

**TOWARD INNUMERABLE FUTURES:
FRANK STANFORD & ORIGINS**

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LUND
UNIVERSITY

**MASTER'S THESIS ♦ LIVR07
SPRING 2015**

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A NOTE ON THE TITLE

The principal title of this thesis alludes to Frank Stanford's poem "Time Forks Perpetually Toward Innumerable Futures In One of Them I Am Your Enemy," the final poem in *Constant Stranger* (Mill Mountain Press, 1976), his sixth book; his title's phrasing is taken from "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" ("The Garden of Forking Paths")—the title story in Jorge Luis Borges's first collection of short stories (*Sur*, 1941)—verbatim (sans the intersentential period) as translated from the Spanish by Donald A. Yates and first published in the *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review* on May 24, 1958, then later collected in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings* (New Directions, 1964). (Translation revisions were numerous and varied from periodical to book, but the aforementioned line remained intact.) My specific use of "Toward Innumerable Futures" pays pointed homage to an essay that ranks among the more impassioned and perspicacious of precedent Stanford criticism, Pamela Stewart's "Toward Innumerable Futures: The Offering of Frank Stanford's Poetry," published in *A Raccoon Monograph*, Monograph Two (the Frank Stanford monograph), in April 1981.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a combined critical, biographical, and bibliographical study of American poet Frank Stanford (1948-1978). A prodigious, prolific poet's poet, Stanford is a long-underappreciated artist whose unwavering legacy, in recent years, has grown to be an undeniable force in contemporary American poetry. Stanford was an adoptee, and this study investigates his preoccupation with his loss of identity—and his perpetual quest for identifying origins—as manifested across his poetry.

My introduction contextualizes the dichotomous state of Stanford's legacy (i.e., neglected yet formidable) and broaches the subject of origins. A biographical-bibliographical background chapter chronologically pieces together the complicated fragments of his life and publications. Three critical chapters follow: respectively, excavations into Stanford's poetic portrayals of his biological and adoptive parents, children and orphans, and his own chameleonic—yet typically autobiographically presented—self. An appendix—a first-ever compendium of characters in Stanford's poetry—functions as a reference guide for readers, and extensive endnotes augment biographical/bibliographical points, clarifying prior discrepancies and confusions.

Frank Stanford was an imaginative virtuoso—one of the preeminent American poets of the latter 20th century. This study aims to help advance his literary legacy to its right place.

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Like Father said down the long and lonely light-rays you might see Jesus walking,
like. And the good Saint Francis that said Little Sister Death, that never had a sister.

*The Sound and the Fury*¹ 1929
—WILLIAM FAULKNER

For the time being you pose
In the secret wall of these sheets with those nine sisters
Who treated you so badly a peninsula
Something of a legend
Cut into rock so we can only see three sides of you

“Blue Yodel of Poets of Times Past”² 1973
—FRANK STANFORD

Dim tavern, an alleymouth where ashcans gape and where in a dream I was stopped
by a man I took to be my father, dark figure against the shadowed brick. I would go by
but he has stayed me with his hand. I have been looking for you, he said.

*Suttree*³ 1979
—CORMAC MCCARTHY

I. INTRODUCTION

The creative flame of American poet Frank Stanford (1948-1978) burned early, brightly, and fast, and he appears quite apart, as stylist and artist, from the currents of latter 20th century American poetry.⁴ Stanford was a precocious youth who allegedly developed a talent for large-scale composition of heroic epic poetry as a teen, and autodidactically.⁵ His most substantial work is the 15,283-line epic, *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* (1977), and eight shorter books of poetry were published in the 1970s as well; in 1990, a volume of his short stories was posthumously published, and in 1991 and 2015, editions of his selected and collected poems, respectively, were published.

