

Poetry Porch: Poetry

At The Blue Bottle

By Richard Fein

“What do your students think about your interest in Yiddish?”
someone asked me after my poetry reading at Harvard Hillel.
“I haven’t taught for over thirty years,” I snarled.
Afterward, I went for coffee with my friend Peter at The Blue Bottle,
where we talked about our pleasures at reading Robert Fitzgerald’s
translation of Homer. And then I just had to tell him about
Pope’s terrific translation of *The Iliad*: “And so young
when he pulled it off. Both achievement and training ground.”
That took us on to Israel—invaded and invading.
Peter wants to return to Israel, to save the country from itself.
He thinks that the whole generation of older leaders have betrayed it:
exploding cell phones in Lebanon, fingers flying off of hands.
He bemoaned a little longer, and then as we pushed up to leave,
a young woman, undergraduish, suddenly appeared out of nowhere
and coming close to me said, “I admire your color combinations.”
I just had pants of dark brown, a fallow shirt pencil-striped maroonish,
a straw cap just a little peaked, tan jacket, and she repeated,
“I really love those combinations. Really cool.” First time
any young woman came over to me to praise my attire.

Suddenly I found myself blurting out to her, “I just came from
giving a poetry reading across the street at Harvard Hillel.”
“Oh,” she said, a lilt in her voice, smiling. “Really? Oh!”

“Why don’t the two of you take a picture?” Peter suggested.
“Sure,” I said. “Sure,” she said, and one of our arms
went over the other’s shoulders, both Peter and her friend
taking pictures of the two of us, with their cell phones.
And since I always still wait for the click, she broke first;
I caught on, moved off the pose and caned toward the door.