

## **Anne Elezabeth Pluto – Five Poems**



### **Featured Poet**

### **Big Trees in Lalaland**

*For Lisa Levine*

Where when we land we seek the light  
the golden evening coming out to greet  
us light up my life – light in the window  
light that is never extinguished – caught  
in the areal antenna cloud grey lighting  
rod where the green lawns look Crayola  
bright and the big trees of lala land sway  
through the night of small houses and giant  
dreams.

### **I wish Wislawa Szymborska could edit my poems**

We would meet in the space between  
terror and waiting – in a room filled  
with books and drink tea from bone  
china cups – she would pour over  
my lines with the eye of a phoenix  
and translate my meager imaginings  
into the Mother tongue I cannot  
speak yet, and would not answer  
in my diminishing Russian vocabulary  
parting the lace curtains and levitating  
towards the East. I am moving backwards  
with every book I read – and she is  
there – solitary figure at the desk  
cigarette smoke curling above her  
head – waiting in the corridor  
reserved only for the dead.

## **In the Beginning**

There is only one  
photograph of your mother.  
She is an old woman with glasses  
in a flowered dress,  
headscarf, and high boots  
Holding a small child. My Russian cousin.

Far away in the thrice tenth kingdom  
of the thrice nine lands – your father  
returned from the war that was meant  
to end ALL war. You are four years old,  
your mother is wearing a flowered dress  
a headscarf, high boots, and a sheepskin coat  
she presents you as a gift  
from the magi – he reaches to  
embrace his young and beautiful wife – remembering  
her long blonde hair – the warmth of her love  
you hit him – she is yours.  
War weary, hungry, he is not healthy  
to understand this bond  
and the gulf between you opens,  
a poem, a fissure  
in your small tight village.

Before he returned the young Russian teacher  
gathered children and with a charred stick  
wrote the Cyrillic alphabet on a discarded  
door. This is the mother tongue – and you  
recite it as if a prayer in church.

The next year after the borders  
are determined – the Soviets  
are only five miles away  
a new school is built – you learn  
Polish.

Language is the only homeland

## **Bolshevik**

Your family was poor  
small house – small garden  
one cow – one horse  
Bolshevik  
named for the revolution  
a joke your father brought  
back from the tsar's army  
a story about four princesses  
and the bleeding tsarevich  
an insincere Siberian mystic  
fucking the German tsarina  
the tsar in his lonely hours  
Bloody Sunday reached him too  
shot and shredded  
July 1918 – Ipatiev House  
no Russian would do “it”  
but the Lithuanians lined  
them up as if to take  
a photo – na pamets  
the girls had one card only  
diamonds stitched in corsets  
sent the bullets bouncing  
and the guards crossing  
themselves – the hand of God  
what did it matter – bayonets pierced  
them all – even the French bulldog –  
Ortipo.

Your horse was grey and worked  
like a dog – like the devil – the plow  
the market – the dream – you rode  
him and loved him – drawn to his  
legs – his iron shoes – to metal -  
Aries was your sign – you were conceived  
In water and born in fire, a short  
15 months before the chaos.

## **My Father's Hands**

Played with fire  
Played with irons  
Played with shoes  
That horses wore  
Proudly on hard packed

Dirt roads that led to the Border.

My father's hands  
Played with girls  
Played with guns  
Went to war

My father's tethered hands  
Dug the airstrip trenches  
Survived the Russian  
Winter marches  
And sleeping in the  
Silent Soviet snow

My father's hands  
Survived the famine  
In the East  
Survived the madman  
Hiding in the Kremlin

My father's hands,  
Held the rail of the boat  
That crossed the Caspian Sea  
Fed the orphaned bear  
And Learned to drive  
Amidst the oil fields in Kirkuk  
Where the prophet Daniel  
lies my father's hands

Touched the Wall  
The stones  
The Sepulcher  
The pyramids  
The valley of the tombs  
Of kings  
The graves of orphans  
And things friends left  
Behind my father's  
Hand held my mother's  
Wedding ring and long black hair  
Held my new born self  
And breathed me pure into the winter air.

**Anne Elizabeth Pluto** is Professor of Literature and Theatre at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA where she is the artistic director and one of the founders of the Oxford Street Players, the university's Shakespeare troupe. She is an alumna of Shakespeare & Company, and a member of the Worcester Shakespeare Company. She was a part of the Boston small press scene in the late 1980s and is one of the founders and editors at Nixes Mate Review. Her chapbook, *The Frog Princess*, was published by White Pine Press (1985), her chapbook *Benign Protection* by Cervena Barva Press (2016) and *Lubbock Electric* by Nixes Mate Books (2018). Recent publications include: *The Buffalo Evening News*, *Unlikely Stories: Episode IV*, *Mat Hat Lit*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *The Enchanting Verses Literary Review*, *Mockingheart Review*, *Yellow Chair Review*, *Levure Litteraire – numero 12*, *The Naugatuck River Review*, and *Tuesday, An Art Project*, and *Mom Egg Review*.