Frank Stanford was born Francis Gildart Smith in southeast Mississippi on August 1, 1948 and adopted on the same day by a single woman, Dorothy Gilbert Alter (Decree of Adoption),⁶ who adopted a daughter a year later (C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 99). His first few years were spent in Greenville, Mississippi (M. Williams 175).⁷ Dorothy married levee engineer Albert Franklin Stanford in 1952, and in time, “Frankie” was adopted by him as well, effecting a final name change to Francis Gildart Stanford, or Frank Stanford (*The Battlefield* 385; Shugars 12). Stanford grew up mostly in Memphis, Tennessee, where A. F. Stanford was based, and he spent his 1950s summers in the levee camps that the elder Stanford designed along the Mississippi River (J. Williams, “Remembering” 107, 109; C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, fourth page). When A. F. Stanford retired in 1961, the Stanford family moved to the town of Mountain Home in the southern Ozark Mountains of northern Arkansas—Stanford’s home state nearly exclusively for the rest of his life (Shugars 137; C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 99). After attending public schools in Mountain Home for three years, he attended Subiaco Academy, a Benedictine prep school, from 1964-1966, then went on to the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville (Shugars 12), where he attended graduate writing workshops as an undergraduate (Stokesbury, “Introduction” x). Despite his precocity, though, he never attained a degree (C. D. Wright, “Frank Stanford” 339). In 1970, he began publishing his poetry in periodicals;⁸ in 1971, he married (Certificate of Marriage, Mencin); in 1972, he divorced (Divorce Decree); and in 1974, he married again (Certificate of Marriage, Crouch). He published six slim volumes of poetry between 1971 and 1976 and co-produced a short autobiographical documentary film,⁹ and in 1976, he founded Lost Roads Publishers, a small poetry press (C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 99). He ended his own life in June 1978, two months shy of his 30th birthday (Mueller, “Incident

Report”). The publication of *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, his magnum opus, was executed that year,¹⁰ and more posthumous publications followed.

In writing intensively about Stanford, it is relevant, even necessary, to convey some sense of the reception and critical impact of his work because a discrepancy has existed between the languishing, nearly endangered state of his legacy and the collective enthusiasm that has fueled support for his work; rarely does such a gaping bifurcation exist—nor last for upwards of a half-century—between prolific talent and relative obscurity.

On the one hand, six of Stanford’s books were, for decades, out of print and considered difficult to obtain;¹¹ a large number of his poetic works remained either uncollected or altogether unpublished;¹² and though he has occasionally been anthologized, he is by no means yet a canonical figure in American poetry.¹³ Naturally, international translations also remain of the future.

On the other hand, however, there is an unwavering, at times cult-like, and growing interest in Stanford’s work.¹⁴ Reception of his poetry has been notably effusive to a seemingly unending degree, especially among poets. Allen Ginsberg met Stanford when Stanford was 20 years old and, shortly thereafter, wrote, “Frank’s poems always seem slightly electric” (Wood, “With Allen” 49; Ginsberg).¹⁵ After reading some of Stanford’s short fiction, Gordon Lish wrote that he had “massively interesting ideas” (Lish).¹⁶ Alan Dugan, an avid advocate of Stanford’s work, called him “brilliant,” a “genius” who, “like Whitman . . . should be encouraged in his amplitude” (*What About This* 374).¹⁷ Thomas Lux wrote that Stanford was “staggeringly prolific . . . a poet of rare talent, imagination, and insight” (Lux, “Brother Leo” 53, 55). Pamela Stewart called Stanford’s work “visionary, sometimes with an overtly primitive mode of expression,” his poems “visceral, often prerational,” his images “genius,” and his lines “atmospheric,” adding that “Stanford’s own taut love for the dead is equal to his love for the living” (Stewart, “Toward” 5-6, 8). James Wright considered Stanford a “superbly accomplished and moving poet” whose poems contain “a great deal of . . . tragic pain” (J. Wright 105).¹⁸ Franz Wright added, “It seems to me undeniable that Stanford’s is one of the great voices of death,” calling his late poems “staggering for their courage and beauty” (F. Wright 131). Richard Eberhart wrote that Stanford’s “language is taut and fine” with “[n]ot a word out of place, remarkable hits, few errors” and that he was “astonished . . . by the originality and power of his poems” (Eberhart 137-138). C. D. Wright argued that *The Battlefield* is “one of those rare, thoroughly righteous books which inspires outrage” and that “it matters, profoundly” (C. D. Wright, “Note on *The Battlefield*” 161). Eileen Myles wrote that Stanford’s poems are “lurid and exciting,” “mythical,” and “things of perfect simultaneity” (Myles 93). Recently, Seth Abramson called Stanford an “uncompromising genius” who is “deserving of serious scholarly study, and

