

Bonnie and 'Stein

A The Bride! Review

By: Adam Dombrow

Frankenstein's monster has remained a permanent fixture in the cultural zeitgeist since Mary Shelley unleashed her gothic novel in 1818; the story itself has been adapted thousands of times across various media, including 469 (!) different film adaptations. Frankenstein's Bride however, has not fared nearly as well, totaling a measly 3 adaptations, including this one (and one of which stars singer Sting and Jennifer Beals from the 80's that I had never even heard of).

It's no secret that I am a sucker for the horror/sci-fi genre, but I'm also a sucker for a well done period piece, musicals, and (as those of you who read my review of Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* already know) the monster *itself*. The trailers for Maggie Gyllenhaal's *The Bride!* looked like it just might combine *all* of these things, so needless to say I was pretty much already sold.

There's nothing wrong with combining *a few* things here and there, but what we have with this movie is an actual Frankenstein's monster (so punny)!

The Bride! is no doubt Maggie Gyllenhaal's baby—she wrote, directed, and produced this sucker—but someone along the way should have told her to dial back some of the messages she had hoped to convey. Gyllenhaal tries to cram as many themes and nods to different movements into this movie as she can: you have nods to the feminist movement, the LGBTQ movement, the mob, musicals, and the golden age of film, and themes such as women's rights, dealing with depression/possible bipolar disorder, the notion of being outcasts in love, toxic masculinity, toxic

relationships, etc. It is *a lot*, and leads to a rather jumbled up viewing experience due to the sheer fact that you are constantly being bombarded with the different messages.

I decided to view the film through the lens of it being a tale about women's rights, as well as about star crossed lovers (the movie even directly quotes *Romeo and Juliet* at one point) and the lengths to which people will go to to preserve and protect their love. It is pretty apparent right from her reawakening (or her "reinvigorating", as the movie words it) that this Bride is a totally different beast from how the character is generally portrayed: she's not helpless nor afraid of the world—quite the contrary actually—she instead wants to carve out her own place, and she wants revenge.

I found the first act of this film really interesting in terms of how Gyllenhaal chose to depict both the character of Frank (the monster) and the Bride. This rendition retains the aspect from the original Universal film that Frank is lonely, and desires a companion, but there are many more layers to it here, making it feel more like a representation of the "male loneliness epidemic": Frank is *so* lonely that he is willing to do or say *anything* in order to make the Bride fall in love with him—including completely lie to her. If you've ever had a friend whose entire personality changes upon them meeting someone, you will fully understand the direction Frank's life ends up going, as he is dragged deeper and deeper into depravity due to the Bride's insatiable desire to discover who she actually *is* (the film makes it a point for the character to "discover her name"), as well as her lust for vengeance. The end result is a toxic romance that would make Bonnie and Clyde blush.

The acting in *The Bride!* is surely the film's strength. Jessie Buckley plays dual roles (I

won't spoil the second role, although you are treated to it immediately at the film's start, and it is one of the more bizarre, head-scratching aspects of the *entire* movie) and she is absolutely captivating in both of them. It's hard to look away from the frizzy-haired Bride anytime she is on the screen—there is an animalistic magnetism and energy that Buckley conjures up, similar to a Lady Gaga, or Harley Quinn. Buckley goes in and out of these almost trance-like episodes where she transforms from one character to the other—especially early on in the film—and it is absolutely car-crash, can't look away levels of crazy. She's fantastic in this movie!

Christian Bale seems to be having the most fun that he's had on screen since *American Psycho*. Bale's Frank is more akin to a Herman Munster or the monster from *Young Frankenstein* than previous iterations of the character: he is in love with movies and dancing, and has this almost puppy dog-like sensitivity to him *at first*. Bale gets to really let it all hang out and showcase his versatility as he transforms from love craving, soft spoken creature into madly in love, protective monster. I hope that Bale is being legit in the interviews he has given for this movie, because he genuinely seems like he had a great time making it.

The cast is rounded out by stellar performances from Annette Benning (as a mad scientist), Jake Gyllenhaal (as a golden age movie star along the lines of Gene Kelly), and Peter Sarsgaard (a detective who just might know more than he lets on). However, it is Penélope Cruz who gets my special shout out for this one. Cruz plays Myrna Mallow, Sarsgaard's Det. Wiles' assistant, who brings this wonderful mix of humor and smarts that make her steal every scene she is in.

If you've seen any of the promotional materials from *The Bride!* and thought to yourself “that kind of looks like *Joker* or more apropos *Joker: Folie à Deux*” then give yourself a cookie

because Lawrence Sher, the cinematographer who did those movies, also did this one. You can instantly see parallels to the world of *The Bride!* and those two movies especially. Two of my favorite shots from this movie are the Bride's reawakening (which reminded me of the transformation in the original *Toxic Avenger*) and an absolutely stunning cityscape scene when the lovers arrive in New York City.

With so much going on in this movie, there is honestly probably a little something for everyone, but almost too much going on for anyone to fully grasp. I would not be surprised to see Buckley get nominated for best actress *again* due to her incredible performance here. Despite not actually being a musical (it does have musical numbers) I do expect this one to become a bit of a cult classic a la *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* or *Repo! The Genetic Opera*. With that being said, I don't know if I ever have to watch *The Bride!* again, but it is kind of whimsical fun, and is no doubt daring and provocative.