



## **Smoke and Mirrors: An Interview with Lea Klibanoff - Ron by Ilana Masad**

### **What was the inspiration for “Warm Milk”?**

Last summer I was at the end of my pregnancy. Luckily, or unluckily, it was particularly sweltering; July was the hottest July here since the '50s. Everyone told me summer pregnancies are harder and I finally understood how true that was. I had a fear – I'd heard it from other women too – that I'd never give birth, though I also didn't want my pregnancy to end. Everything was so heavy – I was, the world was. When I sat down to write, I tried to access that kernel of experience and sink into it all the way – and that's it. That's what came out.

### **If you could choose one Hebrew author to recommend to our readers, who would it be?**

I'd recommend [Michal Govrin](#)'s books. She published three novels, and the first two, *Snapshots* and *The Name*, were

meaningful to me. She's a generous writer, and her heroines are inspirational. She doesn't constrict the protagonists she writes; she allows them to be searching women, so their friction with reality leads to desire and movement. Even their falls from grace aren't really falls. Often, in literature, we meet narrow characters, whose being is so limited – but why? The reason given is often – that's reality. But it isn't; most people around me have incredibly rich souls.

### **Hebrew is an interesting language – it's ancient, and also very new. What do you love about Hebrew?**

I'm the daughter of immigrants. My father was born in New York and my mother in Paris. But they spoke Hebrew to me. Hebrew, and only Hebrew, was the language we lived in, but the books at home, other than holy books, were in foreign languages. Those echoed magic to me, from afar, without my understanding. That's where longing lived. I still need to learn to dream in Hebrew, even though it's the only language I can and do write in.

I have a love-hate relationship with modern Hebrew. It's a demanding language that doesn't soften easily. To be poetic, to evoke compassion, you must listen very closely to what you've written. You can't create phony softness with it. Maybe more than anything else, what I love about this language is that somehow, mysteriously, it demands that you be truthful.

### **According to your bio, you gave birth recently. How has your son affected your writing (if at all)?**

Birth is a rending. The body tears, and with it the soul. It's been less than two months since my son was born, and I'm still looking for words to express this destabilizing knowledge. Meanwhile, I can talk about how, to keep creating, I needed to let go of circumstances I thought I needed. To not lay the table perfectly, not depend on the coffee I love, not wait to slowly sink into writing. To just work. To be ready to stop at any moment. It's limiting, but also freeing.

My son loves being talked to, really loves it, so sometimes when we're together and I feel that it's okay with him, I read him some lines. In the past, I'd always read poems aloud before deciding that I'd finished them, but then I stopped. But reading aloud actually improves precision. Because of my son, I'm doing that again. He even knows the start of this story.