perhaps even the sort of hero-worship usually reserved for national icons like Whitman” (Abramson), and Dean Young described Stanford’s work as “profoundly intoxicating . . . authentically raw, even brutal . . . a true American surrealism” and Stanford “demonically prolific” (Young xi-xii). Ecstatic accolades continue, seemingly ad infinitum. Unequivocally, Frank Stanford is a poet’s poet.

In 2000, the *Asheville Poetry Review* included Stanford in a list of “10 Great Neglected Poets of the 20th Century”—a list that included notables such as Mina Loy, Pierre Reverdy, Kenneth Patchen, and Jack Spicer.¹⁹ Stanford’s mythological presence—mystified by his relentless creative energy, deceptively towering intellect, and indomitable charisma—held astonishing influence over other poets and artists, especially those within one or two degrees of separation from him. “To know Frank then,” Ellen Gilchrist told *The New Yorker*, “was to see how Jesus got his followers. Everybody worshipped him” (Buford 56).²⁰ “Everybody loved [him],” C. D. Wright corroborates. “They couldn’t help it” (ibid). Stanford’s first wife, Linda Mencin Bond, describes him as “exquisitely beautiful . . . lyrical, inside and out,” noting that “[t]here was an instant attraction” (Walton). His second wife, Ginny Stanford, describes her immediate “compelling visceral attraction” to him as one “that overpowers competing instincts, any tendency to caution or reason” (G. Stanford, “Death” 27). Stanford has frequently been elegized,²¹ and his persona has served as a character—often the protagonist—in multiple works of fiction.²²

THE surreptitious, ulterior aim of this study is to narrow the gap between past-to-current and eventual legacies—to edge the future closer to the present; the study’s focus—origins—is its vehicle for accomplishing that aim. The two predominant motifs in Frank Stanford’s work are routinely considered to be death (his “biggest love affair”²³) and the moon (his “familiar”²⁴), and these are self-evidently legitimate readings, but I believe autobiographical questions as to his genealogical/genetic origins—often formulated as a textual search for his biological parents and/or a questioning of self-identity—comprise a widespread, recurring theme representing a topic of comparable influence on him. From a youthful age, Stanford was apparently cognizant of having been adopted by A. F. Stanford,²⁵ but he didn’t learn that Dorothy Stanford wasn’t his birth mother until he was an adult, shortly before he began publishing poetry,²⁶ and the discovery’s emotional and psychic impact on him is considered to have been formidable, metamorphic.

Stanford’s published poetry is laden with the motif—a textual quest for self-identification via the determination of origins—and he wrote frequently of his lost identity, as well as of orphanages and orphans landing on redemption. A reading admittedly moot but inherent to my study considers Stanford’s typically homodiegetic (often autodiegetic)

