

BIRTH BREATH BRIDE ELIZABETH

a lecture play for one performer by Ken Prestininzi

A recorded voice announces:

“Please help me in welcoming our distinguished speaker, Dr. Mary Shelley-Breath.”

Mary Shelley-Breath enters and stands at the podium. She is dressed well, but there is a statement of sexy-woman in her dignity as well. She has a hint of Elsa Lanchester hair. She has note cards and reading glasses.

MARY SHELLEY-BREATH

Hello. Thank you for inviting me.
It’s so nice to see so many fresh unprepared faces out there.
Yes. Ah.

I was invited to speak to you today on the relation of motherhood and the female imagination. There is none.

Oh ha ha ha –

Trying to catch her breath or prevent hysterics:

- ah ah ah -
Ha ha ha -
- ah

Ah.

My mother died giving birth to me.
I wrote a book to terrify my lover.
Often I wish I were dead.

But not today. Not now, seeing so many frightened babes - brides – sorry, scholars staring back at me, each mean squint of your eyes asking me why be smarter than love and God anyway?

Do you believe that there is but one God, and that he is powerful, wise, and good? And how might a woman come to know her Creator? If she cannot know her Creator how is she to know herself?

She takes a big breath.

There are many follies, in some degree, peculiar to women: sins against reason, of commission, as well as of omission; but all flowing from ignorance or prejudice, I shall only point out such as appear to be injurious to their moral character. And in animadverting on them, I wish especially to prove, that the weakness of mind and body, which women themselves have endeavored by various motives to perpetuate, prevents their discharging the peculiar duty of their sex: for when weakness of body will not permit them to suckle their children, and weakness of mind makes them spoil their tempers—is woman in a natural state?

She takes a big breath and exhales.

As you scholars have come to know, in the very marrow of your bones, education is the first step to forming a being advancing gradually towards perfection. That is why it pleases me to see all you budding...no, not budding. Not blooming. A woman is not a flower. Then what is she? A wish? Perhaps. An ardent wish. Whose? Our mothers?

As you plan the bridal shower, be sure to give careful thought to the decorations. Decorations will be the most important thing for setting the stage for your event. Don't be afraid to be creative.

With the abundance of wedding bells and umbrellas you find in the bridal shower section of party stores, one might think that's the only possible motif for this event. Think again.

Are you? Are you thinking again?

Or are you sitting there like a girl?

Wait. Did someone say bridal shower? And what will the theme be? The theme.

Not the moral or message, o no. The theme. What are we trying to point out?

Would it be wrong if the theme were a wee romantic?

Ah ha – do you think I’m setting a trap for you?

Romntic.
Romantic?

When he asks you to marry him, perhaps he is hoping that you can:

Taking on his voice:

“ create for me a female with whom I can join, whose sympathies and energies are necessary for my being. And when you create her, my one and only, she and I will abandon this world, abandon humanity, and only exist for each other.”

Ah.

Make. A. Monster.
Why?
To quicken the beating of his heart...
Ah ha!

Can you say “Ah, ha!” little girls? Stand. Say it with me.

Make.
A.
Monster.
Quicken.
The.
Beating.

His heart.

AH, HA!

Sit. Sit. Sit. Calm yourselves. We're not finished. Did I scare you?
Silly girls.
Every morning I was asked: have you thought of a story?
Do you know this story? We were all to write a horror story.

If possible, she writes WHORER on a white board.

And every morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative.

She places her cheek against a copy of the novel FRANKENSTEIN.

When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination...unbidden...possessed and guided me...I could not admit that I was the cause of all excess.

Fierce little whispers to herself, like affirmations to keep her going:

*I am the cause
I am the cause
I am the cause
I am the cause
I am the cause
I am the cause*

She resumes her strength and stares out at her audience:

You too must admit that *you* are the cause of all excess.
You are the cause.

Have you thought of a story?

EVERY MORNING I WAS ASKED.
EVERY MORNING. YES, EVERY MORNING.

I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative. I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think.

My mother...

IF SHE HAD NOT DIED WHEN SHE SPIT ME OUT INTO THE WORLD.

My mother...

Might have asked me why was I there, cavorting with two married men – why was I fluffing the sweet cock-ego of male genius? Yes? I, the daughter of the first feminist who still died as all women used to, the blood racing out of them as if they forgot how to contain their imaginations once they flung their hopes out of their godforsaken cavities...

