

# Stephen C. Fay

## And What's Become

The tree stumps lie hidden beneath the moss,  
Subtle bulges that still point like an accusing finger,  
Though muted—  
What have you done to me, to us?  
Like old stones in the graveyard,  
All the words and numbers  
Reduced to the slightest of etchings.  
Yet still a testament to the machinations of men.

And what's become of that boy  
Who stood beneath the willows each Spring  
Fishing in that shallow pond  
That went dry each Summer  
(the trees themselves contributing to that diminishing—  
Thirsty and insatiable).

There were no fish there,  
But diligent and expectant he stood  
Patiently casting his hook for hours,  
Dreamily envisioning that special catch

That lay hidden beneath the sun dappled surface.

He caught weeds and pond scum,

Green and yellow, like snot,

That he would have to remove after each cast.

Sometimes the barb held fast,

And sometimes he bled a little.

And yet continued

Casting,

Reeling,

Retrieving,

And hoping.

Once he caught a piece of wood,

A branch from the surrounding trees.

And even snagging, onetime, a frog --

He had to mutilate to free—

Another stump encased in green,

A limb floating even as the water diminished.

Was there some hidden message in that...?

An appendage pointing toward that future moment

Of recognition how desire and action

Can descend into destruction

An arc, a slice, a decay,

Who can say?

The poet speculates,

The boy just fished.

And what became of that spring

That sprung each spring

Under the willows?

Filled in and covered,

The land developed, the trees felled.

The track houses raised

So that no hint remains.

But what about this rainy of rainy seasons?

In some basement, does that spring arise resurgent.

And if that boy were to appear there

Surrounded by concrete, machinery, tools,

And the cellar detritus of the lives upstairs.

Looking out at dark water dappled now

With iridescent oil scum

Might he be tempted to cast once more

On the outside chance of catching

Something

Beneath the surface,

Hidden and beckoning.

What surprise might rise to the right lure?

For he remains even now the optimist,

The dreamer.

Hoping and waiting and hoping and...

## Ms. Etta

One hundred and two years and its come to this:

A single room,

A single bed,

Strangers manipulating your body while

Sight fails,

Hearing deserts you

And with little appetite, the flesh beneath disappears,

Leaving behind fold upon fold of wrinkled skin,

The parchment of experience.

Like your life bending back on itself

Nothing to do

except recall the past.

The present—complaints and drudgery,

A miasma of doing nothing.

Sleep, in its thousand variations

(slumberdozecatnapsnoozedriftfadenod)

A singular escape.

The future, a tightening spiral

With nothing to offer except that final emancipation—

An interminable waiting

Approached with desire and dread

Like a vampiric kiss.

But oh the past,  
Ancient papyrus with which to take flight.  
When I visit, it is there we often linger.  
A place where the flesh fills out,  
Where your voice regains its lilt—it's animation—it's youth.  
Where you see and hear and feel again.  
Wrinkles in time,  
Where cerebral –like, the surface expands  
To contain and shelter flocks of memories  
Neural excitations  
shepherded by associative networks.  
And lately  
There are even intimations of secrets  
Long concealed in those folds  
Hidden glens where quarantined sheep  
Bleat for recognition  
Disappointments,  
Marital dissatisfactions,  
Regrets and even anger.  
But today there is something different,  
You recount a hallucination or dream.  
Ray, your brother, dead some ten years  
Came to visit you last night.  
He wore a straw hat and sensible shoes.  
(Prepared for a journey?)

“He’s dead so it must be a dream...a vivid dream...”

(Has he come to prepare the way?)

As you speak, I watch.

Your hands make little movements.

They become like birds

A flock of fingers in flight

Preparing for that epic migration.

And I, I imagine photographing those hands

That I might draw them at my leisure,

A history laced portrait

Of gnarled knuckles, blue veins, translucent skin,

102 years of holding , grasping, touching,

And then finally letting go.

## Winter Vegetables

I awoke early to make soup

Dicing, chopping, slicing,

Winter vegetables

Tuber and root

Bitter and tough.

Then into the pot

And onto the back burner

To simmer and cook.

To soften and mellow,

Ingredients transformed

Complexities interwoven.

“Be Smart,” his grandfather said

And being young and wanting to please

He was caught in that gossamer web

Woven of immigrant exhaustion and longing,

A recipe for life seasoned and smelling

Of concrete, olive oil, and beer.

Oblivious, he hung there

For years and years

Never questioning the ties that bound—

The sweet stickiness that held him fast.

Later ,

On the way to the gym

To toss steel,

I gaze upon trees covered with new fallen snow,

A web of branches

Melting white in stark relief

Against the dark wet bark.

Already the sap is rising from deep below

Lifting up from those hidden roots

To reanimate those frozen limbs

Gallons and gallons of pale liquid

To be boiled down

To make sweet syrup.

Back at home

I add a touch of syrup to the soup

That evening we eat.

It took so long to come together.

# Ojo Taiye

## MEMORIES LIKE A BLOOD FUEL

i breathe you ]] fresh wounds [[  
into my body

soft crush of dark flowers

what can't be touched without

falling apart

moth: the hand marked after

cinders: what *a ghost* whispers before he leaves you

cotton balls: the shape of lonely clouds

before it

crumbles *dust-thin*

like a rich ripe vowel resting against

the roof of my mouth *peel back*

my skin to show

the wolf underneath forget what you believe

about time *healing* is redacted we speak with a certain

parameter soak the piano keys in the blood it

came from the late hour alchemy of dew damp soil

oh lover, your amnesia is lodged in my *ribcage*

blazing full-bloom *blood art*

*on a night that charges moon-inscribed tides*

## Lighthouse

& forgive me i cannot tell you how to begin. i've learned some things these past few years. aspartame & their milk. the sun bursting into cinnamons. the sky small & yellow in my palm. there are some things no therapist wants to hear. i want a woman to love me: that is the truth. my room is full with light veining through my skin, wanting to reroute my blood--the taste of salts--like castling your voice into a throat of stone. my hair gathers in the shape of a girl & leads me to the mirror. think of the phrase, out of touch. i never explained the kind of pleasure i want. ultimately, i am just a boy lost in a field waiting for breath. abandoned like every yesterday. i mistake the need for belief & becoming. each encounter rusting daylight into the only dusk i've been made to see: the paradise of a single raindrop. what i'm struggling with is how to be more than my suffering: the unspoken trauma as if absence holds water. i confess i've been someone else's choice between marble or slate. i thought of the possibility of painting laughter & selling them for two dollars. what a stupid idea. it occurs to me, i am allowed my own joy. what else could i say except to agree with *you*: an arc of obligation in the cold parabola of grief—

## ASK ME ABOUT LOVE

each morning

i find

me--sifting

through all the syllables

of love

brimming with words i can say

and cannot spell

half-illiterate in my mother

tongue half-silent

in my purchased f-----luency

at the age of five

i watch my mother fold her breath

into birds until they found

home

in a stranger's

arms

and yes

what of all the green blessings

in my mouth--the shadows

that keep me company

when my lover's face is a city

drowning with epitaphs

i open myself to a new kind of love--

a beautiful prison where no one is running

where no one is burning where no one is hiding