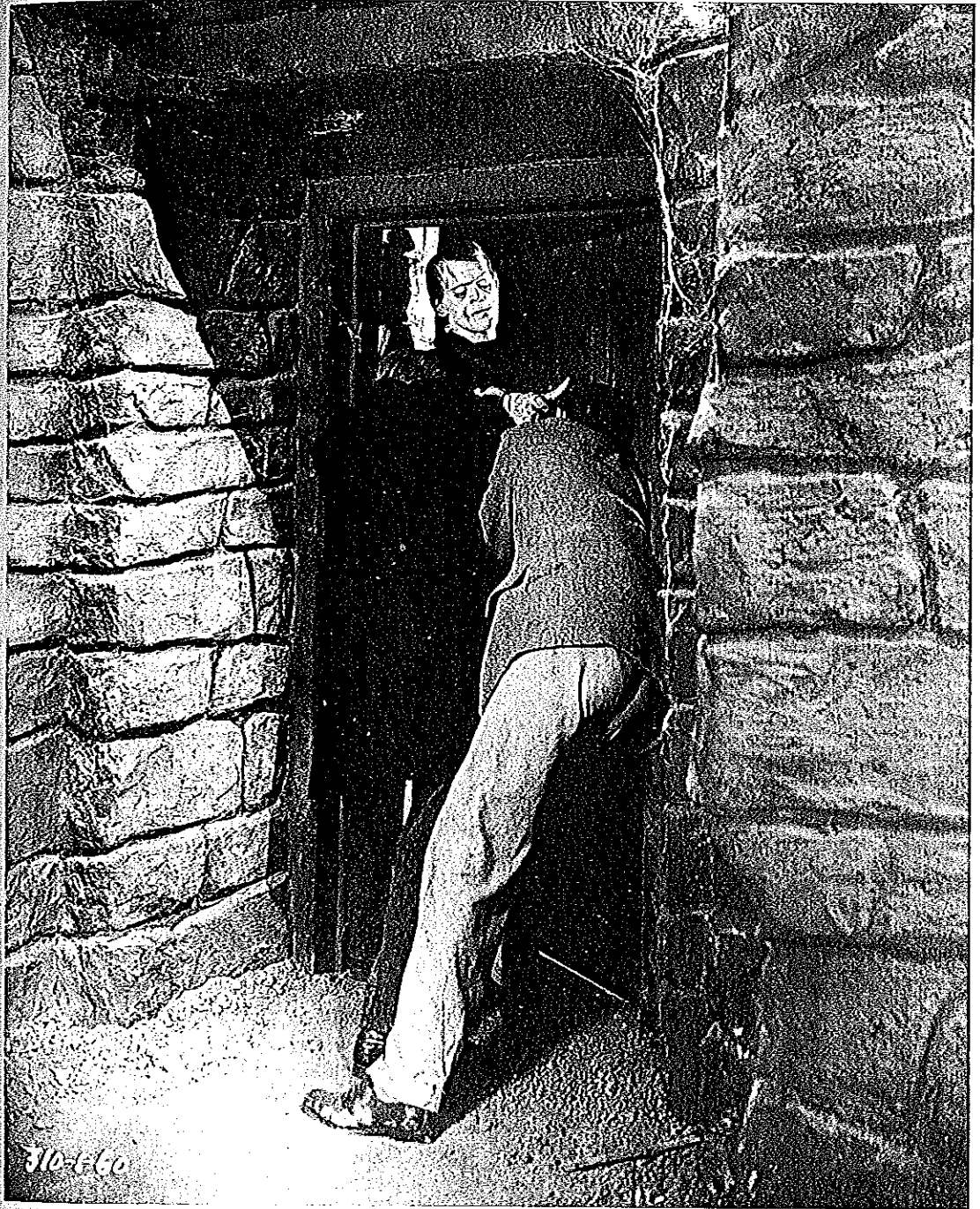
Beside it, *Dracula* is tame....  
—Mordaunt Hall, The New York Times,  
December 5, 1931

In spite of the strong box office performance of *Dracula*, Universal Studios remained a crippled giant. The studio heads desperately sought to get the company's finances in order, often resorting to laying off its employees. Carl Laemmle, Sr., fancied his company to be one of the bulwarks of the industry but, unlike the other majors, Universal did not own a vast chain of theaters in need of a steady flow of new product. The studio's reliance on independently-owned theaters for most of its business placed it at a serious disadvantage. Less critical, but undeniably vexing, was the constant charge of nepotism leveled against the studio. Interviewed by the authors, director Henry Koster recalled working on the Universal lot in the '30s:

Carl Laemmle brought all of his relatives over from Germany. They used to say the European comes over here not to start as a producer, but to establish a beachhead. At Laemmle's studio, everybody was a Laemmle. I remember reporting for work on one of my first days at Universal. One of the reception policemen said to me, "You're Mr. Koster?" I said, "Yes. And you're Mr. Laemmle, aren't you?" He said, "Oh, you know me?"

## Frankenstein

Released November 21, 1931. 71 minutes. Producer: Carl Laemmle, Jr. Director: James Whale. Screenplay: Garrett Fort, Francis Edwards Faragoh, John Russell (uncredited) & Robert Florey (uncredited). Based on



Colin Clive and Edward Van Sloan struggle to subdue Boris Karloff's Monster in *Frankenstein*.

In those more imaginative days, talk of a sequel wasn't the instant reaction to a major hit. But the disreputable horror genre was looming as a potential money-maker for the financially ailing studio. Tod Browning's retreat to his home

base, MGM, did little to deter the studio's ambition to follow *Dracula* with another horror feature. Universal's real challenge was to find the right material. *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's

sprawling Gothic nightmare of a novel, quite unfilmable without considerable pruning, was an attractive possibility. The novel was well-known and had inspired at least one earlier film, a short Thomas Edison produced in 1910, and any number of stage adaptations.

Universal's classic movie version of *Frankenstein* is recognized as the brainchild of French-born writer-director Robert Florey. Florey was invited by studio story department head Richard Schayer to work on a horror property. Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man* fit the bill but the director was pushing the idea of bringing *Frankenstein* to the screen. Stripping the novel down to its bare essentials, Florey delivered a treatment to meet Universal's rigid length and budget requirements. If Shelley's turgid plotting, meandering construction and philosophical diversions were drawbacks to the novel's appeal, Florey's streamlined, unadorned adapta-

tion was, in contrast, simplicity itself. Florey compressed the novel's lumbering narrative into a modernistic horror mode, confining the action to a handful of sets while retaining the allegorical feel of the material. Shelley's novel was rendered all but unrecognizable, but it provided Universal with an ideal property. The go-ahead was given for a complete script.

Florey's first draft of the screenplay, written in collaboration with Garrett Fort, reveals the director's significant contribution to the finished film. Although most of the dialogue (reportedly written by Fort) would be revised, the script outlines virtually every scene in the release print, with some minor adjustments. That Florey did not receive official credit on American prints is a shameful injustice.

Florey's test reel of *Frankenstein*, virtually his audition for the studio brass who were still unsure of the director as well as the subject matter, remains one of the most sought-after of all of Hollywood's lost treasures. Photographed by Paul Ivano on the *Dracula* castle set, the footage (which lasted only 20 minutes after editing) starred Bela Lugosi in Jack Pierce's early makeup design for the Monster.

James Whale, in the meantime, was riding high in Hollywood having brought two notable stage successes to the screen, R.C. Sherriff's "Journey's End" (filmed in 1930) and, more recently, Robert E. Sherwood's play, "Waterloo Bridge" (filmed in 1931). Both were high-toned contemporary pieces recounting in their own way the devastating effects of the Great War on its participants, and marked by vivid star performances. The temptation to explore more cinematic material rather than transposing well-regarded theatrical pieces to the screen must have been great for Whale, and the *Frankenstein* script offered rich stylistic opportunities.

Whale's entry into *Frankenstein* forced out a crestfallen Florey who, to his chagrin, discovered his one-picture contract did not stipulate a specific title. Having no other recourse, he assumed directorial duties on *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Florey, at least, picked up *Dracula* star Bela Lugosi, who, according to



A beautiful character study of the Frankenstein Monster as enacted by his greatest portrayer, Boris Karloff.

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legend, was reportedly more than happy to forsake the non-speaking role of the Monster.