narrations as largely autobiographical, and while Stanford does occasionally fictionalize or dramatize his poetic self, I consider his biography virtually inseparable from his poetry for most attempts at close reading.²⁷ As such—in reading homodiegesis autobiographically—in “The Lies” (c. 1973), he writes, “night has put her coins over my eyes / I don’t know my past” and describes himself as “a long lost / prince in a black cloak” (*The Light* 86). The hero of *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* is a 12-year-old poet named Francis Gildart who expresses such sentiments as, “I must be some memory some bastard son of David / why do I pet this harp so much where do all these songs come from” (8007-8008), “I am the son of the river / just another bastard childhood is not worth living no matter what you hear” (9839-9840), “it is strange that at my age I mention my mother and father least of all / I feel guilty” (10104-10105), “I know I am [a bastard] but I wouldn’t allow nobody / to call me one” (10716-10717), and “I vanished to sing a blue yodel of that low born bastard / brought up by the finest of families” (11959-11960). Numerous poems throughout Stanford’s briefer books and uncollected works expose the topic, even blatantly in their titles, e.g., “A Black Cat Crossed the Road I Was Born On” (*Constant Stranger* 44-45), “Dead Child” (“Dead Child” 41), “Blue Yodel of the Lost Child” (*Crib Death* 35), or even the very book title *Crib Death*, itself.

This thesis examines the motif of origins across Frank Stanford’s published poetry, including collected and uncollected works. It excludes his fiction, as Stanford was principally a poet, and it does not claim to examine his poetic oeuvre, per se—as some of his manuscripts remain unpublished. A number of his previously unpublished works were published in *What About This: Collected Poems of Frank Stanford* in spring 2015, while others are currently housed at Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library or remain uncollected. In any case, I’ve only considered poems which have, actually, been published. There have been two primary academic studies of Frank Stanford to date, both doctoral dissertations and cited herein: Carl Judson Launius’s *It Was a Flood: The Life and Poetry of Frank Stanford* (UC Davis, 1988) and Murray Shugars’s *What the Moon Says: Frank Stanford’s Quest for Poetic Identity* (Purdue University, 2000). Though Shugars’s study could appear similar in scope to my own, he focused on “the ‘codes’ of place, class, race, and gender” in Stanford’s writing (Shugars 2), while I dial in on Stanford’s apparent preoccupation with determining his origins via his representations of biological and adoptive parents, lost children, and his ungrounded self across his poetry.

As my study’s method is that of a detailed thematic reading, I move thematically through the essay (as opposed to a chronological progression of a strictly biographical study), but within each subtheme, I broadly work chronologically through Frank Stanford’s poetry. As Stanford’s biography and poetry are heavily intertwined and as key aspects of his tragic, unusual biography are central to my thematic study, I begin by providing an overview of his

biography—highlighting especially the complicated background details of his adoption and formative years, as well as the alleged emotional and psychic impact that his discovery of his adoption had on him, as these details are invaluable in understanding his poetry (especially the immensely personal narrative in *The Battlefield*)—and his significant poetry publications contextualized within that biography. I then shift into the essay’s thematic critical study, examining Stanford’s lost sense of self and his perpetual quest for locating origins via his poetic writings; the critical study is divided into three subthematic chapters focusing on the parental figure, children and orphans, and the multiple authorial selves in the poetry. My argument is that Stanford attempts to gather his own sense of self via a poetic quest for determining his biological origins; as he continually struggles to determine or hypothesize his biological parents’ identities while frequently portraying his adoptive parents, he presents children as lost and autonomous (frequently orphans) and his self as heroically standing for others—indeed *as* others, wearing innumerable masks—while invariably returning to an autobiographical poetic rendering of himself, born Francis Gildart.

Generally in the thesis, parenthetical numbers unaccompanied by text refer to line numbers, except in rare instances; parenthetical numbers alongside text refer to page numbers or, occasionally, dates. While the thesis’s poetry analysis is primarily contained within the essay’s body, Stanford researchers and readers may find the appendix—a compendium of characters in Stanford’s poetry—and endnotes helpful; the endnotes expound on the odd Stanfordian concept, clarify biographical and bibliographical ambiguities and other details, and inadvertently suggest potential pathways for future Stanford research and scholarship. Nonetheless, the body text and appendix/endnotes are by no means mutually exclusive entities, and the latter may be of some assistance to the reader of this thesis as well.

