

## 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

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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.