

Poem

Tope Omoniyi

A feast of letting go

For Joshua A. Fishman, 1926–2015

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Tonight there'll be no tears for you Shikl
That ritual was concluded at our final meeting
New York City, July 18, 2013
'This will be my last public engagement' you said
Piercing my pupil heart with your transition truth
The tear dam gave way and a deluge
Of farewell tears flooded my face
Gella served me a serviette
And whispered strength into my spirit.

Tonight I've come to Murcia to let you go
I've got to let you go now
So I can see you in resplendent gold
The garb of the City of Light

I am a hoarder of departed souls
Yours and my father's before you
The ones whose breath sustained mine
And tutored my steps up Intellect Avenue
The learned say 'I think therefore I am'
But I know better than their half-knowledge
And half-truths
I am because you were
You were a shoulder for my gangly frame
A pillar and a lighthouse
You were a myth unveiled at dawn
With my gaze fixed upon the glen in Fahey
You arrived in a parcel
Personalised GPS for my yellow brick road
Atonement brought me to you at Long Island

Tope Omoniyi is professor of sociolinguistics at the University of Roehampton, London. This poem was written for a Tribute to Joshua A. Fishman that was held at the 2016 Sociolinguistics Symposium in Murcia.

And I remember your tailored chastisement
'I can't see the forest for the trees'
My ESL repertoire pondered that for a while
The Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity
It was 1999. And your autograph says:
'You're still No. 1' to notch up
My battered confidence

The Yoruba say when the rabbit grows old
It sucks life from its infant's tits.
I waited for you with baited breath
But like a flash of lightning
You have come and gone,
My tits barely touched
I yearned for a Feast of Passover
I wished your cup to pass and let you be
But I had a feast of letting go thrust into my palm.
So, I've got to let go
And let you go
They call for tributes here to your name
Like those they package for catacomb dwellers
But before my very gaze run tributaries of a river
And where there are tributaries
The river lives on

Tonight I behold your tributaries
The streams you spawned
And I am at peace to let go
And let you go
So instead of a tribute
I simply say: Shikl, o dabo, o di gbere.