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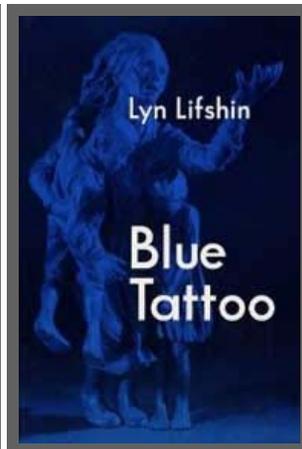
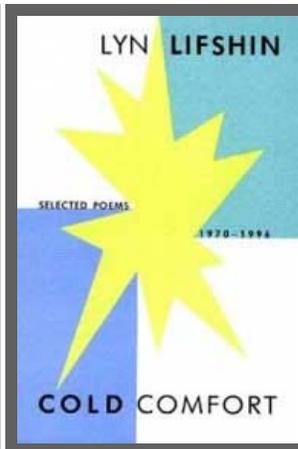
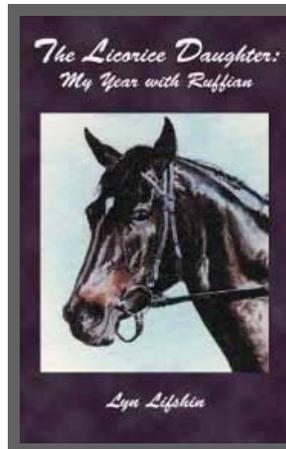
## Lyn Lifshin

### 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](http://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.](#)**