

Two Films

Dana Curtis

LILLY OBSCURE'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

(Adaptation by Dagmar Est)

The monster will be beautiful and no
grunting—complete sentences into the air
of intellectual achievement—he knows
that he is the new God, the fire (*dreams of forgotten alchemists.*)
meant to destroy the old failing
demented Creator. Do we dream?
*You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the
commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such
evil forebodings.*

When Mary's ghost arrives,
her arms are full of
dead children and an offering
of bones for Lilly. Dagmar:
"I always thought Percy was kind of an asshole."
An inauspicious beginning
for the adaptation—no one knows
exactly how to deal with ghosts, but
she's asking for a big chunk
of the gross and Lilly's going to
give it to her before she sets off
fireworks despite of
the dry season or maybe because
of it. She's way too
acquainted with potential.

*I was required to exchange chimeras of boundless grandeur for
realities of little worth.*

Fraught with difficulties,
this version will rip us all
into tiny pieces
glittering at the bottom of the water.

*He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature,
happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his
Creator: he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge
from beings of a superior nature, but I am wretched, helpless,
and alone.*

And how terrible and typical
 that beauty just won't matter—he'll still
 be a killer hunting his creator
 through the snow—the last
 in a long line of deaths—the only
 victim with no claim to
 innocence. The point we must make:
 there's no way to tell
 who is worse; they're both
 murderers—creation
 and destruction in front of
 a perfect mirror with
 the director sitting in the background
 with a wine glass and a broken
 promise of vision. She spits
 on the old movies, insists
 that this version, her version, is
 true to the spirit if
 nothing else. No one has ever had
 the ghost to consult and ignore.

I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me
 But she will use electricity, lightning
 striking the castle, the empty
 eyes of obsession, his need
 to possess and control and where
 it ends. Meanwhile,

The feast is laid and she is
 asleep on a bed of
 spinach and feta. She is her own
 creation. And she will
 enact the battle in her own
 lost self. Does she dream?

*I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the
thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantom of a man
stretched out and then, on the working of some powerful engine,
show signs of life and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion.*

She considered having the same actor play both the doctor and the monster. However, she doubted whether she could find an actor good enough to handle dual and opposing roles. The logistics were just too complicated. Resemblance will suffice.

*Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my
utter and terrible destruction.*

And in creation,
the creator becomes the monster,
the monster the God.
He will look at his beautiful face
in the still pond and
be horrified. He knows.
He should not exist.

A fallen angel becomes a malignant devil.
At the production meeting, the director
of photography smokes ditch weed and
holds his head like a trophy—there is
the hint of revolution
brewing like a subtext—it’s just
the sort of thing Dagmar would
pull out of the ether
with long red nails. She’s gone
horseback riding although
she’s needed on the set.
There’s a big rush of tattle-tales
hoping the Auteur will cast
a benevolent eye upon them.

In his murder my crimes are consummated.
 In this scene, he will read
Paradise Lost by the light of a burning house,
 then lightning.

Lilly tosses her beret out
 a fourth-story window and
 she's off to the country—screaming
 at Dagmar for taking the only
 black horse. They travel
 through green fields and wildflowers,
 chasing each other on their
 black and white steeds. All
 we need now is an ocean.
*I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly and exult in the
 agony of torturing flames.*

Only the ghost is surprised.

The star threatens to quit.
 Lilly points out how easily he can be replaced.
 Dagmar is smug as she picks
 a snack from the Craft Services table.
 Lilly watches her eat it. Dream?
Why do you call on my remembrance?

We will give him
 the wife he deserves—
 delicate murderer with a mouth
 full of poison—not some crazy
 bitch with weird hair. Their
 wedding will be a feast
 of colors and despair.

The ghost is beginning to understand.

Lilly stomps her riding boots,
 pulls out a knife, says
 “Cut!”

Is this a question of morality?
 Is this the correct era?
 The correct locale?
 Is it a dream?

Alive and spinning
 in the coffin she shares
 with a drowned husband and
 the refuse of their pairing.

He eats an apple
 as if it were the first,
 as if there was something
 other than fructose
 dripping down his chin.

All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us.

. . . you reproach me for your creation; come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed.

This is the clear
 end to Romanticism.

There can be no answer;
 Lilly's eyes shine like
 tiny fish in the blade.
 The dream made flesh, made
 silver, made digital.

Insane asylum, torture
 chamber, an intricate pattern
 of green and black mosaics, the birds
 fly into the sun.

We didn't budget for this.
 Everyone he ever loved
 strangled, starved,
 and we are just beginning.