II. LIVES & WORKS: FROM MYTH TO MYTHOLOGY

“with your clouds like horses I remember all of my life”

The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You

There are many sides to Frank Stanford, many phases, many perceptions: the adoptee, the alleged prodigy, the visionary, the backwoods Ozark dreamer, the self-mythologizer, the philanderer, the vibrant light in the room, the charismatic personality, the withdrawn seeker, the suicide artist, etc. To some, he is a localized poet of a particular era and geographical region; to others, he is a world poet with seemingly infinite temporal and spatial reach. Many of the individuals who personally knew Stanford knew him for a season—perhaps a couple years, and as Robert Trussell writes, “no two people remember him quite the same way” (Trussell); gathering a complete portrait of the artist requires piecing together the many versions, perceptions, anecdotes—and applying the collected understanding to a detailed critical reading of his work.

Frank Stanford was born Francis Gildart Smith on August 1, 1948 in southeast Mississippi, in Perry County (Decree of Adoption). The identity of his biological parents, family, and genealogical lineage has long been an utter mystery;²⁸ the name of his birth mother as listed on his Decree of Adoption is Dorothy Margaret Smith, but that name could partially or entirely be a fabrication.²⁹ The mysteries of the poet’s mythology thus begin. He was adopted on the day of his birth by another Dorothy (Decree of Adoption; Launius 23; Shugars 12, 59)—a businesswoman and single divorcée named Dorothy Gilbert Alter (Decree of Adoption; Launius 23; Shugars 60),³⁰ who, at the time, was managing the Firestone tire store in Greenville, Mississippi as the company’s first female manager, nationwide (*The Battlefield* 385; Shugars 60).³¹ The paperwork for his adoption was finalized on August 20, 1948 in the Chancery Court of Washington County, Mississippi—of which Greenville is the county seat—and his name officially became Francis Gildart Alter (Decree of Adoption). Richton, Mississippi—the site of the Emery Memorial Home, Stanford’s adoption home (Shugars 59; C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 99)—is located more than 200 miles southeast of Greenville, where he was first raised. He was baptized one month after his birth—on September 5, 1948—at St. James Episcopal Church in Greenville (Baptismal Register).

Dorothy Gilbert Alter’s Mississippi family had been well-to-do,³² but her father lost his farm during the Depression and became a foreman of a prison farm labor camp at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman (Shugars 207, 209).³³ Called “Frankie” from

infancy (Shugars 12; Launius 23), Stanford lived his first two years on a small farm outside of Greenville, where Dorothy Alter kept sheep and collies and where her aunt and grandmother also lived (Launius 23-24; Shugars 61), and during which period (in 1949) Dorothy adopted a second child—Bettina Ruth, called “Ruthie”—from the Emery Memorial Home (*The Battlefield* 385; Ehrenreich; Launius 24; Shugars 12). Early in 1950, Dorothy and her children moved from the farm into town in Greenville (Launius 24), a western Mississippi town located against Lake Ferguson—an oxbow lake along the Mississippi River.

On March 7, 1952 (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email), when Frankie was three years old, Dorothy married a man 27 years her senior (U. S. SSDI, A. F. Stanford; U. S. SSDI, Dorothy Stanford)—a successful levee engineer based in Memphis, Tennessee named Albert Franklin (A. F.) Stanford (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email; *The Battlefield* 385; WWI Draft Registration Card)—and the couple and children moved to 1157 Knox Avenue in the Frayser neighborhood of North Memphis (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email). A. F. Stanford’s longtime wife, Edna Alexander Stanford, had passed away in August 1951 (Hess, 2.17.2015 email), and though one of their two children (also named A. F. Stanford) had died of pneumonia in 1938 (Coleman, 2.17.2015 email; *ibid*), their other child, Sarah Louise Stanford (1921-2010), had three children between 1949 and 1954, so following Dorothy’s marriage to A. F. Stanford, Frankie and Ruthie technically acquired an adoptive stepsister in Sarah Louise (though, due to the significant age differences, the relationship was not considered as such) and playmates in her two eldest children, Franklin (called “little Frank”) and Carole, born in 1949 and 1952, respectively (Coleman, 2.16.2015 and 2.17.2015 emails; Hess, 2.18.2015 email; Coleman/Hess, 2.19.2015 conversation; U. S. SSDI, Coleman).³⁴

