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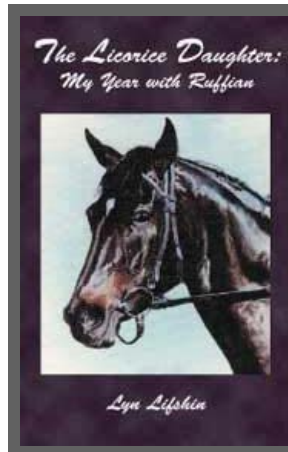
Lyn Lifshin

Pressing the Stylus

"Think of her as a torch singer, belting out what scorches and what can calm, her songs carved into hard clay that will dance, a wild jazz scat."

From: "While Everyone Else is Sleeping"

Anyone familiar with Lyn Lifshin's body of work knows she comes to the page with an all-in approach. Her writing process, it seems, is one of total immersion, as evidenced by the hundred-plus poetry publications, chap books and award-winning nonfiction to her credit. Author of best sellers, *Cold Comfort: Selected Poems 1970-1996* (Black Sparrow Press, 1996); *Blue Tattoo: Poems of the Holocaust* (Event Horizon Press, 1995) and *The Licorice Daughter: My Year with Ruffian* (Texas Review Press, 2005) Lyn has also edited four anthologies of women's writing, graced the pages of dozens of literary and poetry magazines and was the subject of the award-winning 1989 documentary "Not Made of Glass". She believes writing allows her to be the actress she once aspired to be... "to enter the bizarre and mysterious, trap and hold on to what has dissolved or might only haunt."



Books link to their Amazon page.

Born and raised in Vermont, Ms. Lifshin earned a bachelor's degree in English from Syracuse University and master's degree from the University of Vermont. As poet/ teacher she has given over 700 readings in universities, colleges and high schools across the U.S. and been Poet-in-Residence at the University of Rochester, Antioch and Colorado Mountain College. She now divides her time between Washington, D.C. and Niskayuna, New York and can be found on her ever-evolving website, www.lynlifshin.com.

"...she presses the stylus, gives birth to what explodes from her heart."

From: "Between the Euphrates and the Tigris"

With Lyn's work spanning several decades and widely available in print, on the internet, and in audio recording, you can imagine how pleased I was by her generous offer to share as-yet unpublished material. In this previously researched but interrupted project, she lends voice to four charismatic ancient divas, Enheduanna, Nefertiti, Pachamama and Scheherazade, whose beauty, brains and backbone have been a source of inspiration for the ages. A sampling of Lifshin's unnamed, unpublished offering follows:

IN THE SHADE OF MYRTLE AND OAK

in the light dusky
as olive branches
Enheduanna twists
her long hair into
loops of jasper
and onyx, hair
ribbons of gold
leaf. On her wrist,
lapis lazuli and
agates. When she
moves thru night,
her multi chain
of carnelian and
ivory, anklets
of silver darting
thru darkness
like stars

FLAMINGOS AND PELICANS

outside the palace
on the way to Siberia,
to Africa, teals and
reeds and warblers
seem code for
Inanna. Enheduanna
rubs night from her
eyes. The Sacred Ibis
and African darter
sing of a strange wind
no light can grow
in. Nothing like the
sun Inanna threw out
like dandelions
skimming over chaos
in her wild red hair

Lyn is adept at creating a sense of timelessness. Her contemporary works give a clear sense of history, time, place and circumstance as well. In the following piece, the lovely bejeweled and perfumed poet Enheduanna has been made particularly human:

ENHEDUANNA ON INANNA'S POEMS

she can turn a
man into a woman,
a woman into a
man, make any
one desirable.
Gain, profit, and
great wealth
and success are
at her mercy. She
can make men
virile, send
guardian
angels but if
you displease her,
that's another
story

NEFERTITI

I think of her long bones,
enormous dark lake
eyes, that she would be
a beautiful ballerina,
pale with that long

swan neck. You can't
imagine her not having
beautiful perfect fingers.
Were there days, looking
out at the flood plain,
the rich black soil
and the Nile rapids,
she imagined herself free
as the sparkling water
under the blue cloudless
sky, her feet tracing
hieroglyphs, a last
S.O.S.

NEFERTITI AS AMERICA'S TOP MODEL

(Excerpt)

You know she
would follow the
rules, would
not fight with the
other girls but
keep her dignity. Her
long legs and
small breasts, her
knack for high
fashion and she has
her own gorgeous
jewels. How could
Tyra, how could
any of the judges resist
her lustrous hair,
sun touched
or frizzed and who
would not kill for
her cheekbones?

Ms. Lifshin's juxtaposition of past and present gives us a great visual...Nefertiti on the catwalk competing alongside today's top models. With her classic beauty, swan neck and those high cheekbones, she is a sight to behold.

PACHAMAMA

something thaws
under the dead grass.
The world waits
for her breath,
for her wishes to
cartwheel down
mountains. Her eyes,
obsidian flowers.
You can almost smell
her hair in the wind.
Those who love
her touch her symbols
the way you touch
moonlight

I am moved by the mystical language of Lifshin's "Pachamama", and her ability to effectively draw the unreachable near.

HER LARGE ARMS HOLD ELECTRICITY

past long desert stretches
she brings life like flowers
trailing roots. Trillium
open in the dark, petals
move like rain water.
Rivers flow from her

thighs. Her mahogany
eyes watch seeds
unfold as deer and lion
rest in the leaves of
her hair. Pachamama
circles the shells of
sea turtles in her
robes of snow and rose.
White for purity, red
for the power she holds.
The unborn swim
under the roof of her
skin and the dying in
their dreams of lost
love are comforted by
her presence as if
wrapped in a shawl of
alpaca wool and cotton

Along with Lyn's wonderful ability to usher sensory images to the page, there is a lovely sense of movement, of being transported, which breathes life and gives depth to whatever she pens:

HOW COULD HER PALMS NOT BE WET?

Scheherazade, her
heart wild under silk.
I think of her when
the sky gets light
fighting sleep, driven
to map out the next
night's plot. Each tale,
like the third person
in this ménage a
trois where words
tempt more than bodies,
hair and skin. She
knows, like a lover
who prays to never be
boring, her stories
must charm and
disarm or she won't
be there to tell them

I THINK OF HER IN SOME FILMY SILK

(Excerpt)

Call her wily Coyote.
Everything is a trick.
Who can imagine
The names she
calls him where he
can't see shuddering,
as she lists the names
of flowers that only
open once

EACH NIGHT SHE IS LIKE A DROWNING NYMPH

like a woman pulled
out of the river
and dressed in warm
clothes, her lips
parted. The twist of
words that will
keep blood flowing
thru her body.
She could be a woman
close to drowning,
reeled in with eels and

sea weed, fins, like
Rapunzel shimmying to
freedom, her own
hair, her words
a rope to escape

“...you can only imagine her dreams and wild yearnings...”

From: The Disk of Enheduanna

Lark Vernon Timmons, Spring 2012

[Please click for Lark Vernon Timmons's interview with Lyn Lifshin.](#)