

Filmdom's most memorable brides are sometimes more than just the "girl next door," and aren't exactly the "kind of girl that married dear old dad."

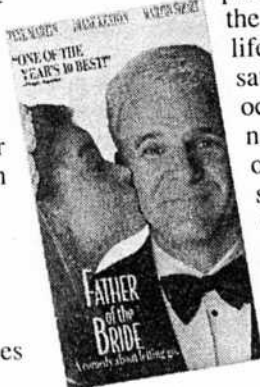
By Dan Harvey

Staff Writer

Holly-Wed

Movie Matrimonials

Elizabeth Taylor she wasn't. Whereas Mrs. Todd-Fisher-Burton-Warner-*et al* personified a classic romantic figurine in "Father of the Bride" (1950), Elsa Lanchester represented a mate from hell in "The Bride of Frankenstein" (1935).



prosaic, dressed for the "biggest day in her life" in the usual pearls, satin and lace. Lanchester — on the occasion of her combined nativity/nuptial — was otherworldly. But though partially swathed in mummy-like wrapping, accessoried with bandages and electrodes, she managed to remain feminine. Intriguingly feminine.

Still, when it comes to movie matrimony, most people choose to remember "bride" Elizabeth Taylor and "bridegroom" Don Taylor in Vincent Minelli's comedy of ceremonial errors; or they think of Julie Andrews' and Christopher Plummer's wedding/spectacle in "The Sound of Music" (1965), or even the recent remake of "Father of the Bride."

And many prospective brides prefer to think of their own impending wedding in terms of Taylor's "Bride" iconography. After all, that film was a representative piece of Americana, as

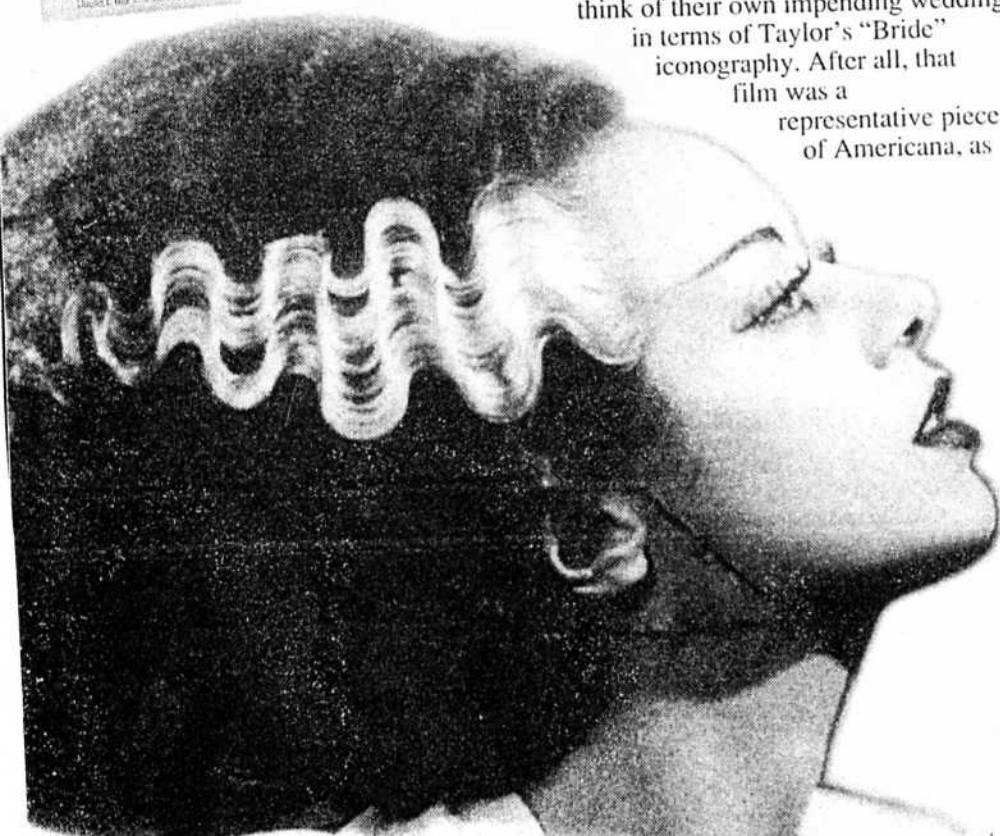
it depicts the quintessential ceremony that every "daddy's little girl" dreams about — a "Someday My Prince Will Come" fantasy brushstroked in snow-white pigments.