Dorothy Stanford referred to Frankie as a “chosen child”—and Frankie and Ruthie “chosen children”—indefinitely alluding to his adoption without unequivocally addressing it (Launius 22, 153; Shugars 64). Frankie began to settle into life in Memphis, and the family passed summers along the Mississippi River in levee camps that A. F. Stanford designed (C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 100), often joined by Sarah Louise’s eldest child, Franklin (Coleman, 2.16.2015 email). Stanford attended at least eight different schools for first through twelfth grades. He actually began first grade, in September 1954, at the elementary school in Snow Lake, Arkansas—one of the levee camp villages—before switching to Our Lady of Sorrows Elementary School in Memphis to finish out first grade (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email). It wasn’t until he was in second grade at Our Lady of Sorrows, in fall 1955, that A. F. Stanford officially adopted him; Frankie’s name changed a final time to Francis Gildart Stanford, or Frank Stanford (*ibid*).³⁵ He switched schools again, in 1956, to West Frayser Elementary School for third grade; in the summer of 1957, the Stanford family moved from Frayser to 1118 Oak Ridge Drive, in an affluent neighborhood of East

Memphis,³⁶ and Stanford attended fourth-seventh grades there—at Sherwood Elementary School for three years followed by a year at Sherwood Junior High School—from 1957-1961 (ibid). In April 1958, while in fourth grade at age nine at Sherwood Elementary, Stanford placed fourth in a poetry contest for students in the Memphis and Shelby County schools (C. D. Wright, “The Mulberry Family” 299, 305; *What About This* x). On May 14, 1961, Stanford was confirmed at All Saints Episcopal Church in Memphis (Confirmation Register), and that summer, when A. F. Stanford was 76 years old and the young Frank Stanford was turning 13, the Stanford family moved from Memphis to 27 Mallard Point Road on Norfolk Lake near Mountain Home, Arkansas in the Ozark Mountains (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email), as A. F. Stanford retired due to deteriorating health (Shugars 137; C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 99).

Frank Stanford would live most of the rest of his life, from 1961-1978, in northern Arkansas. Entering eighth grade, he met Bill Willett, who became a close, lasting friend ([C. D. Wright], *The Singing Knives*, 1979, [62]; Launius 81).³⁷ Stanford attended Mountain Home Junior High School for eighth grade, then Mountain Home High School for ninth and tenth grades (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email); during those teen years, he won fishing trophies (Shugars 115), and he worked for Norfolk Lake as a guide, a fishman, by refueling boats, etc (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email; J. Williams, “Remembering” 109).³⁸ After his freshman year, A. F. Stanford died of kidney complications in August 1963, at age 78 (U. S. SSDI, A. F. Stanford; Shugars 137).

Around the time of A. F. Stanford’s passing, Stanford and his adoptive mother and sister converted to Catholicism (Launius 84-85; Moore 38; Shugars 240),³⁹ and in 1964, at the start of eleventh grade, he began studies at Subiaco Academy—a Benedictine boarding school near Mount Magazine, Arkansas’s highest peak, in the Ouachita Mountains of western Arkansas (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email). Stanford’s junior and senior years at Subiaco Academy are generally considered to have been formative and significant, consisting of rigorous education (Shugars 12; *The Battlefield* 385), and at least a couple of the monks of Subiaco Abbey became his respected companions—including Father Nicholas Fuhrmann, Stanford’s English teacher (Ehrenreich; Launius 89), and Father Wolfgang Mimms, who became the Abbey’s first African-American to be ordained (Launius 89; Mimms Obituary).⁴⁰ Stanford graduated from Subiaco Academy in May 1966 (Subiaco).