This is our last chance. Our only chance. Or maybe we never had a chance at all. Cut to the chase, my melancholy, my beloved, my monster.

“And do you dream?” said the demon.

CARNIVAL OF THE AMERICAN STYLITES

(directed by Lilly Obscure,
original screenplay by Dagmar Est)

“I no longer practice the myth of forgiveness.”

Standing near a ride called Music
of the Spheres, the very
dead and increasingly active
gods are passing out knives while
a feral crowd of Shetland
ponies is hunting her down,
making her pay.

“Get thee behind me.”

“They bite.”

No one is happy: the treatment
of this script becomes even more
obscure with a little o—Revolution
is brewing among cast and crew:
she thought it would be a good idea
to leave people on top
of the columns. No one
really believes in penance.

Voiceover:

*he broke the promise, killing a bird, he dared to eat it. . . . the birds flesh was changed into stone so that
then he could not eat it even if he wanted to. For how could he eat the stone?*

Classic footage:
Lilly, shorn white hair glinting like fireflies,
eats an entire turkey dinner by herself then

scratching at stuffing and mashed potatoes
 clinging to her face, she enters
 her elaborately decorated pink bathroom and
 vomits for an hour.

Midnight at the skating rink—
 moonshine in the bathroom—
 feathered hair matted against her face,
 they've called the ambulance,
 and set up the stomach pump and her eyes
 rolled back—does anyone remember
 blue and brown? At the mall,
 she's being sucked
 into the escalator crack. But this
 is a strip mall—no stairs—but
 boarded up windows, empty
 bottles faded blue and brown
 in what she doesn't remember
 about sunlight. Fade
 to the exterior shot: go carts,
 The octopus, merry-go-round,
 a drunken carnie napping next
 to a game involving dimes and
 Coke bottles with elongated necks. Fade
 to the interior: read classic, read
 derivative: Hall of mirrors scene.

Wheels spinning in the air
 like a bug on its back
 hopelessly waving its legs.

A nineteenth-century operating theater.
 Blood drips to the base of the column.

Voiceover:

By God's will the king of the Arabs came to him to have the saint pray for him ... While they were talking together, a worm fell from Simeon's thigh; it caught the king's attention and, since he did not yet know what it was, he ran and picked it up. He placed it on his eyes and onto his heart and went outside holding it in

his hand. The saint sent a message to him, saying, "Come inside and put away what you have taken up, for you are bringing misery upon me, a sinner. It is a stinking worm from stinking flesh. Why soil your hand, you, a man held in honor?" When the righteous man had said this, the Arab came inside and said to him, "This will bring blessing and forgiveness of sins to me." When he opened his hand, a precious pearl was in his hand.

"He drowns in his own reflection just like any other narcissist. He looks happy about it."

A blonde bombshell in red high heels and a black feather boa.
She's blowing kisses at no one.

Naked people walking in a circle around the edges of the column.

Lapis lazuli.

A string quartet.

A hanging garden.

A navy blue wing-backed chair.

A stained-glass reading lamp.

A blue and brown rag rug.

Today's special at ColumnsRUs:
special hooks for all your hanging needs.

"Do you really think you have a choice?"

Welcome to Columnville!
It's what your God has always dreamed—
it's the God you always dreamed of.
There's a spot on
every lens.

Voiceover:

Satan brought against him a very fierce black serpent. It swelled up and hissed, it rushed against him and called itself between his feet and around itself in many coils around the same flag up to his name. It bound him tight like a rope to frame him and make him stop his prayer.

Into your night vision
goggles there is something
that requires interpretation, requires
a tiny bit of imagination, intuition,
the green soup eaten by
astronauts and jockeys. Learn
to be feral.

And now we have stars,
blinking out one by one—
obscure world.

Dream sequence.

Voiceover:

Then they wanted to strip him, but they could not do it, for his garment was stuck fast because of the putrified flesh. So for three days they kept soaking him in warm water mixed with oil and in this way, after a great deal of trouble, they were able to strip him: but with the garment they also took off his putrified flesh. They found the rope wrapped around his body so that nothing of him could be seen, only the ends of the rope. There was no guessing how many worms were on him. . . .

Multiple vehicle chase.

She's been on the roller
coaster for years now. Fasting
into meditating. Welcome.

"This is a nightly occurrence. You'll get used to it."

Columns can only be rented.
Never owned.

Eventually, there will be war.

Eventually, penance will be done.

Some will build bridges
between pedestals—the better
to burn. It's a strange
place—Columnville.

Scribbling corrections
in the script's margins, Dagmar
has decided to allow
Lily's personal footage into the print.
She's up there, legs folded,
all alone. The wind
ruffles her skin. She becomes
the source.

