

David Elkin

I first met David when Fran and I married in 1981, and I was amazed that we had not met before. Our backgrounds were almost identical: We were both from the East Bronx; we both went to CCNY, though David was a year ahead of me; we both were economics majors; we shared the same political outlook; and now we were married to very similar women.

In the years that followed, I relished our time together, visiting at each other's homes, and certainly at Welfleet. David was always fun to be with: bright, witty, perceptive. Even when the Parkinson's affliction had advanced, he was still able to make wise-cracks or particularly apt observations. Our photo albums are filled with pictures of our families together, and I look at them with mixed emotions, seeing my son David growing up, and my friend David growing weaker.

This past year has been agony. There are no words to express our loss. However, I will always remember David at the beach at Welfleet with his Red Chinese cap and his papers and his humor and his warmth.

Another area of similarity was that Yiddish was David's and my first language. We came from Yiddish-speaking homes and in some respects we were "veltliche Yidn", aware of our heritage, proud of our Jewishness, and proud of the Yiddish literature of Mendele, Peretz and Sholem Aleichem. One of the great Yiddish poets was Moyshe Leib Halpern (1886-1932), and when Peretz died in 1915, Halpern wrote a poem mourning his death.. I would like to read an excerpt from that poem, in Yiddish, and then John Hollander's translation:

Yitskhok Leybush Peretz

Un du bist toyt, un nuch hut dich nisht tsugedekt di erd.
Un iber toisnt gasn veit vi a galop fun ferd.

Un vos ich zay iz bloiz di nacht in dir, dem toyt in dir.
Di vistenish vos vet un dir nuch vister zien in mir.

Gebensht iz der far vemen siz a yene velt nuch daw.
Far im iz daw a treist, far mir a gurnisht, gurnisht.

Far mir vet nuch a toitnlicht farlirn zich in roich.
Far mir vet nuch a kaivershtein in drerd farzinkn oich.
Un Veiter vel ich zen far zich dos retenish, dem toit.
Un blankn vet zein serp far mir azoy vi fier roit.

Azoy vi fier roit.

Azoy vi gold.

Azoy vi blut.

And you're dead; and you've not yet been covered by the ground.
Far through a thousand streets like horses galloping round.

The dead of you, the night of you is all I now can see.
This wasteland with you gone, is emptier for me.

Blessed is he for whom there is a world to come.
There can be no such solace for me, yet one more tomb.

Mine will sink below the ground and yet one more.
Death candle mine, will end in smoke, and as before

I shall be reading always the riddle of the dead.
Death's sickle flashing up in front of me--in red fire.

Like red fire.

Like gold.

Like blood.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/31/classified/paid-notice-deaths-elkin-david-b.html?pagewanted=1>