Francis Edwards Faragoh was recruited to submit a rewrite of the *Frankenstein* script, adding at Whale's insistence some mild comic touches to the decidedly downbeat material. Seizing the opportunity to inject a bit of cantankerous humor into the fully written role of old Baron Frankenstein, Whale cast British comedy player, Frederick Kerr, who had a stuffy role in *Waterloo Bridge*. For the role of Frankenstein's anguished fiancée, Bette Davis, then serving a six-month contract with the studio before moving on to Warner Bros. and Hollywood history, was briefly considered. Whale favored Mae Clarke, who played Myrna the prostitute in *Waterloo Bridge* with fierce, heart-rending persuasion.

Discussing her casting in the role, Clarke said in an interview many years later,

When Jim was preparing *Frankenstein*, he chose me for the part of Elizabeth. Like John Ford, he had his own stock company. I was the reigning queen on the lot for a short spell and we were all treated like royalty.... I was supposed to do the part with an English accent to blend in with Colin Clive's. There was an English touch to the whole production.

The part of Victor Moritz, Henry Frankenstein's rival in love, went to Universal's up-and-coming leading man, John Boles, a fittingly uninteresting role for a singularly uninteresting actor. There was no need to look beyond the cast of *Dracula* to fill the roles of Dr. Waldman and Fritz, Frankenstein's hunchbacked laboratory assistant. Edward Van Sloan and Dwight Frye, both holdovers from Florey's test reel with Lugosi, were natural choices for the roles.

The casting of the lead role of Henry Frankenstein was a crucial decision. Leslie Howard was suggested, but Whale's first choice was Colin Clive, the neurotic young actor who had replaced Laurence Olivier in the original stage production of "Journey's End." Clive's bearing suggested learning and sensitivity, but his deep-rooted restlessness and insecurity marked him for high-strung, slightly over-the-edge characterizations. He was, in short, perfect for the part.

Interestingly, Lugosi's involvement with the project seemed to come to an end when Whale was just coming on. This has led to speculation

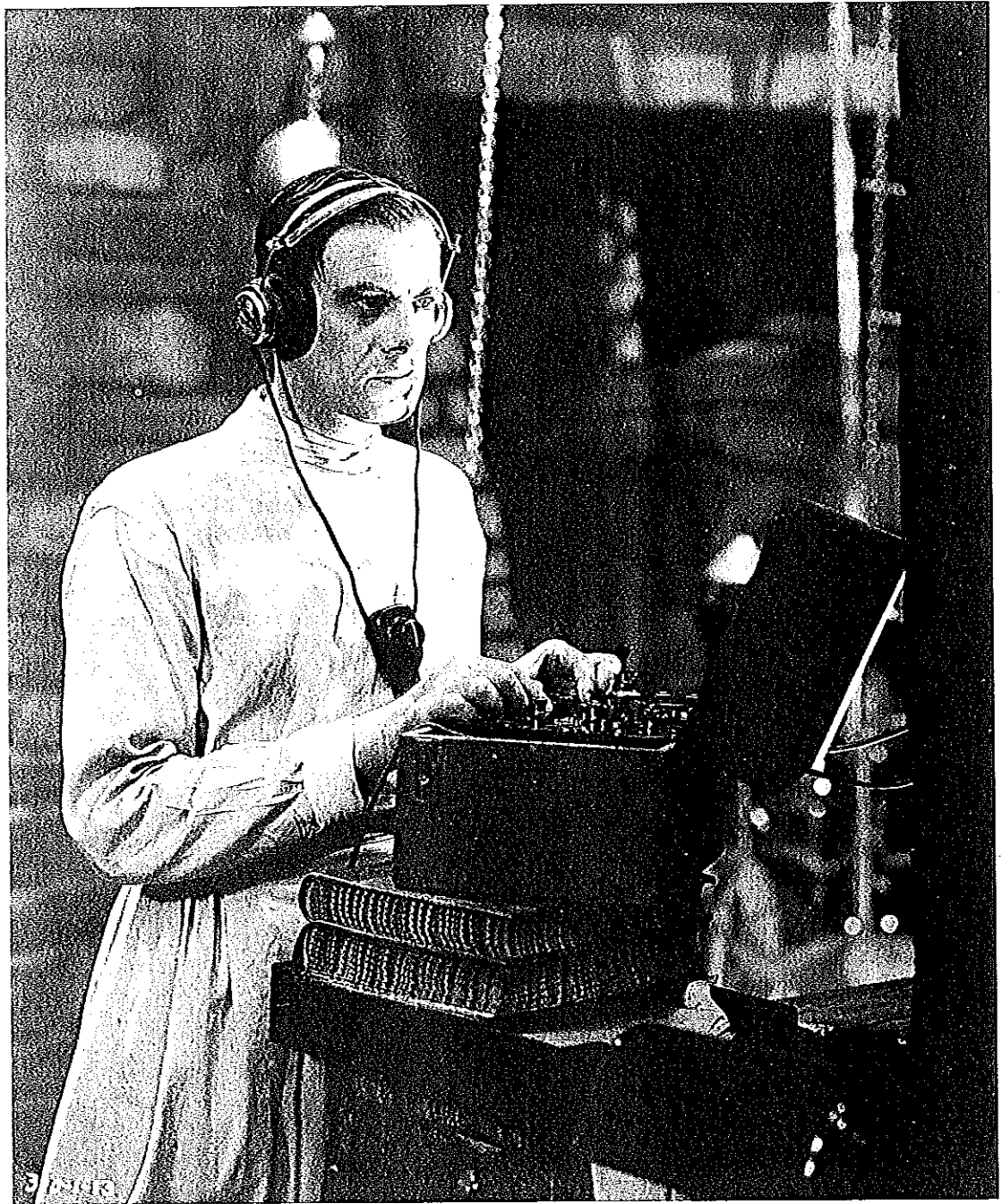
among some that his departure wasn't the result of Lugosi's rejection of the non-speaking role, as widely reported, or merely Whale's decision to look elsewhere. Boris Karloff would claim in later decades that it was luck and a chance encounter with Whale at the studio commissary which led to his casting in the history-making role. But David Lewis, Whale's companion and lover at the time, insists that he was the one who suggested to the director that Karloff would make the ideal Monster after spotting him as the convict Ned Galloway in Howard Hawks' *The Criminal Code* (1931).

