

White Trash & Southern

Collected Poems, Vol. I



C. S. Fuqua

White Trash

&

Southern

Excerpt

Complete book available from B&N,
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brick-and-mortar stores by order in eBook
and print editions. Audio version available
from Audible.com.

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*Collected Poems, Volume 1*

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C.S. Fuqua

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Cover photograph “Fritz,” circa 1963, © 2013 C.S. Fuqua:

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*For Bonnie and Tegan
and those who inspired these poems.*

We'll walk into this one again and again....

From the Print Edition's Cover

"...An unflinching examination of the sorrows and joys we experience while moving through the world..." ~Dr. Wendy Galgan, Editor, *Assisi*

Poetry in this data-saturated age is not, for most, a viable way to make a living. So why expend the time and energy to create something that few people will read and even fewer will purchase? To which I must ask, why do people sing in the rain, paint pictures, dance? Because it provides pleasure and reward and perhaps even keeps them sane. As a writer of fiction and nonfiction, I am most concerned with story. When I write poetry, I view it not as some lofty literary tool to fool or condescend, but as an exercise in crafting story within the strictest confines. *White Trash & Southern* is a collection of such exercises, spanning nearly three decades. To create a complex story within a limited number of words—to communicate far more than appears on the page—is a challenge that can provide enormous reward and satisfaction. Sometimes I succeed. Sometimes I don't. But at least I remain sane. Sort of.

~C.S. Fuqua

Contents of Complete Book

Acknowledgements

Those Days Are Gone Forever

Studebaker

Holes

1963

Trusting B.J.

For Cathy, Growing

Churning

The Following Days

Hidden Inside

Home Movies

At 12

Hunchback

Last Date

Lunch

Waves

The Calm

Suicide

Night Beats

Another Parental Death

Rocks

Smoke

The Accident

Monroe

Parent Child

Penny

Becoming

Third Generation

Bass

At 16

Familiarity

Celluloid

Fort Morgan

Part of Her

Sand

Old Games

Tell Me

Tiddlywinks with Satan

at the point of too far

My Father's House

Carnalities

Making Ants Pop

A Question of Balance

Bruised

One Last Caress

Carmel

Currents Scattering

Darts

Living Room Fire

Fumble into Fancy

The Oddest Moments

In the End

Late Night
Monkey See
Wasn't That a Party?
Quittin' Time
Saturday
Sinking
Slow Fans
Debating the Problem of Simple Sores
The Path
Under Sheets
This Woman

Coupled

Words
Ashes
Local Love
Catch Phrase
Crow
Afterbirth
Diamond
Mother's Lover
Encounters
Enough
Accounting
Kiss Me Onward
Mortality
Seconds
One Thought
A Quarter Invested
Old Reliable
Setting, Rising
Private Tables

Take My Hand, Take My Hand

The Beat

Becoming

In what dimension do memories await
rebirth and rebirth and rebirth?

Relativity

Air

If Only a Moment

Business

At 30

Brother and Sister

Buzzard

Counting Change

The Bayou at Your Back Door

Bottom of the Glass

To Give a Child Choice

Father's Day

The Iron Bed

Last Rite

Machine

The March

Mattresses

Seeking Middle Ground

Your Funeral

Waiting for the Old Man

Recycling

Screening

Last Rite Revisited

Severed

Stats

The First Stroke

The Second Stroke

The Third Stroke
And the Wife
Thomas
Time Rings
Unk
Worms
Driving With James
Pennies

Acquainted

Anyone
Johnny
And Music for Jeff
For Angie, Waving
The Kid at Dusk
shutterwinks
The Waiting Room
Charlie, Passing
Cheerleading
Émeute
Webs
His Bed
Jennifer
All Part of It
Connecting Lots
Mainstream
No Good Thing
Moving
When a Neighbor Dies
The Park at One
Quake
On Reading “*Émeute*” to the College Girl
Reconnecting

Running
Soul
Stranger, We've Changed the War
John
The Mark
Slices
Slices, Too
Surface Tension