The Bride of Frankenstein," on the other hand (the one with the wart), is all expressionistic chiaroscuro. With a lot more depth, it makes for a devilish contemplation of that profoundly life-altering passage.

Just compare the brides themselves. Taylor is a heaven-as-cottonly-clouds vision, ornamented in peau de soie, silk shantung and tulle. Conversely, Lanchester looks like she stepped out of a Goya-esque vision of the infernal abyss.

All of the stitchings she required were sewn right into her flesh. Otherwise, her frame is adorned in a gown held together by adhesive. A flowing shroud is her train and surgical gauze her hosiery. Instead of the traditional white satin pumps, she wears clunky shoes bottomed by flat platform soles. Her electronically-frizzed coiffure — with twin shocks of white hair rising from her temples — was modeled after Queen Nefertiti's headdress.

Those actresses — or, their characters — are the diametric faces minted upon the two-headed coin of Hollywood brides — *der Januskopf* of cinematic spouses. Imagine Liz Taylor stepping in front of a looking glass, seeking a reflected affirmation of her beauty, and instead gazing upon a reverse image perverted as if by a funhouse mirror, a degraded *doppelgänger* staring back at her.



Despite the strong initial reaction her appearance provoked, Lanchester's bride has aged well. True, she's exotic. But, if you can overlook the scars crisscrossing her neck and underlining her jaw, she's rather contemporary. Dress her in black spandex and she could be the erotic focal point of a raunchy music video.

No other cinematic brides can equal Lanchester's terrible splendor – not "The Brides of Fu Manchu" (1964), nor "The Bride of Dr. Jekyll" (1964), or even "The Brides of Dracula" (1960).

At least one other bride can match Lanchester in conceptual outrageousness, however – though only on an intellectual level. That would be the female lead in "The Bride and the Beast" (1958), who allowed a bizarre fetish to interfere with her newly revised marital status. In this representative offering of grade Z cinema – fodder for the "Mystery Science 3000" wise guys – the bride finds herself strangely drawn to her scientist-husband's pet ape. The script, written by trash-film legend Edward D. Wood Jr., exploited the then-current Bridey Murphy reincarnation revelations and suggested that the woman was a female gorilla in her past life. Even in her higher-evolved incarnation, she can't overcome her sexual attraction for chest-thumping silverbacks (or, at least, a man dressed in an unconvincing ape costume).

In another classic ape-bride romance, the more explicitly titled "The Bride of the Gorilla," it was the husband's turn to supply the weirdness. In this 1951 bit of jungle schlock, Barbara Payton marries Raymond Burr. But instead of living happily ever after, the couple finds their wedded bliss destroyed when a local witch doctor casts a spell over Burr that makes him act like, well, a testosterone-addled gorilla. And that makes for some delightfully ludicrous histrionics.

Now here's something to ponder: What sort of post-vow reception would these celluloid

brides have? Fictional newlyweds of Taylor's ilk usually get the country club, banquet room affair, with "Miss Manners" etiquette in evidence all around. But what about someone like the Frankenstein monster's bride? Well, Lanchester and her mate (Boris Karloff) never made it to their reception. In a fit of anger, the monster dynamited himself and spouse after she was repulsed by his very sight – sort of a metaphor for wedding-night rejection. But if someone had bothered to throw them a party, it would probably have turned into something as bizarre as the wedding feast scene from "Freaks" (1932).

