



LADY FROM THE BLACK LAGOON

by Mallory O'Meara

Summary:

The Lady from the Black Lagoon uncovers the life and work of Milicent Patrick—one of Disney's first female animators and the only woman in history to create one of Hollywood's classic movie monsters.

As a teenager, Mallory O'Meara was thrilled to discover that one of her favorite movies, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, featured a monster designed by a woman, Milicent Patrick. But for someone who should have been hailed as a pioneer in the genre there was little information available. For, as O'Meara soon discovered, Patrick's contribution had been claimed by a jealous male colleague, her career had been cut short and she soon after had disappeared from film history. No one even knew if she was still alive.

As a young woman working in the horror film industry, O'Meara set out to right the wrong, and in the process discovered the full, fascinating story of an ambitious, artistic woman ahead of her time. Patrick's contribution to special effects proved to be just the latest chapter in a remarkable, unconventional life, from her youth growing up in the shadow of Hearst Castle, to her career as one of Disney's first female animators. And at last, O'Meara discovered what really had happened to Patrick after *The Creature's* success, and where she went.

A true-life detective story and a celebration of a forgotten feminist trailblazer, Mallory O'Meara's *The Lady from the Black Lagoon* establishes Patrick in her rightful place in film history while calling out a Hollywood culture where little has changed since.

Source:

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40165912-the-lady-from-the-black-lagoon#:~:text=The%20Lady%20from%20the%20Black%20Lagoon%3A%20Hollywood%20Monsters%20and.Lost%20Legacy%20of%20Milicent%20Patrick&text=The%20Lady%20from%20the%20Black%20Lagoon%20uncovers%20the%20life%20and.of%20Hollywood's%20classic%20movie%20monsters.>

Mallory O'Meara uncovers **the** life and work of Milicent Patrick, one of Disney's first female animators and **the** only woman in history to create one of Hollywood's classic movie monsters. **O'Meara** discovered that Patrick's contribution had been claimed by a jealous male colleague, and she soon after had disappeared **from** film history. **O'Meara** set out to right **the** wrong, and in **the** process discovered **the** full, fascinating story of an ambitious, artistic woman ahead of her time.

Source: <https://pinnacle.polarislibrary.com/polaris/search/title.aspx?ctx=11.1033.0.0.1&pos=3&cn=1862956>



About the Author:

Mallory O'Meara is a producer and screenwriter for Dark Dunes Productions. Growing up in New England, she fell in love with the strange and the scary at an early age. Mallory was hired by Dark Dunes Productions CEO and director Sultan Saeed al Darmaki in 2013 to be the communications director for

the company. In 2014 she was tapped to be the associate producer for al Darmaki's directorial debut *Kids vs Monsters*, and later that year took on her first main producing role for Dark Dunes on *Yamasong: March of the Hollows*. She now lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Source: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm6261672/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm

Author Interview:

*Mallory O'Meara, author of **The Lady from the Black Lagoon***

Callie Smith

*On Saturday, at the Chattanooga Film Festival, I had the pleasure of sitting down with filmmaker, author, and podcaster Mallory O'Meara, whose new book, **The Lady from the Black Lagoon: Hollywood Monsters and the Lost Legacy of Millicent Patrick**, was published by Harper Collins last month. In our discussion, we covered her book, filmmaking, writing, sexism, and how to find balance between so many projects.*

*In your words, what is **The Lady from the Black Lagoon** about?*

*Mallory O'Meara: **The Lady from the Black Lagoon** is a biography of Millicent Patrick, who is the woman who designed **Creature from the Black Lagoon**. It's also part-detective-story about my own experiences in the same industry she worked in, just sixty-five years after the fact, and why her story is still relevant today.*

During your presentation at CFF, you mentioned that this took two and a half years from start to finish. How did you deal with the holdups and obstacles you encountered during that time?

Like emotionally or artistically?

Both!

Emotionally, I just wanted to know what happened to her so badly, for my own sake. She's been my hero for so long, and I desperately, desperately wanted to know, for my own curiosity, what happened to her, where she went, and where she started.

Artistically, when I ran into problems, I just kept throwing things up against the wall. I kept trying new leads. I kept reaching out to new people and trying things that sounded kind of weird but ended up working out. Researching a person, you're reverse engineering a life. A lot happens in somebody's life, so there might be a resource somewhere that you don't even expect. Somebody somewhere might know something, so you just have to keep asking around. A lot of the breaks I got came from just constantly talking about the project. At a brunch I was at, a woman I never met before happened to work at Disney, where I needed to get into, and that led to one of the biggest breaks.

