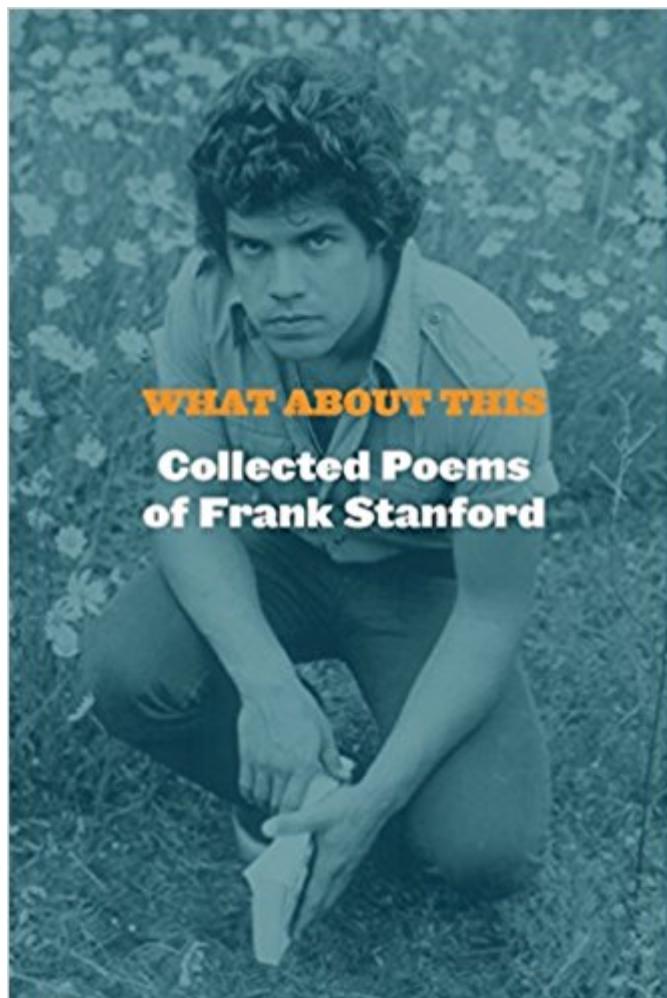


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What About This: Collected Poems Of Frank Stanford



Synopsis

The big event in poetry for 2015 will likely be the long-awaited resurrection of Frank Stanford.¹ National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist *What About This* introduces to a broader audience an important and original American poet who, sensitive, death-haunted, surreal, carnal, dirt-flecked and deeply Southern, whose promise, only partly fulfilled, it hurts to contemplate. His poems flick on a heretofore unnoticed porch light in your mind.² Dwight Garner, *The New York Times*³ • Stanford fearlessly explored the terror and wonder of the mind and the physical world.⁴ Publishers Weekly, starred review⁵ "Highly recommended work from an American original."⁶ Library Journal, starred review⁷ *What About This* marks a rare moment, when a critical and completely original American voice is recovered after decades and takes its rightful place in the canon.⁸ Now that the work is finally available, the real risk is that Stanford's poetic legacy will play second fiddle to the myth of his life and death. The beautiful young suicide is a hard narrative to shake.⁹ *What About This* offers the fullness of both the work and the image, and leaves it to readers to decide what they will value most.¹⁰ Jay Deshpande, *The New Republic* "This vibrant volume forms a comprehensive selection from his huge output, and includes published and unpublished poetry and prose, archival photographs, original manuscripts, a rejection letter, an interview, and excerpts from the 'ungovernable' fifteen-thousand-line epic poem, 'The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You'...Stanford's poems are by turns earthly and visionary."¹¹ *The New Yorker*¹² The big event in poetry for 2015 will likely be the long-awaited resurrection of Frank Stanford, a legendary badass from Arkansas, much of whose poetry has been unavailable since his suicide at the age of 29 in 1978.¹³ Stanford was a hell of a metaphor-maker and simile-slinger, and could cast a spell of extreme intensity with a flick of his wrist.¹⁴ NPR.org "The book [*What About This*], layered with north Delta dialect and superstition, departs again and again on dream-like thought sequences in which unpredictable imagery continually startles the imagination and overwhelms it with visceral beauty."¹⁵ Matthew Henricksen, *Arkansas Times*¹⁶ Frank Stanford's *What About This* is a monumental achievement. So much of Stanford's work was unpublished, scattered about in limited-edition, hard-to-find volumes, but now it has been collected and readers will rejoice to discover (or rediscover) a distinct poetic voice.¹⁷ He was a voracious reader and was heavily influenced by Thomas Merton and French writers. He loved the Surrealists and Rimbaud, Mallarme, Follain and the French filmmakers Cocteau and Buñuel. His poetry is wildly imagistic, imbued with Southern folklore and culture, and it's¹⁸ to use Stanford's own word¹⁹; strange.²⁰ Tom Lavoie, *Shelf Awareness* "Stanford was a teenage

