

P.B.: It is the same as when I started *The Prince's Boy*, about five years ago. I put it aside and started to write something else. I wrote about a hundred pages of this other book. At the risk of sounding melodramatic, two or three years ago I actually did think that I was going to die. I was in hospital for quite a while, so I thought I'd finish this one. I read what I'd written and thought: this is ok. It's the only book I've written at night. I tend to write at daytime, in the morning. But I would sit up in our kitchen at the top of the house, drink a glass or two of red wine, have some dark chocolate and it happened: I finished it. Then, earlier this year, I read what I'd written of the other book. It's much more of a conventional novel than anything I've written for a long time. I thought: "Just cut it. Take it from a different angle". So at the moment I am worming my way into the book. It's an idea I've had for a long time. It's about the theater, about an actor who goes mad. He is based on somebody real, but I've got to make him real on the page. He mustn't be a copy of somebody who's already lived.

In real life, he was the son of a famous academic, who wrote classic books on D.H. Lawrence, W.B. Yates etc., and gave me one of the best reviews I've ever had in my life, so I am rather fond of him. The son was completely un-academic. When the Dada movement started, the idea that theater can be made up on the spot was much more common in Europe, and very common in Romania. You don't need a play, you can get a group of actors together and they can start improvising: there's been a lot of that in the English theater. The man that I want to write about was one of the cast of a group which is disbanded now, the National Theater of Brent. They did the *Charge of the Light Brigade*, then *The New Testament*. This actor played The Virgin Mary, knitting a scarf. At every performance, the scarf was getting longer. He was a man who really did end up tragically. He walked onto the motorway: a very selfish way of killing yourself, like people who throw themselves under trains. Quite often they are not the only people who die. The shock of killing someone that a train or a car driver has stays with them forever. I am not putting that in the book. In fact, I don't think I am going to kill him off at all. I just think I am going to have him go completely mad.

POETRY

Leah Fritz



Leah Fritz, an American ex-pat in London since 1985, has had her writings published on both sides of the Atlantic. Her essays and reportage in the United States were collected in Thinking Like a Woman, published by WINBooks in New York, and Dreamers and Dealers: An Intimate Appraisal of the Women's Movement, by Beacon Press in Boston. Both her prose and poetry have appeared in The Guardian, Poetry Review, PN Review, Acumen, The Literary Review, and London Magazine, among many others, and in anthologies, as well. She has judged several poetry competitions. Her archives are at Duke University in the United States.

Leah's first Romanian poetry co-translations, with Alina-Olimpia Miron providing the literal interpretation, are in Deepening the Mystery, by Cristiana Maria Purdescu, published by Editura Semne in Bucharest. Poems from that volume, and with Ioana Buse from Born in Romania by Liviu Ioan Stoiciu, published in both languages on the internet by Contemporary Literature Press in Bucharest, have been reprinted in Modern Poetry in Translation, Acumen and Poem Magazine. Working with Prof. Lidia Vianu of the University of Bucharest, she has re-interpreted the work of numerous Romanian poets for Poesis, an internet anthology of the Writers' Union of Romania.'

Reflections on Lines from Two Poems by T. S. Eliot

[*'Teach us to care and not to care, teach us to sit still...'* - *'Ash Wednesday'*]

[*'At the still point of the turning world...'* - *'Burnt Norton'*]

to care is hope not to care
is faith

I who am an unbeliever
learn to accept this
acceptance which is
neither belief nor dis-
belief not a shrug but
a stare releases me
from some point of
responsibility enough
is left

I who am an unbeliever
have been taught too
studiously to care not
caring is another aspect of morality
madness is caring
too much sanity the
still point

from which all action
is possible from which
one can move in any
direction the random
buffeting of neutrons
leads one home who relies
on probability

there is more than one
voice in the world
listen check
what you hear
against the hum
of the universe

it is perhaps
foolish
to invoke his name
who was hateful to
women and jews (I
am both)

it is perhaps foolish
for a poet to
invoke his name who
was master of this art
to invite absurd compar-
ison