After several lean years, Karloff was beginning to establish his Hollywood career, usually playing small-time villains and crooks. He had already worked with an impressive array of top directors such as Lewis Milestone, Mervyn LeRoy, Michael Curtiz and Raoul Walsh, but always in featured roles.

To Karloff, the role of the Monster was a gamble as well as a dramatic challenge. At one point in the production, he confided to Edward Van Sloan that he felt the picture would ruin his career. He had little fear of being recognized; the grueling makeup sessions with Jack Pierce have been reported to be as brief as three and a half hours and as long as eight. Karloff's slender six-foot body was propped up to give the illusion of unnatural height.

The Monster's makeup design was once assumed to be wholly the creation of Jack Pierce, but in more recent times Whale's contribution has been recognized. That Whale's sketches of the creature's design jibes comfortably with the finished product can't be denied. The robotic appearance featuring grafted-on metallic highlights suggest a melding of science and nature. Pierce's execution is no less impressive, artistically rendered on Karloff's facial canvas to create a truly organic effect.

Pierce took credit for the Monster's square-shaped skull which supposedly came to the makeup man while he was watching a surgical operation on a man's head. The abnormal shape represented how the top of the head would look removed, with more gray matter piled in and a new cranium supplied to accommodate the oversized brain. An artificial skull was fitted over Karloff's head and his face was covered with a thick layer of gray-green greasepaint. Artificial



The Man Who Made a Monster: Clive as Henry Frankenstein.

veins were actually strips of cotton soaked in colloidion and the actor's hands were meticulously made up. Working from James Whale's sketches, Pierce labored slowly and meticulously; even the slightest bit of makeup caused unbearable pain when caught in the actor's eyes. A 2005 issue of

*MakeUp Artist* magazine listed the design as one of the fifty greatest makeups of all-time and, among the general public, it is still one of the most recognizable.

Of the \$262,007 budget, \$10,000 was spent on the electrical effects alone. Frank

Graves, Kenneth Strickfaden and Raymond Lindsay were in charge of the picturesque electrical gadgetry installed in Frankenstein's mountaintop laboratory. The devices were given such exotic names as a lightning bridge, bariton generator, vacuum electrolyzer and nucleus analyzer. The publicity department's claim that each device carried over a million and a half volts fooled no one but it made for the most spectacular pyrotechnics put on film up to that time.

Production started on August 24, 1931. The first scene shot, quite appropriately, was the first page of the script, on Charles D. Hall's hill and cemetery set, constructed especially for the film. The picture wrapped on October 3, five days over its allotted schedule, with a final budget of \$291,000.