On the subject of powering through, you have a [podcast on Maximum Fun](#), you write books, you produce films. Besides not sleeping, how do you find balance?

I am a huge proponent of schedule books. I'm a big organizer. I could not get through my day without my almighty, holy schedule book, which I live or die with. I just parcel out my time. You know that mug: "Beyoncé has the same 24 hours in a day that you do." You just have to look at your time. You could spend a lot of time on social media; you could spend a lot of time watching TV; you could spend a lot of time napping. If you carve out a little bit of those hours and put it towards something else... Normally, my day is in the morning, I do my film stuff. Afternoon, I do my podcast stuff, And then I write at night. In that, I make sure to schedule some time to eat, exercise, look at the sun for a little bit, take a breath, go to bed, read, see my friends, spend time with my partner. It's really just, for me, all about organizing. Like, weaponized highlighters.

To pivot into film and sexism...

I'm ready.

Everybody's favorite subject! Within the first pages of the book...

I come out kicking. I don't pull any punches.

Well, you can't not, because it's a part of it. You point out that she made this incredible thing and not many women have been able to do it since in about 50 years. What do you run into the most in the film industry that keeps women excluded? Have you seen any solutions that have worked?

One of the biggest problems we have is not even the garbage men, it's men getting defensive. Sexism isn't fun to talk about. It puts a lot of people's backs up, you know? And when you start talking about this stuff, guys get so defensive, and when they do, they want to double down. So, I think a lot of guys need to be like, "Okay, yeah, we get it. We are a production company, we've never hired a female director." That sucks, but it's OK, because you can have time to fix it. So, stop being so defensive, and let's have some forward progress. There's been a lot of butthole clenching around #metoo and a lot of "I don't want anyone to tell me what to do or have anyone

encroach on my artistic process.” It’s OK to admit that you did something wrong. You’re not going to get canceled. What you can do is move forward.

We all struggle against the unconscious biases we have, and if you’re a person with all the privilege in the world, you don’t notice these things. As a white woman, I constantly noticed the gender balance in the room, but I might not necessarily notice how many black people are in a room. You don’t notice these things and less you make an effort to do it. So, now I’m constantly like, “How many books by gay authors am I reading? How many people of color do we have on this team?”

It’s just like with exercising or journaling; if you want to make a good change, you just have to constantly do it. It’s those little things every day. [Sexism is] a really big problem, but I don’t think a big, massive, crazy solution is going to help us. It’s men, unprompted, going, “Hey, guys, did you notice that there is no women in this room? Maybe we should fix that.” It’s all these thousands and thousands of little choices that we all face every day. If we all just got on board with making this world not as shitty, things would change.

In your book, you point out that women are the most important part of horror, because the horror happens to us, both in fiction and in real life. What is your favorite female character in a horror film or female horror trope?

*I love female werewolves. It’s my favorite, favorite thing. I love female monsters more than anything in the world, because we are monsters to so many men. We scare the shit out of them. There’s this big valley between two kinds of female characters. You have the ones that’re too sexy-scary, then you have the hag who lives in a swamp and eats toads, because a lot of men really look at women in that polarizing way. So, when you get to have a narrative, like in *Ginger Snaps* or *When Animals Dream*, where a woman is really exploring her own agency through being a monster or fighting monsters or becoming a monster, it’s the most exciting, fun thing to me. I really want to see more female werewolf movies. I know that the director of *Tigers Are Not Afraid* (Issa Lopez) is developing a female werewolf story with Guillermo del Toro right now. I’m so stoked about it. Like, take my money now.*

Tigers Are Not Afraid was one of my favorite things I saw at CFF last year. It’s incredible.

Yeah, that movie rocked me. I loved it so much. She’s definitely a director to watch.

*On the press tour for *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, Milicent Patrick had to publicly give away the credit for her work and design. Have you had experiences like that where you had to give credit for your work to men on set?*

Yes, yes, yes. Mostly on a lot of writing. On my first project, which ultimately never happened, I was doing a lot of work on that script. And there have been other movies that I’ve worked on scripts with no credit. Now, we’re living in a time where people can say stuff, but for a long time when I started in the industry, I just thought that’s how things were, so I didn’t say anything. Milicent didn’t say anything. Now, you can pitch a fucking fit about it, which is great. Not only can you pitch that fit, but now you know that things might change if you do. I didn’t realize that when I started working as a filmmaker. Now I know to stand up for myself and that a difference will be made if I do.