Cavorting with the cock-ego? Is that what you think?

O mighty Mommy, feminism can go hang itself if it will not allow me to do as I please with my own aesthetics, ethics and sex organs. I was not cavorting with the cock-ego.

I WAS COMPETING!

Remember, it's a competition, little girls.
It's always a competition.
Scare the bejesus out of them.

Women.

Listen up, buttercups.
Listen up.
Listen, Mother.

Admit that *you* are the cause of all excess.
ADMIT...it...

This is not a lecture on the second sex or the weaker vessel or the undoneness inside us all; if only I were a hysteric, how beautiful life would be... I would wander in every direction, up and about and through out the body, obstructing all passages, closing up pores, confusing every natural instinct to breathe.

My lecture is on aesthetics and ethics – a male domain.

I see you thinking out there.
THINK AGAIN.

I see your naughty eyebrows lifting.
Your pornographic tight foreheads.
Sucking on your little hard candy of obscenities.

I know you want to ask the bad questions.

*What about a man's sex organs?
Are they the Real?
Or are they a cultural construct?*

A man's sex organs.
Hmmm hmmm hmmm.
A man's sex organs are disobedient.
Disobedient Creatures.
Dominated by frenzied Lusts. They wander every direction, up and about and through out the body, obstructing all passages, closing up pores, confusing our natural instinct to breathe.

She bites her fist and takes a pose of fright:

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, o sir!
She's gone
The monster
He's got her!
Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

She recovers as if nothing just happened:

The biblical Adam came forth from the hands of God a perfect creature – happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator. He was allowed to acquire knowledge from all things, living and inanimate, and he was allowed to believe in his superior nature.

Ah, I'm a little nauseous.
No. I'm fine.
A little acid reflux.

“The word ‘reflux’ comes from the Medieval Latin word refluxus which comes from the Latin word refluere, meaning "to flow back, to recede". If you suffer from acid reflux the acids from your stomach "flow back" into your

esophagus, causing discomfort and pain - this discomfort is known as heartburn.”

I have everything here on my cards.

And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man made He a woman.
And brought her unto the man. So God created in His own image. He also
had acid reflux if you read between the lines. It was “flow back” that got Eve
all that unjust attention for seeking enlightenment and...

Ah ah ah –

Excuse me,
I am having trouble...
bre-ath...brea-ca...ca-etching...
My breath -

Ah ah ah -
Mmm.
Better now.

I wanted to...where am I?
At this point, I would like to show the original film *Frankenstein* by the
director James Whale. Film, please.

Film. Please. Film, please. Start the film. Start the fucking movie.
WHY MUST THERE ALWAYS BE THIS BREAKDOWN, THIS
GODDAMN BREAKDOWN WITH MEDIATION, MODERN MAN AND
FUCKING TECHNOLOGY.

If I were a hysteric, you’d all be dead right now.

Oh ha ha ha, ah ah ah –
Ha ha ha – ah
Ah.

Who was the woman who dreamt the song of Solomon?
“You have put your heart into me, my bride
and you have stolen mine,
with one of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.”

A bride who gives everything.
A nameless one.
Until death do us...

The unthinkable...

How did I, a young girl, come to think of and to dilate upon so hideous an idea as...

Giving birth? But no...

OhhhhhhHHHHHHHAHHHOOAHOOHAOHAOHAOHAHAAAAHHHHHHHOAHOOO

FILM!

She enacts the film we do not see:

The storm is coming up over the mountains, it will be here soon.
The kites. Are the kites ready? Yes.
Then send them up as soon as the wind rises. Hurry. Hurry.

The kites. The kites.
Get 'em ready.
Ludwig. Ludwig...
Darling. Darling.
The creation of life is distinctly enthralling, is it not?
Yes! Yes!
A new World of Gods and Monsters.

Love that.

Yes! Yes!
A new World of Gods and Monsters.

She returns to the podium.

The monster is not Frankenstein.
Frankenstein is the doctor-fiancé.

She reads from the novel Frankenstein.

With shut eyes, but acute mental vision, I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the Creature. Victor Frankenstein, graduate student to shame any other graduate students ever conceived. My fiancé, Victor. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold, the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains and looking on him with yellow, watery, and speculative eyes.

I retire at an early hour. But last night, I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I saw my mother climb into my bed while I slept. I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death. Her features appeared to change. I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms.

I can still hear her whispering in my ear:

Have you thought of a story?

No.

A love story?

