

**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.

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## POETRY

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### *Leah Fritz*

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*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.