

FUSE

poems

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Black Lawrence Press

For my parents,
✧
for Camellia

✧

In memory of
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CONTENTS

An Autobiography of Flux	11
Reading <i>The Metaphysical Club</i> in Egypt, Texas	13
The Value of Information Calculator	15
Dear	18
Susceptible	20
Infotopia	21
I Know or Maybe	22
Funeral	24
F	27
How to Stitch Flame	29
To Want	31
Upon Seeing the Brightly Lit	33
Serpentine Fuselage	37
Auto-Cento Kiss Goodbye	53
Plenisphere	55
Endings	57
Exasperating Gift	59
Flight Data Recorder	61
Discordant Concourse	62
Exodus	65
Is Not This Salad Everything You Ever Wanted from a Salad?	67
Funereal Jaunt	69
Why I Hate Realism	70
Fire Engine	72
Construction Site	77
Fan Letter	79
It is the Horse's Hoof Squared On Your Back	80
Pensivision	81
Flare	83
Envoy	86
If I'd Known It Was Going to Be That Kind of Party	87
Everything and a Kite	88
Epiphantasm	90
What is the Light?	92
Open Letter	94

*like a rusty axe in the back of a flatbed truck
it will all be used in good time like a fuse like a fuse like a fuse*

— Frank Stanford

An Autobiography of Flux

Say I say *animal machine*, would it make
all the difference, suppose *balladeer*
in a storm like this which turns into a story.

What's your watch say? I tell that story
and it's the one where I can't convince my friend
of his greatness or the one about the man

who drops 12,000 feet
and walks away with a gorgeous bruise.
Suddenly *the force that through the green fuse*

and suddenly 10 year old
with a necklace of ears and an AK-47.
My microscope befouled, hurt eye—

My Romance is the eye a mouth,
the mouth a launch ramp suddenly
trombone, suddenly land bridge.

If I said something more *fidelio*
or *silencio* would I only be guessing
and would that be enough. Much sundial lapse

spent trying to be enough. Say I say
as if the train speeding toward us.
We sit in the truck what if

stalled on the tracks. What if I could
render aloud the perfect thing
before the curtain scrape. Suddenly

what if I could. What's your watch sing
now? If I started at the beginning
and told you everything, would you

stick around and would then everything
and would then everything else.
Ask me how we got here

and each sound a struck match
suddenly a tongue, beautiful
and gone and gone and gone.

Reading *The Metaphysical Club* in Egypt, Texas

Standing in the middle of a land this vast
you can nearly apprehend the curvature
of the earth.

Every weight seems connected, each measure
inept. Venus tonight

brighter than the stars
over this ex-plantation house, one pillar

an inch off the ground, *So many ghosts—*

A great concrete bowl out back,
once used to boil sorghum and cane

now a coy fountain.

Not far from here, all but one of the children
of master and mistress

burned beyond inheritance.

See the horizon? See a line
of undriven railroad spikes laid out

like a long ammunition belt?

In front of the air-conditioned guest shack
a windmill, a dirty calico crying.

If I could, I'd bring the wild and plain eclectica
of each instant to bear:

wells, back roads, plush and agèd trees,
Cessnas, mustard, the force of water, voices

cut into wax, grooves like cracked riverbeds

swelling at the prick of a needle, up-wail, outcry,
the knowledge that corsets alone

kept the whaling industry afloat at the end—

Each sail would fill like a heart
at a crucial part of a recovered letter.

I'd guide a circuit of such sweet power
the air would tilt. We would contend with

the withering advance of sorrow that calls itself History
as we are: arcing combustions

mortal and deft.

The Value of Information Calculator

Soon I will cloudburst, soon hailstone tell you,
about the girl on the bus who keeps singing
a cloying chorus from Wheeling, West Virginia
to Springfield, Ohio because she can't remember
any other words. Backyards in Ohio.
Often sad. About the 75% to scale Johnny Cash
with coke bottle glasses who hitches from Ontario
to Louisville to be rejected when he meets
his love face to face. Daily we are rifled,
even our history of ideas can't cope.
About his surprise. About the dream
of playing basketball with Luna dressed-to-the-9s,
about Dan not getting the part, being rejected by Kate
but then accepted into NYU. Balance almost.
When he is not the love for her. Although
sometimes later. I'll tell you about Wynship Hillier,
his applied probability, his amazing project,
how after being pressed to describe what it is
he *actually* does he finally shouts
across the table, "Do you want me to draw you
a decision tree?!" biofeedback and stress
management, logic as a computational
paradigm, about trying to describe the shanty
with the new motorboat out back, about missing
my bus nearly, about listening too loud, seeing the wall sweat
in the Carnegie Art Museum, entitled "Water,"
while Dan crosses many streets seeking Kate,
wearing figuratively his lacrosse helmet, how Dave
is mistaken for a lacrosse player at the after-party,
how on my way to a bar called the Beehive
I pass no less than 3 lacrosse matches
so in Pittsburgh, lacrosse seems nearly