Rosé Tinted Glasses

Another Drunk
Waiting for the Post
Spare Change
Under the Banyan
Beach
My cat
Closets
A Dime's Worth
At this Distance
Enemies
When Hawaiian Girls are Grinning
Holidays
Hurricane
As I Imagined
The Immigrant
Immortality
Kimono
Light
The medic
Metallic Wisdom
Mistakes
Music
New Orleans TV, 2005

For the New Order
Under a North Wind
Old Cat
Leon, Passing
Fritz
One of a Kind
Against the Palm
Parting
Pensacola Beach
Playground boy
Possum Eyes
Ready?
Relics
Someone Said Words are Useless
Scrap from an Old Notebook
Self-Portrait
September
Shakes
Simplicity
Parked
Deep Space
Squoze
Survival
The Bird
The Test
Holiday Traffic
Transplant
Turtle Lawn
The Vapor King
Worth
Neighborhood Watch
Yard Sale
Flight

Desire

Lump

Taxed

Dementia

Of Mortal Creation

Atalanta's Legacy

Burial Ground

In Shadows, They Cry

Armageddon Sky

The Minotaur's Last Meal

Astral Dance

Trilogy in Stone

Incarnations

Apologies

Amen

Journey

Predator

Make-Believe

Religion

Was, Is

Key of G

Flesh and Blood

Coda

For a Moment, I Shall

Beauty

Autumn Grove

Strains

Postal

Leaves

The Odor of Dust

Ringin' Out the Old

Melodies

Sea Roar

I Was Young

He Said Wishes are as Good as Prayers, but

His Friend has Walked a Thousand Dreams

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White Trash & Southern

but that doesn't mean the events in the poems transpired as detailed. Some did. Some didn't. Some sort of. Many of the ideas came from other people. Some poems are simple exercises of placing myself in other people's situations. An idea has a way of becoming more on the page, transforming into something completely different from the original inspiration and intent. Don't believe anything you read. Believe everything.

Thank you, Bonnie and Tegan. Who could ask for more...?

Finally, I am deeply grateful to you, the reader, for buying this book. I hope you find some part of it worthwhile and entertaining.

Those days are gone forever

Studebaker

There, next to the polished Mercedes,
the yellow Studebaker,
rust holes in the fender walls,
paint-chipped hood,
worn seats—nothing like
the old man's.

He kept his sparkling, let me tell you,
just like the Model T before,
and the Thunderbird, the '56 Chevy,
and the entire freeway of cars
that sped through my youth,
but none was so striking
as that hand-buffed Studebaker
with its white walls,
its custom steering wheel,
its immaculate seats,

and that night,
coming back from Andalusia
when they thought I was asleep
in the back,
and he reached over,
grabbed her hair,
jerked her hard enough
to spin her head to the side.
I found two spots of dried blood
the following day,
and I remembered how the moon
had hung in the rear window
just below a cluster of stars
as he muttered, Christ,
why'd you make me do that?
And she had rested her head
back against that perfect seat
as the hum of new tires on asphalt
rose through the floorboard.

Penny

Penny refused to enter the woods that day,
rearing gently, but not high enough to throw my balance.
Legs hugging her sides, I lay against her neck,
mane brushing my face,
petted, stroked, coaxed, but she would not enter
the place we'd entered countless times before.

She had gone everywhere with me, for me—
into thickets and brambles,
alongside the busiest highway,
into the river where I dove from her back.

He had yelled the night before
that I was worse than my mother—
this, after the woman told me about the pills,
the ones that assured her
no others like me
would surprise her or him.
So we rode away,
Penny and I,
but at the woods, she balked.
Then my mother's voice
called in the distance,
tinged with something more than frustration.

Penny reared once more,
settled, tucked her head,
and entered the brush,
and I rode.
I rode fast away from
those days,
those voices.

Becoming

Bass

Desert heat and stinging sand,
that's the world of our future,
so say most who lay bets on signs.