That cult-classic circus movie depicts the ultimate alternative-lifestyle wedding reception. Consider the happy couple. The bride is a star of the "big top," a beautiful trapeze artist, a statuesque Amazon. Her unlikely husband is a sideshow midget. (With his diminutive size and dark suit, he resembles a groom doll that adorns a wedding cake.) Their reception is held in a circus tent, empty except for the banquet table and guests – a collection of sideshow denizens including assorted dwarfs and pinheads, Siamese twins, a bearded lady, a "skeleton" man, a hermaphrodite, an armless-legless "living torso," etc. You think the relatives at your offspring's reception acted like drunken louts? The guests at this wedding danced on the table, swallowed swords, and ate fire. And when it came time to toast the newlyweds, a large communal cup of wine was passed from guest to guest, as the assemblage chanted "Gobble, gobble/One of us/We accept her/One of us."

This unsettling scene may prove subliminally frightening for parents of future brides, and it could very well conjure up flashbacks of the primordial horror experienced by parents at raucous post-nuptial festivities. It's evocative of a mother's worst nightmare: She looks across the banquet hall, at the groom's crude relations, and she imagines that her daughter – genteel and beloved but blinded by love – is being welcomed into a fold of slobbering simians.

Okay, what of the next stage, then? After the last cup of celebratory champagne is emptied, after the cash bar closes down, where does the happy couple go from there? For two people, the spotlight will never shine as bright again. It was the special day – “their day” – when they became the stars of their own movie. He was Prince Charming while she was Sleeping Beauty. But the floodlights darken all too soon, the guests depart to get back to their own lives, and the newlyweds are left to face an uncertain future alone. And, sad to say, some are fated for the harsh reality of the revisionist fairy tale that is real life – the unhappily-ever-after of dissipating passions, romantic entropy, compromise, complacency, and even melancholia. In allegorical fashion, no film better addresses post-wedding bell blues as the luridly titled “I Married a Monster From Outer Space” (1958).

The film deals with a surreptitious alien invasion, as anthropomorphic, emotionless extraterrestrials take over the bodies of the most virile examples of Earth males. Poor Gloria Talbot. She’s looking forward to married life with strapping Tom Tryon. On the surface, they make a prototypical Eisenhower-era American couple. In tight, knee-length skirts and form-fitting blouses, Talbot is an oomphy “sweater” girl, while Tryon is mannequin-masculine in the Rock Hudson mold.

But trouble awaits. Before their wedding day, he undergoes a transformation. In what could be considered a cautionary passage, his body becomes inhabited by one of the unfeeling aliens when he’s driving home from his bachelor’s party. As one may expect, this leads to a rather disappointing honeymoon night for the lusty Talbot, as she finds herself married to a shell of a man who possesses even less passion than Mr. Spock. Afterward, she endures months of marriage to this physically and emotionally distant man. Upbeat woman that she is, she remains optimistic that he’ll live up to the pre-wedding promise he once exhibited.

However, after a year of marriage, she finally resigns herself to the reality of the situation and is forced to tell her husband that he’s not the man she once thought he was, hoped he was. In a despairing scene – dimly lit and profoundly felt -- she sadly confesses to him that their life together isn’t what she expected or what she wants.

That sort of material may seem a bit dark-sided for some. Take heart. Not all cinematic matters of marriage are as somber. Other movies with equally confessional titles relate narratives with much happier consequences:

- “I Married a Centerfold” (1984) – starring Timothy Daly and Teri Copley. The title explains all.
- “I Married an Angel” (1942) – with Nelson Eddy and Jeanette McDonald. They were made for each other, but at least they were happy about it.
- “I Married a Witch” (1942) – same year, different attitude. And it starred the vixenish Veronica Lake, who draped her sultry expressions with a “peek a boo” hairstyle.
- “I Married a Woman” (1958) – wherein George Gobel enjoys connubial bliss with vivacious Diana Dors. Some men win the lottery. Others strike oil. But this nerdy brushtop was able to hook the British version of the Jayne Mansfield buxom platinum blonde.