The pre-title teaser takes its cue from the deleted closing scene of *Dracula* with Edward Van Sloan breaking the fourth wall to directly address the audience. Supposedly speaking at the behest of Universal president Carl Laemmle, Van Sloan, in his best professorial manner but with a slight twinkle in his eye, warns the more faint-hearted in the audience of the onslaught of horrors to come. It's a masterstroke of showmanship which probably did serve to brace Depression audiences for the 1931 equivalent of a Hollywood rollercoaster ride. The actor barely exits from the stage when the film cuts to the main titles superimposed over a nightmarish illustration of a partially obscured head of a humanoid creature with claw-like hands and light rays emanating from its eyes. No melancholy strains of *Swan Lake* here. Bernhard Kaun's stark, bass-heavy theme punctuates the soundtrack, suggesting a visceral, no-holds-barred shocker.

Kaun worked behind the scenes and largely without credit for a good part of his career. He served as Max Steiner's orchestrator when the legendary film composer was at RKO. He eventually scored Warners Bros.' *Doctor X* (1932), *The Walking Dead* (1936), *The Invisible Menace* (1938), *The Return of Doctor X* (1939), and *British Intelligence* (1940), as well as the main title music for Whale's *The Old Dark House*. The decision to leave the bulk of the film unscored probably was made by Whale although a full score was considered at one point in the production. The finale music, heard over the closing cast list, was an old cue composed by Giuseppe Becce. It

would later be heard as the main title of the John Barrymore vehicle, *Counsellor-at-Law* (1933).

For the uninitiated: *Frankenstein* is set on the outskirts of the Tyrolean Alps. Henry Frankenstein (Colin Clive), a brilliant if erratic medical student, works in secret, assembling a human body from parts of corpses he has stolen from graveyards. Needing only a brain to complete his artificial man, he sends his hunchbacked assistant Fritz (Dwight Frye) to his old medical school. There, Dr. Waldman (Edward Van Sloan) had placed on exhibit two specimens of the human brain for his anatomy students. Accidentally dropping the glass jar containing a normal brain, Fritz grabs the other specimen, unaware that it has been removed from the body of a psychopathic killer.

Henry's fiancée, Elizabeth (Mae Clarke), his friend Victor Moritz (John Boles) and Dr. Waldman set out for Henry's mountaintop laboratory one stormy night to try to persuade the obsessed student to give up his experiments. They find the young scientist on the brink of madness. He sets his fabulous electrical apparatus in operation, sending the artificially conceived body to the rooftop where it is baptized by a powerful bolt of lightning. The body descends back into the lab, endowed with life, as Henry rejoices in his triumph.

But Frankenstein's joy is short-lived. His creation (Boris Karloff) is more monster than man, the obvious result of the abnormal brain stolen from Waldman's lecture hall. Viciously intimidated by Fritz, the Monster slays the hunchback at his first opportunity. He is overpowered by a massive dose of tranquilizer administered by Henry and Waldman. Waldman urges Frankenstein to go ahead with his wedding plans while he (Waldman) prepares to dispose of the Monster by dissection.

On the eve of Henry's wedding, Waldman is about to begin his grim task of dissecting when the Monster comes out of the anesthesia and strangles him. While roaming the countryside, the Monster comes across a little peasant girl, Maria (Marilyn Harris), who innocently befriends the brute. The encounter ends in tragedy with the Monster accidentally drowning the child in a lake.

Frankenstein's wedding is rudely interrupted by the news of the murders. The Monster

crashes into Elizabeth's room, sending her into shock. Henry leads a search party after his creature as the bloodhounds track him into the mountains. Confronting the Monster, Henry is quickly overpowered and dragged to a windmill. The villagers arrive on the scene and set the structure ablaze. The Monster throws Henry's body to the ground below and becomes trapped in the inferno. Pinned under falling rafters, the pitiful creature is consumed by the flames.