I've had similar experiences in other industries, not at all related to film, where men have taken over my work and my projects and gotten all the credit and praise.

You just feel like that's the way things are, and that's why Milicent's story is so amazing. All of us can relate to it, no matter what you do for a living.

You mentioned in your panel that you don't have a formal education in film...

Or in anything.

Yeah! So, what was that learning curve like when you got into film?

Massive, and that's also a part of the reason why I dealt with so much for so long. I thought, "I never went to film school; I don't know these things. They must know better than me." The truth is, in a lot of art, people are just making shit up as they go along. You know a lot more than you think you do. You've got to trust your instincts, but I wasn't doing that. So, there was a huge, huge learning curve. Luckily, even though I dealt with a lot of garbage men along the way, I have a really close friend named Frank Woodward, who I met on the very first project I ever worked on, and we're still super, super close to this day, six years later. He taught me everything I know about producing, and he gives me hope that this doesn't have to be a nightmare experience. There are good people out there who will celebrate you, support you, be there for you, and teach you. I've met so many other great female filmmakers. But, that first year or two was a super steep curve, and there was a lot of growing pains.

Sure! And you shifted into film from a radically different career, right? It was...

I was working in animal science as a veterinary technician.

How do you navigate that big of a change in your life? Even financially, that's a huge change from a steady income to one that's more unsure.

I took a massive pay cut when I went from working with animals to working in film. You love what you do, and that pulls you through. It really does. I'm also an organized person, so being able to manage my life really helped me out. It still hasn't quite sunk in six years later that I make movies, that I wrote a book, and that I do podcasts. It's so surreal. It's great.

You made that change and did it right!

Yes!

In your book, you manage to capture your unique voice so well. How do you get your personality on the page?

For me, it's like telling a story to someone at a party about someone they don't know. You have to give them enough information that they understand the story, but not too much that they get bored. That's the key to telling stuff like this. I could tell it in my own words, in my own voice. It helps when you're a podcaster and you're listening to yourself talk all the time!

As writers, we have a lot of pressure to use the right word or phrase, but you've really got to trust your gut. If you're writing and you're like, "Man, I just want to say this is a fucking piece of shit," just say it! The cool thing about writing is that you can go back and fix it if you reread it and it doesn't feel like it rings true. I joke about bourbon all the time, but I like having a drink when I'm writing because it can get you out of that really oppressive headspace where everything has to be perfect. You can just sort of roll it out and tell it like you'd tell someone in person. Free yourself from these weird expectations that you have, and don't be afraid to write a bunch of crap. Just let it out.

Just suck the first time and improve it later.

Writing, for me, is all about rewriting. I'm a huge rewriter. Getting over that fear of going back and reading your own writing is key.

In your panel, you mentioned a video you made for The Mary Sue where you read some of your feedback from men about your book. Was there actually catharsis in doing that? Was it frustrating to dig them up again?

No, it was so cathartic. The fact that I was doing that video at Harper Collins and releasing on a big site like The Mary Sue, it was like, "Look at these fuckers." Making fun of them is so cathartic to me. All these old crusty dudes that years ago told me that I couldn't write this book and that Milicent Patrick didn't get to do anything... Having written the book that got taken up in such a big way and sitting on the other side of it, going "haha", it's so cathartic.

Do you ever use the energy from getting a hateful email or tweet to motivate yourself to keep doing the art?

Yes, a hundred percent. The book is filled with a lot of rage, and I definitely used that to power me through. Especially going through rough spots in the research process, that anger made me want to tell her story even more. It made me want to prove them wrong. Honestly, I've gotten criticism for the book that I'm too close to the subject or the book's too angry, but that's how this stuff is allowed to continue, when we don't look at it in context or we dismiss it like "Well, that's how things were." No! Let's get mad. Let's make fun of them. Let's talk about how mad we are. Let's write in a mad way. Let's make people feel those emotions so that they can't dismiss it anymore.

So that people who didn't understand before can understand now what it's like to get this feedback.

Yes.

