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This marks the launch of our new feature: BOOK REVIEWS! Every other month, we will be bringing you a review of a full-length book or chapbook that we deem worthy of wide exposure. We hope you enjoy our reviews, and we also hope that you buy the books (we won't steer you wrong!) We begin with Leigh Harrison's insightful review of Lyn Lifshin's scintillating book "Ballroom." -Cindy Hochman, Editor-in-Chief

Lyn Lifshin's *Ballroom*

March Street Press (Greensboro, NC, 2010)

ISBN: 1-59661-142-1

Reviewed by Leigh Harrison

There's no sense trying to resist Lyn Lifshin's poetry collection, *Ballroom*. If you've ever been in love, if you've ever had your heart broken, these poems will be cathartic, simultaneously conjuring and exorcising the ghost of an old lover with words. If you love dance, you'll feel the kinetic energy of her language, respond to tangos, waltzes, and rumbas that strut through the poems here.

This work is passionate, infused with memories; she recalls dance classes, a prom

in school, old lovers with whom the tango of a relationship becomes a tortured dance macabre of broken hearts. Tour the author's ballet studios and dance classes, a gymnasium where a prom took place in her teenage years; in *Ballroom*, she revisits old homes and apartments, old dreams that died, invokes her mother and father, her grandparents, their homes, old lovers, friends, and dance partners.

The landscape of dreams -- bejeweled stones set amid her narrative, like a string of pearls, or a haiku chain -- surfaces in "Dream of My Mother Picking Up My Uncle and Bukowski," "Dream of Fogged Over Destinations, Train Station, Language I Never Learned," "Week of Nightmares," and other dream poems. And everywhere, Lifshin's mastery of simile and metaphor -- "Dark Night Purple" is devoted to describing several shades of blue. Both the "Some Lovers" and "Other Lovers" series of poems catalog the men she's known, with her delicious, evocative language. She speaks of "moving like birds on fire," or how "the only color is the blue of the train's moan," and of "the musky night heat . . . a drug where I . . . drift thru starlight toward morning."

Ballroom is permeated with images to fill the senses -- the delicate fragrance of tuber roses, tea roses, and violets wafts through - but she also refers to "the stink of bad breath and dirty clothes," to "eau de vagina," to the smell of the dancers' sweat. The reader's hungers and thirst are quenched by images of food and drink (garlic, thirty kinds of jam, margaritas, champagne). A chocolate-covered strawberry appears, reappears, recalling a relationship that ended, like many she describes, before its time, but which lingered long after, like the strawberry she secreted away, a small memento mori of an old love. Here is kinetic energy, too, in the dance moves of sambas, fox trots, boleros,

Book Review: Wright Reviews Gardner	and especially the tango to which she keeps returning, encapsulating the torturous, winding relationship between those who come together and break apart, over and over.
Stern Reviews Katrinka Moore May 2015	And it is these varied and various dances of our lives that are at the heart of this compelling, passionate volume; the collection, taken as a whole, might be seen as an extended metaphor for the idea that life is a dance. She recalls, repeatedly, her various dance partners and old lovers -- sometimes one and the same. She speaks of herself as an overweight child, wallflower at the prom that figures in many poems, as do old griefs, old issues. An auto accident that left her with scars on her forehead is a subject she returns to often, juxtaposed with bittersweet poems about the scars on our hearts that also don't heal.
Hochman Reviews Ross July 2020	There is the sense that she's documenting her life and memories, her dreams. Certainly, her well-documented insomnia is duly noted in passages, and also seems to underlie the fragmentation in her work.
Tocco Reviews Simone September 2015	That fragmentation is everywhere. As always in Lifshin's work, she frequently makes odd line breaks -- "rhine / stones" "no / body" "grown / ups" "some / thing" -- that can be disconcerting at times, an affect of her brilliant yet fragmented style (but which also might represent hurriedly-done editing;
Simone Reviews Cefola May 2016	<i>Ballroom</i> has, for example, no Table of Contents, some poems with the same title, and there are some obvious typos such as "cocolate.") Nevertheless, her word fragments perfectly match her fragments of phrases, which, in turn, exquisitely mirror her clipped fragments of memories and dreams, ultimately making the work a powerful, organic whole. Here, Lifshin takes snippets (a word, a phrase, a reference) from a previous poem and braids it (braid, a verb she repeats) into the next poem, creating interlocking poems -- a process not unlike the way a baker uses small portions of a sourdough to prepare the next loaf.
Bledsoe Reviews Wallace November 2016 January 2017 May 2017	Lifshin's work is rife with colors, images of light, things that are iridescent, sparkle or shine: fireflies, or rhinestones, diamonds, and sequins on costumes. Many pieces are in the first person, addressing a second person; in "Midsummer Night":
Wehrman Reviews Dhar July 2017	
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Sensually, she references fabric and clothing -- ballet tutus of tulle and sequins; prom dresses, all satin and bows; dance class leotards; beaded evening dresses of rhinestones and lace, of silk or velvet. And yet, (like George Meredith in his *Modern Love* sonnet chain) along with all the shimmering light,

there is a sense of darkness - the darkness of a heart closed into itself, of a cold night when no comfort comes amid heartache. She clarifies one aspect of that darkness in "Sometimes It's Like": "the child dancing in / the Warsaw ghetto / in his body of rags / there must have been / music no one / could hear / dancing through corpses, / his face pale as the moon / just to stay alive, / begging please / don't hurt me. Dancing / to horror...."

Her work in *Ballroom* is emotionally charged and, often, deeply intimate (and highly erotic) and yet Lifshin sometimes writes in the third person. The "Mad Girl" poems seem to be autobiographical, although here she's distancing herself by shifting to the third person. In "The Mad Girl Feels Him In Her Fingers, Her Skin," she writes: "...what she / aches for is elusive / as snow. Her first / poems had that / image in them. What / was intoxicating / and then melting / quickly, snow / flaked beauty, there / and then not...All / she is missing and / starved for is / what she / can't have." These poems stand juxtaposed to other poems in which she exults because someone who loves her cannot possess her -- except via her poems.

And so, put on your dancing shoes. Let Lyn Lifshin's *Ballroom* lead you into a mad, sexy fandango with poetry and language -- and whirl you off your feet!

LEIGH HARRISON is the author of *Tour de Farce*, *Our Harps Upon The Willows*, and *Finding Sermons In Stones*; she has been published in print and online in the US and internationally. She is the former Associate Editor and Poetry Editor of *Medicinal Purposes Literary Review*, and is Consulting Editor for *Shabdagucha*, an international, dual-language (English / Bengali) magazine. Ms. Harrison worked for *Asbestos Arts Journal*, *Second Glance Magazine* and others, and is a member of the online poetry group, *Brevitas*. She was a staff member of one of the earliest poetry TV shows, *Poet To Poet* (with Robert Dunn); working with SongCrew, she and Bob Perfetto are re-mastering and uploading the old *Poet To Poet* TV shows to YouTube. She has worked with numerous writers, proofreading and editing their work, and now works with Harrison / Hochman 100 Proof (proofreading / editing services). Her previous book reviews have appeared in *American Book Review* and *On The Bus*. www.leighharrison.com