But I am a fisherman,
casting into a pond that boils
with trout centuries ago:
My father stands on house steps, calling,
"Boy, lightning's gonna strike you dead,"
but my line's taut in this thunderstorm,
and I lean into the struggle,
reeling against the fighter,
a mighty opponent,
yet he is mine, all five pounds,
raised high, a trophy
flopping against my forearm,
my fingers hooked into one gill.

Now, in late nights, with images dancing
on a screen where nothing is real,
I hear whispers of the signs
that warn the end is near,
the end is here—
mysteries that befuddle me.
All I know is that the pond
is smaller than it used to be
and the bass don't put up
as big a fight these days.

At 16

conscience is but
a wall forming
like breasts,
small,
firm,
under hand,
a breathless voice
whispering out of
backseat darkness:
Why is this
so important?

Carnalities

A Question of Balance

The night screams hollow
with the roar of semis,
stars spiraling into
a jagged-tooth sky.
This light—
this spattering of space—
sends the dogs howling,
skin crawling,
as the ambulance shrieks
into a fetid night-wind.
Eyes glass,
bruises define,
questions badger, end:
*You sure you didn't just
bring it on yourself?*

And knotted in bed, we
drift through heat pump hums,
nursing rhymes into dreams
while the world goes mad.

Bruised

Bruises.
She craves
bruises—
here, she says,
fingertips
hesitating, drifting
across her breasts,
down her abdomen
to her inner thighs—
a garland of desire, of love
that will fade as certainly as
the petals of a summer rose.

Coupled

Afterbirth

I am tired of hangers on doorknobs,
of milk dried in bottoms of cups,
of magazines on the kitchen table,
of vacuuming carpets,
of clothes in closet hampers,
of oil draining from cold engines,
of whims,
of *dramadies*,
of hormones,
of speaking quietly in the morning,
of saying I'm sorry,
of being forgiven.

I am tired.

You pat my knee,
tell me the house looks good,
car too,
kiss my cheek,
fall asleep on the couch.
Through the window,
I see the grass is high,
and a load of clothes
sours in the washer.

Mother's Lover

They threw dirt in
Mother's lover's face
yesterday:
she discovered the obituary
three hours
after he was covered.

His heart—bloated,
overworked, a battered toy.
(I won't chain you to a dead man.)

The affair
endured Mother's temper
a decade.
(Fifteen minutes rapping on her door,
finally opening,
a red face peering over her shoulder,
smiling nevertheless:
warm hand,
soft voice.)

Wife, daughter,
responsibilities to satisfy,
then on with a new life—
so the dream went.

Employment problems,
insurance adjustments, chest pains.
(You can't marry a corpse.)

She didn't stop
the last day she saw his truck
parked at the coffee shop
where they met to talk:
She was late.
She asks me how can she
deal with coffee breaks
in years to come.
At the coffee shop two days later,
the wife begins to teach her.

Relativity

Air

Blow my soul down
a culm half as long as my arm,
and Unk is waiting at the end,
seated with hands behind his head,
legs stretched, ankles crossed,
grinning around that old cigar.
He sailed past jungles
of *madake*, bullets whispering,
but that was a lifetime ago,
a life ago.

Smoke rises in one giant puff
from that misty grinning mug.
My air runs its course through
sound and sound and sound again.
His image fades,
bamboo moist
against my lips,
its song, its song
the voice of the dead,
rejoicing.

If Only A Moment

On a whim, he snaps
a stem from her
untended bed of roses,
careful not to prick his finger.
He climbs toward game show voices
screaming through the tattered screen door—
needs fixing, he thinks, but doubts
he will soon find the time.

He slips inside, calls
granny, granny,
and the TV falls silent.
Honey, baby, is that...?
A shadow, she appears
from the den, eyes clouded
with heavy lenses.
See what I've brought you?

She edges close,
quivering fingers
wrapping around the stem,
drawing the bud gently near her face.
How beautiful, she whispers.
A single bead of blood
shimmers on a thorn against her palm,
cries a thin path across
her pale, wrinkled wrist.