I do not wish to
rewrite history that which
is written and true
I wish to add what
is unwritten and

also true to be free
of debts one must
pay them
in his words I recon-
cile the foolish and
the wise the rhetoric
and the emotion the group
and the individual
because the centre is not
the middle

but the still point where
I sit still
and let what will
pass over me not passive
but impassive the still
point where my eyes
see centre and
peripheries

the still point where
I take that which
sustains me take and am
glad to take
with the paradoxical
indifference of nature
which for all its
divine distance makes
heroic and detailed efforts
to perpetuate
itself

it cannot matter
to the dead poet
that I thank yet
do not forgive
it can matter
only to me of his
bread with all its mould
I eat

to perpetuate myself
I eat of it
to be once and for all
free of debt
I am thankful
for the rest I learn
to care and not to care
to sit still at the
still point to turn
and stare

Shelley Survives his Drowning
(a conceit)

Struggling up through choking algae, slimy
things that slithered past my skin,
through brackish blackness I perceived the climbing
world above and blessed sweet oxygen.
Around a driftwood fire I found my dearest
wife and friends awaiting me. My boat
had capsized in a sudden storm. They feared lest
only a pitiful drowned corpse would float
ashore. Thus, grieving, they had built a pyre
according to my will, whence my blithe spirit
might arise. I heard their mournful choir
and joyfully joined in, wishing the world to hear it!

One by one, my friends, my wife, departed.
Not for their deaths do I remember them
(though reputations thrive on *in memoriam*)
but for our common youth, light-hearted,
brave, and more than slightly mad. We loved
voraciously and freely, as if the thought
and act were one, shared vivid nightmares fraught
with angst and odd remorse: mine of that rough
remembered sea; dear Mary's of a womb
that brought forth monsters she believed deserved,
her mother's death proceeding from her birth.
To sweep such wraiths away, our pens were brooms.

These days my pen is powerless, my dreams
unworthy of recording. Decades on
I wonder how I filled so many reams,
why my life was spared with muses gone...
Friends soon weary nowadays of tales
they only half-believe (that I have half-
invented, half-forgotten.) Hours grow stale
with no irreverent mates to make me laugh
at things that, on my own, I sigh about
though strangely I sleep quietly at night,
impassive, dreamless, unassailed by doubt;
awaken unrefreshed, and do not cheer the light.

Alone at my desk, I contemplate old age,
how strange a gift life is, this empty page.

Ozymandius Defends Himself

An awkward upstart like a young centaur
cantering on envy to become
what brain and heart had always meant for me
to be - a stallion of a man - I went for
power and got it. Destiny for some
is what they dare. Here in my hand the key
to wind up armies. I sent them out to kill
as coolly as I killed. The way to lead

is not to see yourself in other men
but as a man apart, above. My will
was justice, theirs mere wilfulness. Succeed
I must for faith to be restored again.

Some popularity's required, unless
an ancient culture of docility
to gods and kings has laid men open to
the mystical authority of class.
I was twice blessed. Men's love did fall to me
when on my pallid horse I staged a coup.

Akin to kings, but not direct in line,
I drew a following inside the court
and out among the peasants where I preyed
on fears of anarchy. Since power's divine,
I claimed the gods' instruction to cut short
that dynasty, its ancient fabric frayed.

Corrupt, incestuous, effete, it would,
in time, have withered ignominiously.
I cleansed the realm to life. The man on horseback
blent with his steed, hinting at brotherhood
to monsters in a myth, surrounded me
with rumours of high origins. My forelock
grew to strengthen the resemblance. You saw
a fallen effigy and read delusion in
the sand. Never mind. I was misquoted.
by a mad engraver. I brought the law,
it's true, but never usurped the name of Him
who gifted me. A sculptor made a bloated
replica. It broke. I don't deny
I was tyrannical. The multitudes
would have me be that way. They loved
the executions in the square, the lie
that gods mandated power absolute
to me. And I, who thought myself above,
apart from other men, became their basest
servant. Mobs my conquests clothed and fed
acclaimed both means and ends of ruthlessness.

Happy they were to burn those scrolls. My racist
slogans echoed in their empty heads.
I followed, did not lead, them to excess.

Left to the gritty tendency of sand
to hide both noble and ignoble deeds
of man in real and metaphoric time,
as arrogant cliffs disintegrate and land
docile as pebbles when breaking waves recede,
my fame would pass, but for that infamous rhyme.