No.

Why not a love story?

No.

A woman wants a love story!

Think again.

I told my mother that even if I could not conjure love, I could cause fear.

And that was when the Thing made its demand:

You must create...

No, no, no, no, no, no...

...a female for me with whom I can join, whose sympathies and energies are necessary for my being. And when you create her, my one and only, she and I will abandon your world, we will abandon humanity, and only exist for each other.

She freezes. Doesn't move. Finally...

When you create her.

Create her.
Who?
Her.

The hidden one. Beneath the text. The woman. The force. A mind in her own parts. She's born. She takes a breath. Slap. Wah. Here I am! Birth. Breath. Who among you knows her name?

They call the wind Mariah. We call her... ...?

Bride.
Bride of Frankenstein. ...
She has a name, people.
Hmm?
What is it.
It will be on the exam. The Exam. Try.
Birth, Breath. Bride. ...
Birth. Breath. Bride. ...

Elizabeth.
Damn it.
Is her name.
The bride has a name: Elizabeth.

She must appear fresh and innocent at the altar.
FRESH AND INNOCENT.
Oooooooh. Ahhhhhhhhhh

Hopefully she will not forget the good advice everyone offers her.
Be obedient. Ooooooooooooo.

And prove her worth.
Ahhhhhhhhh.

Be obedient.
And prove her worth.

But she wants that. She wants that.

I want to dance with the bride!

The monster throws her across the bed. Breathe! Why won't she breathe?

I want to dance with the bride!

Her pale distorted features half-covered by her hair.

I want to dance with the bride!

The murderous mark of the fiend's grasp was on her neck. Her breath...

I want to...!

I want to dance with the bride

I want to dance with the bride

I want to dance with the bride.

No, me!

No, me!

No, me!

ME!

ME!

She dances a frenzy, until.

MOMMY!

UNDER THE BED!

MOMMY!

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, o sir!

She's gone

The monster

He's got her!

Ah uh uh uh –

I'm fine.

I wake from my sleep in horror – but I have never fainted.

Ah –

No.

False alarm.

She recovers as if nothing has happened.

I could not sleep.
I could not think.
I wanted to win.

And suddenly -
Yes, that word suddenly.
And suddenly...the story came...

Unbidden.
I swear to you that is the right word.
Unbidden.

The horror story.
Frankenstein.

Questions?

Remember, please keep your questions to the theme. I know how girls get. Girls don't stick. To the theme. They wander up and down and all over, willy-nilly, they wander every direction, through out the body, obstructing all passages, closing up pores, confusing our natural instinct to breathe.

Questions?

Yes? What is it?
Yes?
What.
Is.
It.

No questions? Too soft-headed and warm bellied to think?

Considering woman as a whole

She writes on the board WHOLE

Not...

*She crosses out **HOLE**.*

...dismissing out of hand fanciful theories about ribs and other such appendages, the inquiry is whether woman has her own reason or not. If she has, which, for a moment, I will take for granted, then, she was not created merely to be the solace of man.

Why was she created then? Hmm? If not for him? Why would she be created a she, if not for he? But she was not created a she. He called her a she, but that is not what she was. She just was. It was he who she-ed her.

Reason tells us I am not not a man.

Follow me here.

We're going deep. If your ears want to pop from the pressure, open and rotate your jaw like this.

Here we go. Remember to breathe.

I am a man of science, a man of reason.

Science, like a woman, has *her* little surprises. You shall see.

Ah –

I am a woman of many parts
Separated in jars, alcoholized, pickled pristine
He chose my breasts from the morgue like fruit from a bin:

In Victor's voice:

Are these the best? Tested by a firm squeeze
His thumbs print their mark into them
A hundred dead women were needed
From them he sewed together one female:
A bride.

LET'S PLAY KISS THE BRIDE'S ASS!

YES. YES. KISS MY ASS.

Get ready for tons of laughs! We draw a picture of the Brid's ass on a big posterboard. Then each guest puts on red lipstick and gets blindfolded - for their turn to kiss the closest to a little red heart on the Bride's big ass!

Take notes.

Take copious notes.

This will all be on the test.

You will be responsible for regurgitating it back.

Is she about to vomit? That would be too much...

Kidding.

She giggles.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

I must recompose myself. Collect myself.

Compost myself.

She giggles.

I apologize.

The biblical Adam came forth from the hands of God a perfect creature – happy and prosperous, guarded by – oh, motherfucker, fuck it..