I remember after the second review I ever wrote online, I got this horribly sexist response. It's instant for women who write.

Yes, it's constant, but you've got to just use that and keep pushing.

What kinds of projects do you have coming up that we need to be looking out for?

*I'm working on three new books right now. My film, *Yamasong: March of the Hollows*, is going to be on VOD on April 23rd. It's a live action puppet film. You can also check out *Reading Glasses* with my friend Brea Grant every Thursday on *Maximum Fun*.*

Source: <https://talkfilmsociety.com/articles/interview-mallory-omeara-author-of-the-lady-from-the-black-lagoon>

Book Reviews:

There's never a dull moment in this beautiful, heartfelt tribute to a pioneering special-effects designer and animator and passionate call for change in the industry that forgot her.

-- "**Booklist (starred review)**"

[An] engaging, forthright, and personal history of both the author and her muse.

-- "**Library Journal**"

An engaging chronicle of Milicent Patrick, a woman trailblazer in the film industry...This passionately written biography will do much to bring Patrick the recognition she deserves.

-- "**Kirkus Reviews**"

Captivating and exhaustively researched...This is a fascinating slice of Hollywood history.

-- "**Publishers Weekly (starred review)**" --This text refers to the audioCD edition.

Particularly timely in light of the #MeToo movement, this book is more than simply a tribute to a forgotten pioneer of special effects and makeup design, Milicent Patrick. The creator of the iconic mask used in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), and one of the first female animators for Walt Disney, Patrick seemed destined for a memorable career before encountering the sexism of male coworkers threatened by her talents. When she was a child, her father had been superintendent of construction at newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst's Hearst Castle, so readers are also treated to a fascinating side story about life in and around San Simeon, CA, as well as the peripatetic life of Patrick's family. But it's the book's subtitle that clearly has a twofold meaning for author, screenwriter, and producer O'Meara, reflecting her passion for the project. The individuals she discusses are also those who are part of the internalized misogyny of the industry, and she and her subject had to handle very similar situations and

prejudices. **VERDICT** This engaging, forthright, and personal history of both the author and her muse will be a valuable addition to most libraries.—Peter Thornell, Hingham P.L., MA

Library Journal

"The Lady from the Black Lagoon is a stunningly honest, compassionate investigation into the life of a woman who changed the face of horror. Milicent Patrick's story is as heartbreaking as it is relatable, and O'Meara has written her story with empathy, vulnerability, and courage. The direct discussion of what it's like to be a woman in the film industry—to be a woman in any industry—is incredibly refreshing; The Lady from the Black Lagoon is a blast of fresh air. I've never read anything like The Lady from the Black Lagoon, and I hope it's just the beginning." —Sarah Gailey, author of Magic for Liars

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. If your book offers a **cultural portrait**—of life in another country or region of your own country, start with questions a, b, and c ...

- a. What **observations** are made in the book?
Does the author examine economics and politics, family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?
- b. Does the author **criticize or admire** the culture? Does he/she wish to preserve or change the way of life? Either way, what would be risked or gained?
- c. What is **different** from your own culture? What do you find most surprising, intriguing or difficult to understand?

2. What is the **central idea** discussed in the book? What issues or ideas does the author explore? Are they personal, sociological, global, political, economic, spiritual, medical, or scientific

3. Do the issues **affect your life**? How so—directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?

4. What **evidence** does the author use to support the book's ideas? Is the evidence convincing...definitive or...speculative? Does the author depend on personal opinion, observation, and assessment? Or is the evidence factual—based on science, statistics, historical documents, or quotations from (credible) experts?

5. What kind of **language** does the author use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it biased, inflammatory, sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?

6. What are the **implications** for the future? Are there long- or short-term consequences to the issues raised in the book? Are they positive or negative...affirming or frightening?

7. What **solutions** does the author propose? Are the author's recommendations concrete, sensible, doable? Who would implement those solutions?

8. How **controversial** are the issues raised in the book? Who is aligned on which sides of the issues? Where do you fall in that line-up?

9. Talk about **specific passages** that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?

10. What have you **learned** after reading this book? Has it broadened your perspective about a difficult issue—personal or societal? Has it introduced you to a culture in another country...or an ethnic or regional culture in your own country?

(Questions by LitLovers.)

Source: <https://www.litlovers.com/run-a-book-club/questions-for-nonfiction>