Worms

When I number the dead,
I come up with no more than one,
saving all others for
more opportune times.
The ragged halls
are drenched in golden mist
as cool air whispers in.
I am comfy in my down wrap,
my feet are warm,
and I remember Eber's worms.

He dreamed of wiggling red worms
in an earthen bed,
churning, procreating,
a promise of riches.
I climbed the state tower with him
a thousand times to stretch
my eye down a spotting scope
to points where smoke rose
from careless camp fires
or fires ignited by smoldering cigarettes
(like those that nailed his lungs together),
and he would say, someday, my boy,
worms, my worms...

In the evenings, he raked the worm bed,
spoke of grand plans for us all,
but when smoke finally forced him
to lay his rakes aside,
he found that he'd only worked himself
into potting soil.

Acquainted

Anyone

Anyone would do.

Anyone at all
with the best music:
we danced, we lay:
Anyone would do.

Anyone at all
to talk:
the VW stuck
on the beach,
that bastard cop, grinning
at Debbie's open blouse:
Anyone would do.

Anyone at all
for truth or dare:
down the street
in my underwear,
found reason to lose them
in dark gulf water:
Anyone would do.

Anyone at all
to sit with me:
numbers fuzz
and surf breaks on
late night shores
of three jiggers, clogged
with stuck VWs,
shirts and pants
on bone-white sand,
giggles between
dunes, beer cans,
condoms, diplomas,
marriages, kids,
divorce, death:
Anyone would do.

Anyone at all.

Johnny

His hands clench into fists,
teeth gnashing until his face glows red,
eyes glaring up from lowered face,
that practiced, possessed mask that's frightened before.
Days ago, his mother raged,
*I'm damn sick of coming here
time and again because of you
being in trouble.*

Should've never been born.
His face burned red then, too,
but embarrassment filled the eyes,
his gaze locking with mine a moment too long.

He refuses to complete assignments,
drawing, instead, thin feminine figures,
with entrails bursting:
a space mutant,
a robotic hero,
a miniature monster with pointy head,
tiny letters in a word bubble crying,
help.

He drums on his leg and then scribbles
on the page he'll submit in place of his work,
*Miss Teacher, I like you.
I dont knowWTD.*

The bell rings, and he's into the hallway,
rage simmering
for attention
that makes him feel
at home.

Émeute

—For Andrew

I simply had to come over,
says the woman in rattlesnake boots.
That piece, she clicks, it speaks
to my inner child, and I want you
to know how I feel before I go.
A toothy grin, a press of soft flesh,
and she leaves you in a sea of witnesses
who carry invitations like flash cards.
Eyes linger at waists, glance at wrists,
float across bordered images like mist.

Some frightening quality to each,
a woman whispers, and the man with the baby
sighs his personal losses to the matted goat
who appears more like a guest and not a vision.
The college girl hovers at the spiked bowl
while the writer hawks his books to anyone asking,
What kind of work do you do?
And the fat woman dealing antiques
swears by the slimming qualities
of makeup and black blouses:
What would you charge to do a bust of me?

You know each musician, each artist,
each engineer and executive alike,
one way or another. Their voices carry you
toward “sex” and “lust” and “mama,” swinging
you around slowly to catch
snatches of smiles as punch spots
the framework of your talent.
The goat’s eyes glow in this musty loft air,
and you breathe, *Who are these people?*

Rosé tinted glasses

Another Drunk

—For Mr. Carver

Drunks have been done to death.
Raymond took care of that,
so don't expect me to add much here.
Still, my old man could
put away some booze,
but God and I know he was no drunk.
Just liked the buzz
from time to time;
still does as far as I know.
Mom, she'd swear he was
the sloppiest drunk
to put lips to a bottle,
though she never had to worry
after the divorce;
just liked to because the role
of victim came easily.

I like to drink
from time to time.
A good way to zap a feeling,
if you see my meaning,
and God and I know it makes
the day go down easier.
I could, in fact,
use a tall one right now,
but I don't have time.
That's why I envy the drunks.
That's why I envy Raymond,
even though he learned how to live.

