



The Light the Dead See: Selected Poems

Frank Stanford , Leon Stokesbury (Editor / Introduction)

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Between 1972, when he published his first book, *The Signing Knives*, and 1978, when he died at the age of twenty-nine, Frank Stanford published seven volumes of poetry. Within a year of his death, two posthumous collections were published. At the time of this death, as Leon Stokesbury asserts in his introduction, "Stanford was the best poet in America under the age of thirty-five."

The Light the Dead See collects the best work from those nine volumes and six previously unpublished poems. In the earlier poems, Stanford creates a world where he could keep childhood alive, deny time and mutability, and place a version of himself at the center of great myth and drama.

Later, the denial of time and mutability gives way to an obsessive and familiar confrontation with death. Although Stanford paid an enormous price for his growing familiarity with Death as a presence, the direct address to that presence is a source of much of the striking originality and stunning power in the poetry.

The Light the Dead See: Selected Poems Details

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From Reader Review The Light the Dead See: Selected Poems for online ebook

Scott says

I finished reading this a few weeks ago, but can't put it back on the shelf. Pretty amazing collection. Some books you read and you like them because it reminds you of something you have thought or strikes you that a strange version of you could almost have written it. Reading Frank Stanford is not like this at all, for me, at least.

Katie says

I'm always suspicious about Selecteds, and this one, which is unbalanced and flat, justifies that feeling. I love Frank Stanford's work--it has a dark energy that appeals to me--but this is not the best representation of it.

Rainey says

I was heartily obsessed with Stanford in high school, spending hours googling his individual poems from "The Light the Dead See" when I was unable to find the collection anywhere. I am so excited to read the newly published complete poems!

Josh Luft says

Frank Stanford's poems often bring to mind—especially the selections from his first book, *The Singing Knives*—the film *The Night of the Hunter*—specifically the scenes of Willa underwater and John and Pearl's ride down the river. They are both image-rich Southern Gothic with a shared surrealism and otherworldliness. However, the film's composed of stylized sets, influenced by German Expressionism, while Stanford's settings are out in the world. You feel the humidity, smell the animals, hear the mud squishing beneath feet. The imagery often becomes hyperreal. Also like *Hunter*, Death is always on the prowl in Stanford's work. Unfortunately for Stanford, it caught up to him too soon.

Nick says

When I read this five years ago, I fell in love with this collection. The figurative language he uses is so unique. I'm having a very hard time finding his other writings but hope to read more of him soon.

bill greene says

re-reading, again. or rather, still.

(rather still... hmmm.)

some poets i love because they do interesting & clever things with language or because they present a thought-provoking philosophy. but the ones that always are dearest to me are the ones who slyly reach inside your chest & pull your heart out where you can see it beating in all its grisly glory. Frank Stanford is one of those poets. not for the faint of heart.

THE MINNOW

If I press
on its head,
the eyes
will come out
like stars.
The ripples
it makes
can move
the moon.

Farren says

The shorter, stand-alone poems in this collection were the most revelatory. In the longer poems where Stanford is trying to serialize the story of the Chinaman and Born in the Camp with Six Toes and Mama Julinda &co, the form detracts from the narrative. I was frustrated by the ambiguous and fleeting details about each character, had no sense of the emotional depth of their interactions and experiences. I also found myself, especially in these longer poems but largely throughout the entire book, a little annoyed and distracted by the plain speech and line breaks. I have no ear for poetry that doesn't sound like poetry, I guess, and these lines fell like bricks into the street. The shorter meditations were dark and deeply profound and I liked enormously.

I don't know if I am more in love with the legend of Frank Stanford than his actual output? Or if I lack the context to really appreciate the dangerous expertise of his poetry? Or if it's just not my aesthetic? Or if I'm ignorant and provincial for loving only poetry married to music? A few more years and a pass at *Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* may reveal.

Shawn Aldridge says

Stanford is in a league all his own. His poetry, his short stories, everything was just so uniquely him.

It's a shame so much of his work remains out-of-print.

Abby says

Dark, dreamy, frightening poems about the mythical realities of the deep South. I found that these poems intersected very closely with *Light in August*, which I happened to be reading at the same time.

T.J. Jarrett says

I want to love this. I really really do.

But somehow, I'm thwarted in that aim. I'm not certain if it's all bravado and no emotion to tether it, or if it's too violent, or too something. All I know is that it IS extreme and that excess is its virtue.

But it's hard. I don't like the form of the earliest works. As Stanford matured, it settled into something I believe is earnest and moderated and masterful. I wanted more of that.

I do remember thinking of the earliest work: if this is selected works, what the hell crap did he leave out?

In this, I fear I need to backtrack and read all the works as Stanford and not his editor intended.

As a select collection, it's out of balance.

Thai Son says

I did not like how many of his poems concluded - it makes you hard to breath, and there is definitely a certain depressing darkness in his choice of images and symbols, however powerful, creative, evocative, challenging, personal, and crazy they are.

Good poetry though. I can see why he is now considered one of the most underrated American poets around.

Andy Lagerstrom says

I agree with other reviews on here in that the portions of Stanford's epic poems are poorly presented and not well-served by this collection. The smaller, self-contained ones are exquisite, though, and the general effect is a kaleidoscopic vision of a South teeming with dark secrets and startling violence.

Sean A. says

"when a cow drinks water we get milk
when a snake drinks water we get bit".

this shit is some of the darkest poetry of our day. and boy is it great. i remember reading stanford in college, in springfield missouri not far from the ozarks that along with mississippi consist of the southern macabre that inform these poems endlessly. i forgot how brutal he is, tho it is also as thoughtful and beautiful as i recall. these are poems of stilted desire and rural intrigue not dissimilar and certainly not inferior to the hallowed lorca, but later in the 20th century, with the gore and dreamlike elements cranked up. stanford looks past and also forward straight into the wolf eyes of amerikan decay and boy is he spot on. you can play up the haunted angle of his young suicide or you can see it as literary macabre that stands on its own.

stanford creates gorgeous nightmares out of endless southern childhood backwoods mystery. he is surely a stunning and memorable mythmaker and dare i say twisted surrealist. it is sure to stick with me as one of the best and most haunting collections i've ever stumbled across.

Cary says

"I wanted to ride down to where I come from / On an appaloosa / And take you away for good / I wanted to tie your hands with my belt / And watch you stare at the campfire / In the mountains not saying a word."

Fairly certain these poems will shake the Devil out of anyone.

I never knew how many creek-banks collapsed in my heart as a child until I read Frank Stanford---I'm better for it.

Rusty says

I bought this book on a whim, mentioned somewhere on someone's blog--I do too much of this, honestly--and jeeze, I come on here and find out that as usual, I'm the last to know how effing good it is. This is the forshizznizzle. Or something. Can anyone point me toward good secondary sources on Stanford?