The film's climax presented Whale with the vexing problem of what to do with Henry Frankenstein. As the results of his experiments culminated in several gruesome deaths, it seemed rather unfair to have him go unpunished. Florey's intention was to have the father of the little girl take advantage of the confusion at the windmill and "accidentally" shoot Henry to death while gunning for the Monster. Florey ended his script on a distinctly downbeat note, with Elizabeth, Victor and old Baron Frankenstein praying for Henry's soul in a funeral scene. Whale, too, opted for a tragic wrap-up with the deaths of the creator and his creation, but at the last moment settled on a conventional happy ending with Henry recovering from his wounds and Elizabeth sitting at his bedside. Ironically, the sequel revises the original ending, starting the story off with Henry being mistaken for dead by the villagers.

*Frankenstein* went on to its well-known success but only by surveying Hollywood trade papers in those last three months of 1931 can one appreciate the furor it unleashed. The picture was phenomenal, smashing box office records and igniting a storm of controversy wherever it played. Far from being regarded as the artful, literate horror classic it is now considered, *Frankenstein*, in its day, was seen as a grisly, blood-soaked example of exploitative filmmaking. Its detractors were numerous and vocal.

The picture was literally mangled by censors in Kansas City, who ordered that 32 cuts be made on all prints screened in their district. The "approved" version cut the original running time in half, rendering the film incomprehensible. Incensed editorial writers responded so loudly to this butchery that the governor was forced to take a hand, resulting in the restoration of all the missing footage. Carl Laemmle, Jr., expressed his gratitude to the newspapers for championing

free speech, but inwardly the young executive was probably snickering with delight. The uproar undoubtedly sent box office grosses soaring even higher.

The Motion Picture Theatre Owners Association, feeling the pressure of civic groups, did an about-face. It urged its members to discourage producers from making horror movies, but the organization knew the plea would fall on deaf ears. The exhibitors were making a bundle on *Frankenstein* as well as Paramount's new horror release, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931).

For years Universal continued to make a fortune off *Frankenstein*, but (predictably) very little of the spoils trickled down to the creative talents. Karloff and Whale soon found themselves clashing with the Laemmles over well-deserved pay hikes. Universal retained the rights to Jack Pierce's world-famous makeup years after they canned the genius in 1947.

Twenty years after the production of *Frankenstein*, playwright-screenwriter John L. Balderston and the estate of the late Peggy Webling were engaged a legal battle for a piece of the *Frankenstein* action. The basis for their lawsuit was an adaptation of the Webling play penned by Balderston for the Universal film shortly before Florey wrote his own version of the screenplay. (The Webling stipulated in her contract with Universal that the play was not to be staged in the United States.) The suit sought declaratory relief under a contract through which they allegedly were to receive one percent of the world gross of the film and all sequels deriving from the original picture. Universal's lawyers' contention was, of course, that the subsequent seven Frankenstein films were not based upon any of the dramatic compositions bought from Balderston and Webling. On May 25, 1953, three years almost to the day after the suit was filed, Universal settled for a sum which, the trades reported, was believed to be in excess of \$100,000; in return, the studio obtained all rights to the character. The postscript to this story is that Florey later claimed he never bothered to read Balderston's adaptation in the first place!

*Frankenstein*, unlike *Dracula*, is a film that doesn't need apologies, and rightfully stands as Universal's first great all-talking horror movie. Countless imitations have taken a bit of the gleam off its reputation and the picture stub-

bornly stands in the shadow of its first sequel. To be fair, *Bride of Frankenstein* was a self-conscious attempt to outdo the original and had the advantage of far greater resources. While *Bride* certainly rates as a better movie, there's a unique appeal in the original's simplicity and lack of pretense. And *understatement*. The original is one of the few films without a score that actually *doesn't* need one (a credit to Whale's alert visual style). The long shot of Frankenstein and Waldman breaking into the Monster's chamber to find Fritz's twisted body dangling from the ceiling is just one moment that works very well without musical punctuation. Even minus orchestral accompaniment, the soundtrack is unusually rich. The climactic mountaintop pursuit of the Monster is accompanied by the mournful baying of bloodhounds and the jeers of the villagers. The windmill scene is played against the rhythmic creaking of the pump shaft. Considering that *Frankenstein* was made when film composing was a fledgling art and that most scores of this period were usually undistinguished or worse, the lack of music actually works in the movie's favor.