Waiting for the Post

I

I can't believe you've stood
there
all morning.
You could've been
cleaning
up after yourself,
doing something
useful.
Can the mail be that
damned important?

II

Ghosts dance on the window
pane,
spread and fly
as the sun splits
condensation into
single atoms.

III

Winter
comes in
whispers
that chill
grave-sitters like me—
I ache for warmth:
this comforter only
insulates
the icy
gnawing
at my bones.

IV

You've been waiting
long enough,
don't you think?

Take the rag;
dry the window.

V

I drew faces
on frosty panes
when I was a kid.
Granny would warn me
not to dirty the windows,
then laugh at my finger-sketches:
withered,
mummified.

VI

You're still
there?
(I have drunk a half-bottle
of wine,
watching droplets
evaporate.)
God, you look like
a ghost.

VII

Granny knew nothing about
atoms.
She would stare
through windows
for hours,
talking to her husband,
dead for 38 years.
Once,
she touched a pane:
the ghost gathered itself into
a single droplet
at her fingertip.

VIII

Draw the drapes.
(I drink,

sift through bills,
gravesite offers, expiring
subscriptions.)
Draw the drapes, I say.
It's as cold as death
in here.

IX

The panes tempt
twilight moisture from the room,
gathering drops for
tomorrow.
I nestle the bottle between my lips,
sink deeper,
deeper,
always deeper
into the comforter,
shudder,
wait and hope the ghosts
will dance again.

Dementia

Of Mortal Creation

At midnight
I am near the end.
The bottle is dry
except for the spoonful
of spittle that has
drooled from my lips.
I tip my head in praise,
oh god,
and snore.

I am anathema,
for this god's nectar
has performed design's opposite,
has enabled me to
see the world for what
she has become:

stranded, a rock,
her serpents and dogs,
spitting, howling, ripping
all who stroll her
barren shores.

Raped,
drained,
poisoned,
she's turned on us.

Take this bottle,
god of vine,
god of insight,
and fill it with contempt
to fuel this fire
under me.
Bait the howls,
tempt the fangs
and fill my veins
with enough courage
to dance with the Maenads,
to ravage,
to finish this Scylla

of mortal creation.

Atalanta's Legacy

Daughters,
I had you beaten.

Naked,
she lay her naïveté open to me.
“Miraculous,”
they chirped;
they screamed,
“She has met her equal.”
But was I
more or less?

I gave only the required.
I could not have been the fool
who fought for “honor”
at the hunt.
Love has never made me
stupid enough to die.

Golden apples as my weapon
(you sneer, call me Cheat),
I won. I won
and made her less
than my equal.

Didn't I?

Lion and Lioness,
our den was never bare.
In our sins,
she served me well,
but her mind was on the future.

Daughters,
I won the race,
but sweet Atalanta
never stopped running;
she has sparked your souls,
fixed your eyes on the line.
Sons hear your footsteps gaining,
feel your breath upon their necks.

Amen

Journey

We come from the myriad points we define,
searching for something we believe
can be found in rosaries and crosses,
in incense and chants,
in prayer and faith,
or buried behind the mosque,
underneath the cathedral,
among the glowing rocks
of the sweat-lodge;
and all the while,
all the while,
the gods themselves scream,
wake up, wake up,
yet we taste only
the hiccups of our breath,
feel the twitches of our intellect,
seeking, seeking, always seeking,
secretly afraid enlightenment
is a coil of rattlesnakes.

Make-Believe

In this make-believe world,
I'll conjure a new god for us.
Give it any name you choose,
and we'll launch it
on autumn's decaying breeze.

Winds such as this draw
dark and desperate words,
echoes from those days of new jeans,
stiff, scratchy, two sizes too large,
cuffed and cycled
through wash after wash,
faded creases measuring
a season's growth,
waist frayed and tight by spring.
Autumn succumbed to screams
of winter nights, sobs and curses
that blamed each other,
prayers that roared for progeny
they could be proud of.
Winter's bitter wind fanned
hands, switches, belts
that raised welts
across lines of tears.
God knew all,
saw all from his
high, safe perch
in heaven—
that's what they said.
Yet god blocked not a single blow.