Sorry. Sorry everyone.

Maybe we could show the film now?

She looks up at the screen. Nothing.

The other film, please.

The other one.

We've already not seen this one. The other one.

The other one. GODDAMIT.

In the other film we do not see, we see a girl, a handsome smart little girl, kneeling at her bed. She prays. Her Mother stands nearby in the doorway. She loves her little boy. Little girl. He is everything. She is. The mother tucks her into the bed, kisses her on the forehead, shuts off the hall light and leaves.

The girl lies in the dark in the big bed and listens to her mother leave.

The girl giggles. The bed has begun to spin. It levitates. The girl is about to shout but she covers her mouth. She doesn't want to bring her mother back in to the room and make the bed behave.

Because the bed – the bed knows her. During the day, the bed is calm and quiet and ordinary. But at night, it is funny and naughty and smart and full of questions, so full of all her funny dreams. Her sex organs dream like you wouldn't believe.

They wander wander wander in every direction, up and about and through out the body, obstructing all passages, closing up pores, confusing every natural instinct to breathe.

Dreams are not the uterus.

Giving birth? But no...

OhhhhhhHHHHHHHAHHHOAHOHAOHAOHAOHAHHHHHHHOAHOOO

Ah. I remember. At the moment of my birth. My mother said to me: "I died, but I dreamt I came back to life and gave birth to a child. I tell no one. A woman turns me on my side. A doctor waves his forceps. Even in this dream, I feel the shape of love like a blow against my ribs."

A human heart in perfection must preserve a calm and peaceful flow and never allow passion to near its tranquility. Hysterics and silly girls never learn this rule. Love is full of dangers and wild imaginings. I entered your room as you slept, sobbing in the dark of your worst nightmares. Shh, shh, my darling, my darling, what's wrong, what's wrong?

Oooohhh.

The lecturer doubles over in labor pains.

OhhhhhhHHHHHHHAHHHOAHOHAOHAOHAOHAHAHHHHHHHOA

*You have destroyed the work that you began. What is it you intend?
Do you dare to break your promise? Shall each man find a wife and
each beast have his mate and I be alone?*

YOU ARE MY CREATOR, BUT I AM YOUR MASTER: OBEY!

OhhhhhhHHHHHHHAHHHOAHOHAOHAOHAOHAHAHHHHHHHOAHOOO

*IF YOU HAVE A WEAK HEART
BETTER LEAVE NOW
because
FRANKENSTEIN RETURNS
IN SEARCH OF A BRIDE
THE MONSTER'S BRIDE IN THE MAKING
WHAT WILL SHE LOOK LIKE*

*Her water breaks.
This is awful.
She gives birth to something.*

*Is it a cake?
She destroys it.
What a mess. Afterbirth mess.*

*This makes her feel bad.
She eats it. Stuffs her face.
Eating makes her feel less bad.*

*She offers cake to her audience.
She doesn't see any takers.*

The unnameable throws open the door and presents her unearthly and monstrous person on the stage...SHE AT THE PODIUM!
O, SIR!

I love Science.

And cake.

More cake.

I dreamt I died.

I dreamt I gave birth to a most holy child. It was born blue with a purple bruise upon its chest. Even in the dream of carrying, I feel the shape of love like a blow against my ribs. Our child is born blue, fighting the doctor pulling it into this world with pinching forceps. I take this blue thing with its bulb like head and firmly give it my breast. I nurse it to pink, yellow, brown, red. My tears wet its hushed sighs, Shush, shush, little one.

I name the girl Jesus.

Princess Diana.

Elvis Presley.

I want to kill it.

Too late.

It sings to me.

As Elvis:

Love me tender,
Love me sweet,
Never let me go.
You have made my life complete,
And I love you so.

Love me tender,
Love me true,
All my dreams fulfilled.
For my darlin' I love you,
And I always will.

Almost a false exit or end, and then:

Love me tender,
Love me long,
Take me to your heart.
For its there that I belong,
And we'll never part.

Go for broke:

Love me tender,
Love me dear,
Tell me you are mine.
I'll be yours through all the years,
'til the end of...

Back to Mary Shelley Breath persona. She surveys her listeners.

A woman is not a flower.
What is she?
Who created her?

Back to Elvis:

When at last my dreams come true
Darling this I know
Happiness will follow you
Everywhere you go.

Happy New Year's Eve, everyone. Thank you for inviting me.

Exit.