ubiquitous as steel or references to steel
or questioning one's auditory perception
when one seems to hear one's name shouted
in a crowd. This bus headed where, O Lord?
It stops for a man in Springfield who has managed
to leave all his luggage behind him. Remember
to remember your identity. Soon the moral, codified,
how the sagging little Toyota hugs
the shoulder of the highway as if it's a taut rope
leading into light, how a 14 year old boy
in a blues bar in Dallas sits down to the keys
and plays as if to keep the piranha at bay,
how we are in great peril, isn't this peril *great?* and how
to avoid acquired neurogenic cognitive disorder.
The value of information calculator
calculates the value of the information
one naïvely desires. Identities should fit nicely
in a 9 X 12 inch loose leaf folder preferably red.
I will tell you how learning theory
coincides with recovery from loss, how soon
we will break: soon we will break.
Have a good reason for sending a postcard
depicting a wintry funeral in the dead heat
of summer. Too soon. A hammer, a notebook
and a hopefully-decorated kite used in harmony
may some day aid you in an important escape
or a perfect rescue. I will tell you about
not being at this moment in an oven,
not considering the lake in the darkness,
not sabotaging an exposition on 19th century dance, soon
the dazzling all, never, detail detail, location³,
the cumulative fireworks of this world,
soon—. Moments—how too much inside
too many, how too much each and then breaking.
These giant windows we can't help.

I watch a calm young boy
hurl stones with terrific force
at the ducks by the edge of the river,
and those birds rise with unforgivable grace.
That the boy threw those stones or why,
one shouldn't wonder.

Dear

Even if the movies are not about us

I want to collapse into every one I see—

Look,

I wanted to say, *I am made of disappearing,*

I can only make the ideal appear real

for an instant. If I could see me now in the airport

I would always be in the airport but never

reading the names of the slain, my hair full of glue.

The future is a punished shade, the present a choir

of debris. A miracle is departure because departure is impossible

and the impossible gives us hope.

Look,

I wanted to say, *be perfect, don't reach, your reach*

will wreck in my shallows and *Don't ever, ever*

go away. We sing into an old typewriter: karaoke,

it's all karaoke but so what. What for and why we do not know

but beg we must beneath the sagging marquees:

Don't they bear our names? If I could see me now

from the unnamable then, I would shout—I will never

walk that far again in a suit. I would shout

but what could it fix, why can't I throw these pictures away,

in how many cleft, bullet-riddled dreams

will I not stop pointing. *Don't score your knees!*

I say, *You need those!* because we are always on our knees,

even running to the arrival gate, even falling asleep.

I want to believe we are made for the moments
that crash through us

but we are made for the moments after, the past
is an ash thumbbed into the spine, a live coal or two.

If I could see me now walking to those cracked concrete
steps, to that door, in that brushed silk suit,

in those scuffed wingtips, what?

I would say *Put that bottle away*. Books and matches
in the back seat, windows down.

I know you won't understand, I would say,
but you will listen. I would say,

Go.

Susceptible

Already it is summer, cooking
going on, people setting off bombs
near the train tracks in some kind
of bizarre rain dance. The asphalt
nears its boiling point. No matter
the level of your superstition,
it is hazardous to utter the words
To be on the safe side. To avoid
the black plague, the pope was set
between two huge fires kept constantly
ablaze. Think of the jellied glow,
the dizzy operas passing for dreams.
There was no safe side.
He must have come away
with a whole new understanding
of brimstone. You could be admiring
your carriage, the finenesses of your robe.
You might be bending spoons,
loosed from employment, panting
like nuns cloistered around a television set
then the cloud descends. Nostradamus
lost his family to the plague and was thus
moved to different visions, versions,
but disputes between prophets and priests
are only natural. Think of no darkness,
sleep only a syrupy light. No sleep
and images constantly fanged.
It is summer as much as possible, the world
is hot to the touch. The safe side evaporates,
revealing nothing we can make out,
leaving fear to feed only on what we imagine
and still we are implacable,
refusing to revise our story
even as we buy the one-way ticket
to what is rumored to be
the last safe place on earth.

Infotopia

I do not recall water.

Now one tree becomes a thousand matches
and one match can unbecome a thousand trees.

This begets a certain feeling about languor.

What the TV news promises:

Ability to cope with persistent dangers in the home.

Keys to surviving exotic animals loose in your neighborhood.

How not to die

but still the ways to die outnumber the ways

to not die. Which beget further lyric and lyrical begetting—

Even in the tessitura of moans and panting: music.

Hunger can only be mollified,

the mouth at the center of an hourglass—

We may be only thirst quenched,

our post-script is unavailable to the mortal eye

boarding the train, the funeral veil smeared with rain.

Something late held too close.

Newspapers or museum guards follow us

as if we meant the art harm.

As if to attend our inevitable wounding.