The grandiose, self-mocking style of the sequel is absent in the original. *Frankenstein's* stylistic indebtedness to such silent classics as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and *The Golem* (1920) have been somewhat exaggerated through the years. The influence of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* with the creation of the female robot amid the electrical trappings is a more likely inspiration. It's not unreasonable to assume Whale might have screened a print of Rex Ingram's *The Magician* (1926) with its highly recognizable image of the dwarfish assistant doing his master's bidding. Whale opted for a starker, more naturalistic realism here than in *Bride* (no one could ever mistake *Frankenstein* for a fairy tale). It's a horror movie played for shocks, although they have been greatly diluted by time and imitation. Like the film's humor, the undercurrent of sympathy for the Monster isn't strained.

Karloff himself preferred his non-speaking but no less inventive performance in the original to his work in the sequel. After *Frankenstein's* release, the actor was instantly hailed as "The New Lon Chaney," but the typically self-effacing Boris refuted the title. "He was the master," Karloff said in early 1932. "No one suffered

as he did to bring a tragic, poignant quality to his roles." Karloff went so far as to suggest that almost *any* actor could have played the role. It is true that no other actor brought the dimension that Karloff lent to the character, but it is equally true that none of these actors enjoyed the benefit of Whale's direction.

Karloff's early performances were uneven; he tended to lay it on a bit thick in pictures like *The Unholy Night* (1929), *Five Star Final* (1931) and *Behind the Mask* (released in 1932, but actually shot before *Frankenstein*). He excelled in *The Criminal Code* (1931) as the homicidal plug-ugly, a virtual warm-up for his stint as the Monster. Later producers tended to cast the Monster role for name value (Chaney Jr. and Lugosi) or physical prowess (Glenn Strange and virtually all of the Hammer players, including Christopher Lee); for decades, Whale was one of the few directors to cast the role with an eye on characterization. Whale brought out the best in Karloff, who displayed a gift for mime untapped in earlier roles.

The discovery of long-missing *Frankenstein's* footage in the late '80s, especially Little Maria's drowning scene, provides an interesting sidebar in one's appreciation of the film and Karloff's performance. In spite of Universal's best efforts to blend the new material seamlessly into the film, the viewer can't help but be distracted by the sudden loss of picture quality. This caveat aside, the Little Maria footage adds to our sense of the Monster's emotional evolution as Karloff's expression of delight gives way to his panicky reaction to her death. Desperately wringing his hands as if to separate himself from the deed, he flees into the woods in an inexplicably under-cranked shot.

Within a few years, Whale would see himself as a victim of his own success in being identified with horror films despite his eclectic output. His first foray into the genre is marked by an appropriately literary tone although flashes of his trademark humor keep slipping through. Frederick Kerr's blustery Baron Frankenstein and Lionel Belmore's Burgomaster provide the conventional geezer comedy relief. More interestingly off-center is Dwight Frye's Fritz doing a variation of his iconic Renfield performance, Frye finds himself fitted with an oversized hump on his back and a grotesque makeup only to be



turned into a semi-comic figure. Whale focuses on such quirky bits of business such as Fritz's over-reaction to the suspended skeleton bouncing wildly in the medical school's operating theater or the scruffy assistant making quick adjustments to his sagging socks while scrambling around Frankenstein's tower. It's a tantalizing hint of how Whale would have handled the Renfield character had he directed *Dracula*.

It speaks rather poorly for Universal, who shunted the Monster from one sequel to another, that Whale was the only director to provide him with a fully dimensional character. Whale blocks Karloff's entrance for maximum impact. Inexplicably shuffling with his back towards the camera, he slowly turns for his memorable closeups. A series of quick cuts taken at slightly different angles underscores the Monster's cadaverous appearance, from his hollow cheeks to his heavy-lidded eyes. His stumbling, unsteady gait is the macabre parody of the first steps of a child. Indeed, the scene suggests the introduction of a new child into a family, complete with the sadistic taunts of an older sibling in the form of Fritz. The Monster stretches to grasp the streaming beams of sunlight from a skylight as if he instinctively remembers his own creation, being strapped to the elevated gurney to catch the life-giving bolts of lightning.

Colin Clive more than fulfilled the role's requirements, emerging as a Frankenstein ideally suited for its time. The sheer intensity of the character was something the actor could probably relate to, much as he did playing Stanhope in *Journey's End*. Clive's neurotic personality often came across as a form of idealized romanticism which might have proved useful in other roles as well (including his Rochester opposite Virginia Bruce's *Jane Eyre* [1934] in a typically low-rent Monogram production).