prodigy out of Arkansas bleeding beautiful streams of Faulkner-like fever dream that has survived mostly in out-of-print chapbooks passed hand-to-hand. Now a monster compilation, 'What About This: Collected Poems of Frank Stanford,' has assembled more than 700 pages of poetry and a little prose like a moon-spattered Bible."; Dean Kuipers, Los Angeles Times "The work of poet Frank Stanford, whose turbulent life ended in suicide, is experiencing a well-deserved renaissance."; Mary Ann Gwinn, Seattle Times "I don't believe in tame poetry. . . . Poetry busts guts."; Frank Stanford As Dean Young writes in the Foreword to the book: "Many of these poems seem as if they were written with a burnt stick. With blood in river mud... Frank Stanford, demonically prolific, approaches the poem not as an exercise of rhetoric or a puzzle of signifiers but as a man 'looking for his own tongue' in a knife-fight with a ghost."

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Customer Reviews

Five stars for the simple reason that this book exists at all. If you're familiar with Stanford, you're probably wondering why so little of his output has been reprinted. I've never heard a good explanation, and this juggernaut of a poet has been relegated to a footnote, even if a monumental one. This book is a good step towards remedying this injustice. First of all, it's not 640 pages. It's 735, not counting the index. All of the small volumes that Stanford published in his lifetime and posthumously are presented first. You heard right. The complete texts of *The Singing Knives*, *Shade*, *Ladies from Hell*, *Field Talk*, *Arkansas Bench Stone*, *Constant Stranger*, *Crib Death*, *You*, and the "greatest hits" volume *The Light the Dead See*. There's a beautiful essay written for an

anthology on the creative process, too. These poems comprise almost exactly half of the book. Brief excerpts from his colossal *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* are inserted throughout the length of the book, which is mostly chronological. Then it's like Christmas for those, like me, who've lived for 20 years with the poems, and were constantly irritated by the fact that so much more existed, but no one had taken the time or trouble to compile it. Poetry being the corpse that it is, I don't have as much faith in Stanfords ability to change lives as I used to, but if there still exist people capable of being changed by poetry, Stanford's the man to do it. I won't get deep into the content, as that's a discussion beyond the scope of an review. If you like linear narrative, you may not appreciate it.

I have a vague recollection of meeting Frank Stanford in Oklahoma City at the Contemporary Arts Foundation when he was just starting his writing career, circa 1970-71. The CAF was home to a group of artists, poets, actors and playwrights. It seems Frank had just done something in Tulsa. In the whirl of a visit you could see Stanford was clearly a force unto himself. Somehow I found Stanfordâ™s poems online in about 1998. Half a dozen of his early books (or selections from his early books were presented online at the Alsop Review website. I loved the poems so much that I printed them out using my old dot matrix printer. I am glad I did because the website went offline years ago and the few book then available offered only a this slice of what Stanford left us. As his books have become available I have ordered them. It was wonderful when I could finally buy a copy of *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*. The fact that I now have *What About This*, the Collected Poems, is a complete joy. And at the same time a kind of heartbreak. Stanford was born in 1948, three years after me, and I wonder what he would be writing now if he were still alive, wonder who he would have encouraged and mentored with his Lost Roads Press, and how his genius would have developed over the years. Reading the blurbs about Frank Stanford a person might get the idea that he was unique, a wunderkind, and extraordinary. While he may have been all of that and more, he was very much of his time and in a living tradition. Frank was a real person. Many of us were writing poems of similar fabric. Most notably he was in spirit with Richard Brautigan and even older poets like Kenneth Patchen. He expressed the freedom of the Beats, though he never adopted any Beat rhetoricâ™ none of the Zen.

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