Waterfalls.

Mountain valleys covered in wild flowers.

Voiceover:

He saw a man come and stand above them—he looked like lightning. His outer garments were like the sun, and his face like rays of fire.

A woman fires a gun at her own reflection.
Linger over the shattered image.

“What is your name? Are you sure?”

An empty room.

A globe.

Riots, fires, shipwrecks.

“Call me when you arrive.”

Voiceover:

His bed was covered with worms, but no one knew what had taken place. . . . When he heard this, the abbot was astounded. He inspected his bed and found it full of worms, and because of the stench he could not stay there. The abbot said, “Man, why do you do these things? Where does this stench come from? Why do you deceive the brethren? Why do you undo the rule of the monastery? Are you some kind of spirit? Go somewhere else and die away from us.”

“There was a night I woke up and looked over the side. There were dozens of people—maybe pilgrims, maybe not—dancing with torches and singing without words. I was afraid. I knew what they wanted.”

This might be your last chance.
Now find an image, a key,
a church without a roof.

He’s eating a Twinkie
in front of a stained-glass window—
minute examination with
his nose just inches away
from the colored light,
the un-fractured panes.

She holds the record
for most consecutive
rides on the Music
of the Spheres.

Voiceover:

One day he went out from the monastery and came across a bucket in front of the well from which the water was drawn. It had a rope attached, and he untied the rope, went to a secluded place and wrapped the rope around his whole body. Over the rope he put a tunic made of hair. . . . So he remained a year or more with the rope wrapped around his flesh, and it ate into his flesh so that the rope was covered by the rotted flesh of the righteous man. Because of his stench no one could stand near him, but no one knew his secret.

Sunday:

everyone is dressed up
here in Columnville,
smiling smugly, casting
aspersions on each special
hat—there is a column
just for Sunday school.
Adults mill adjacent and soon
there will be snacks.

The competition for the most beautiful ladder:
it's become a full-blown pageant with
women in evening wear and tiara's
clambering up and down the bone,
ivory, mahogany rungs.

Firing into the Hall
of mirrors, screaming:

And now the clocks are all set back.

During Column War I, we are calling children
starving, the fast that will save us.
It is the pillar to end all pillars.

She holds up a snow globe
full of sparks, full of all
the refuse of these spilling
and no longer inhaled.

It's all you know:
Cocktail party in the sky,
she will find the perfect
visual for amnesia: it is her gift.

“Get thee behind me.”

The ponies are circling Columnville,
the ponies are angry—they don't really want
to trample everything to dust
but know they must.
For the final death of Director Obscure:
they are suddenly carnivorous,
intentionally cruel,
revealing wings and terrible light.

Voiceover:

She took hold of the pitcher of water but along with the water drink a small serpent. Nourished in her womb it became large, and her face became like the green grass in appearance. Many physicians came to heal her but were unable to. . . . the beast stirred in the presence of all; it threw her on the ground, came out, put its head in the middle of the barrier, and perished.

This empty highway stopping
 at an exit sign reading “no
 services.” Take it to
 the one
 wordless green then to the one
 now nonexistent, a gate
 stretched across the road, rusted
 locks attempting inviolability.
 The parking lot for nothing:
 blackening weeds further cracking
 the cracked asphalt.

People walking toward this goal.
 People swimming toward this goal.
 Crowds wanting.

And when she looks out
 the window, there will be

 a cratered, blasted landscape,
 smoke rising toward the sky
 that has not been blue for a long time.
 Her earrings are columns.
 Crushed marble ruins.

Lilly understands
 the succulent obsession that is
 worship. Extravagance
 floats through the air like
 pollen and lightning and
 she’s wearing an eye patch today,
 says: “you call this a light meal?”

Raining frogs.
 Raining blood.
 Raining acid and
 lit cigarettes

The voluptuous fireflies of the cigarette rain.

Burn like intricate
 clumps of hair.

Voiceover:

“Let me die as a stinking dog. . . .”

“Cut.”

Burn in the endless
 cremation of insect bones
 leaving the gold
 silhouette in the night. Wake
 locked in a grove: Hibiscus
 and honeysuckle—wild
 roses entangling all that remains.

“I looked over the side and saw ropes
 wriggling like happy worms. In the end,
 all will be vermiform.”

Maybe the director will come down
 from her lofty marble perch but
 probably not.

I forgive you.
 “I forgive you.”

I forgive you.

“Lilly Obscure’s Frankenstein:” all the italic parts are taken from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

“Carnival of the American Stylites:” The voiceovers are all from *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, translated by Robert Doran.