At first glance, it would appear that Clive was given the potentially star-making role. The character is carefully developed in the opening scenes. The quiet tension as he collects the numerous body parts for his experiment plays against Clive's mounting anxiety. All culminates into the grand theatrical moment before he puts the life-giving electrical apparatus into high gear. His impassioned, half-mad speech to his guests is a climactic theatrical moment and a commanding showcase for the actor. Unfortunately,

after reaching this peak, Henry's character dissipates badly. His scientific curiosity evaporates at the moment of his most audacious success and he seems only too willing to retreat into the role of the submissive student to Van Sloan's knowing headmaster. In the end, the Monster's vengeance on him seems justified after the creator becomes one of the mob bent on his destruction. Henry's diminishing appeal would give Karloff a tremendous opportunity to usurp the audience's sympathy, probably even more than Whale intended.

In his biography of Whale, *James Whale: A New World of Gods and Monsters* (Faber and Faber, 1998), James Curtis hints at the director's disgruntlement at Karloff's star-making turn as the Monster. It's difficult to entirely dismiss the possibility that Whale was expecting the adulation to be showered on his old friend Clive rather than Karloff, who was not part of the director's social set. Curtis doesn't fail to note that no one even thought to invite the actor to the film's first public screening at Santa Barbara's Granada Theater in October 1931.

Except for the bland John Boles, Whale's cast selection is sound. Mac Clarke's Elizabeth is refreshingly real and unsentimental in a performance that holds up amazingly well after 75 years. Edward Van Sloan's Waldman is assured, authoritative and devoid of the stagy mannerisms that marred his Tod Browning-directed performance as Van Helsing in *Dracula*. Van Sloan so projects the stereotype of the magisterial headmaster that his momentary turn as the foil for the scowling old Baron Frankenstein is a rare example of comedy relief that actually works. Van Sloan registers a surprised, possibly real reaction in a genuinely amusing scene.

*Frankenstein* has long since lost its ability to frighten, but the film still exerts a hypnotic power. Technically, it's a marvel, from Arthur Edeson's atmospheric lensing to Charles D. Hall's sumptuous, Expressionistic sets. Whale's talents hadn't quite peaked, but he still towered over the average studio director and his excellent judgment is ever present. Add Karloff's milestone performance and one realizes that *Frankenstein* is still a warhorse worth viewing and re-viewing.

## Critics' Corner

[A] stirring grand-guignol type of picture, one that aroused so much excitement ... yesterday that many in the audience laughed to cover their true feelings.... It is naturally a morbid, gruesome affair, but it is something to keep the spectator awake, for during its most spine-chilling periods, it exacts attention.—*The New York Times*, December 5, 1931, Mordaunt Hall

Rating: ★★★ [C]lutches at you icily and holds you until the romantic ending guarantees satisfaction after an hours [sic] worth of gripping, intriguing horrors.... [I]t is heartily interesting and wholly absorbing.—*The New York Daily News*, December 5, 1931, Irene Thirer

Karloff has done some excellent things in pictures, though usually in minor roles. This was his big opportunity, and whether you like the picture or not you won't deny his efficacy.—*The Motion Picture Herald*, November 14, 1931, Leo Meehan

*Frankenstein* looks like a *Dracula* plus... [A] new peak in horror plays.... Laboratory sequence ... is a smashing bit of theatrical effect.... Playing is perfectly paced.—*Variety*, December 8, 1931

[V]ery free and modernized adaptation. Scenes which for sheer horror were unexcelled on screen and rouse pity and fear.... [D]irection emphasizes gruesome nature of theme.... [P]owerful portrayal by Boris Karloff in one of the most difficult roles possible to imagine.—*Today's Cinema* (GB), January 21, 1932

It touches the highest peak of sensational melodrama.... [I]ts uncompromising depiction of stark horrors and gruesome experiment are calculated to appeal to the unsqueamish.—*The Kinematograph Weekly* (GB), January 20, 1932

The most sensational motion picture ever made.—*The Sunday Times* (GB), January 1932

Brilliant to the point of genius.—*The Daily Dispatch* (GB), January 1932

You've got to admit it's good.—*The Empire News* (GB), January 1932

Universal has either the greatest shocker of all time — or a dud. It can be one or the other; there will be no in-between measures.... Whale seems to have gone far enough, but not too far.—*The Hollywood Reporter*, 1931, Billy Wilkerson