So name one in whom
we can confide all the good,
all the bad, all the fears and joy,
the beginning and in between.
If we convince ourselves,
if we simply fool ourselves into believing,
perhaps we'll coax heaven to swallow us
in the silence of our final breath.

Coda

For a Moment, I Shall

These shall remain:
the bouquet of roses;
the hymn of frogs;
the sun beyond frosted clouds;
the bite of mountain water;
the surge of gulf waves;
the claw of briars;
the call of owls in pre-dawn;
the silence of snow;
the patience of dirt.

These shall pass:
the self-taught trill of bamboo;
the resonance of strings;
the odor of skin;
the dampness of a single breath.

But until snow smothers memory,
each moment shall settle
like tea leaves in a cup,
savored in games of laughter,
illusions that leaves shall never dry.
Perhaps if I whisper to
the last leaf of experience,
the last drift of snow—
perhaps if I whisper, whisper.

He Said Wishes are as Good as Prayers, but His Friend has Walked a Thousand Dreams

Little more is left to do.

A walk.

A wish.

Speculation on dreams
and what could have been

if.

Kiss me.

Pull back slowly and smile.

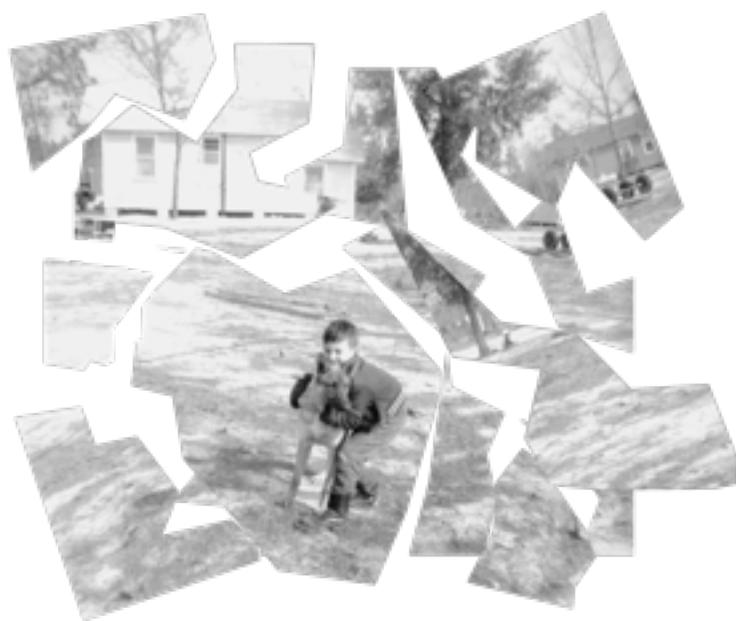
Then, again,
the last time.

Hard.

Allow your fragrance
to bathe me once more.

Then turn quickly,
walk away.

I will linger here
a while longer.



C.S. Fuqua has worked as newspaper reporter, magazine editor, book editor, English tutor, substitute teacher, teacher aide, janitor, respiratory therapy technician, gas station attendant (when such things existed), salesclerk, and writing instructor, to name a few. He has been a full-time freelance writer since the mid-1980s, concentrating on fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. His hobbies include music and crafting Native American flutes which are sold through www.fluteflights.com.

Books by C.S. Fuqua:

White Trash & Southern, Collected Poems, Volume I

Notes to My Becca

The Native American Flute: Myth, History, Craft

Hush, Puppy! A Southern Fried Tale

Big Daddy's Fast-Past Gadget

Trust Walk

Rise Up

The Swing: Poems of Fatherhood

If I Were, I Would!

Deadlines audio novel series:

Death in Service

Deadlines

Flight of the Omni

Butterflies Die

Divorced Dads

Alabama Musicians: Musical Heritage from the Heart of Dixie

Music Fell on Alabama