IN fall 1966, Stanford began studies at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, in the College of Business (UArk; Rogers, 12.9.2008 email), making the College of Business’s Academic Honor Roll in spring 1967 (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email), and living in at least 10 different residences in his time as a student, including several quarters shared with Bill

Willett (Willett, 4.9.2015 email and 4.15.2015 emails 1 & 2). Stanford “would go three and five days straight,” Willett recalls, “essentially living off coffee and whiskey and writing, writing, writing” (Ehrenreich).

In 1968, around the time of his 20th birthday and leading into the start of his junior year, Stanford learned that Dorothy Stanford was not his biological mother, that he had been adopted by her (Moore 37; C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, last page); he “came home . . . one day and asked [Dorothy] if she’d adopted him,” Joan Williams writes (J. Williams, “Remembering” 108). A variance in perception appears to have existed between adoptive mother and son. That is, from Dorothy Stanford’s perspective, she allegedly had thought that Stanford had always been aware that he was adopted, as she “had made it clear from the beginning that he was a chosen child, and grafted into her family from the minute he was born” (ibid); Ruth Rogers explains, “She said to Frankie, *I don’t understand why you all didn’t know you were adopted. I said you all were chosen children*” (Shugars 64). From Frank’s perspective, however, the matter had allegedly never been clear. Launius writes that Stanford “had been told that he was a ‘chosen child,’ without a clear explanation of exactly what the term entailed” (Launius 153); he describes the discovery as having been “a traumatic event” for Stanford (Launius 22). The knowledge acquired from the confrontation was epiphanic for Stanford and was received as a personal blow. “He was very upset. He cried,” Rogers notes (Shugars 64), and Willett adds that Stanford was “shocked” and “very depressed” to discover that Dorothy Stanford: “had lied to him all those years. That’s the essence of it. It’s not really whether she was his blood parent. He [had been] lied to by someone he loved and trusted” (Shugars 65). “It was essentially a lie his mother had presented him with for the better part of his young life” (Moore 37).

Accounts by Dorothy Stanford, Ruth Rogers, and Bill Willett are invariably consistent that Stanford’s discovery (or realization) of his adoption by Dorothy was paramount to his psyche, instigating a metamorphic change in his disposition and general outlook (Shugars 64; C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, last page). Stanford’s official adoption by A. F. Stanford had occurred late—in 1955, at age 7—and he had long known that the elder Stanford was not his biological father, but he had believed that Dorothy Stanford was his biological mother and that Ruth was his biological sister, and the revelation’s psychological and emotional impact on him was allegedly formidable (Moore 37; Shugars 65). “I think you cannot underestimate the significance of him finding out [that] he was adopted,” Willett has stated (Moore 37), maintaining that the acquired awareness brought about “an emotional break-down” (Shugars’s words) in Stanford in the years that followed (Shugars 64-65)—which Shugars refers to as “an identity crisis” (Shugars 56); Willett observes, “I think from that point on Frank was branded with a feeling of hollowness” (Moore 37). Dorothy Stanford

told Joan Williams that from that point forward, Stanford never seemed the same again (J. Williams, “Remembering” 108), and Rogers concurs, “[f]rom the time he found out that he was adopted, it was like day and night” (Shugars 64);⁴¹ he was like a completely different person, he became quieter—“he didn’t laugh, didn’t smile” (Rogers, 12.4.2008 conversation). Ben Ehrenreich writes that individuals who knew Stanford before he learned of his adoption by Dorothy “remembered a cheerful, outgoing, charismatic youth, an athlete. People who met him afterward remembered him as a quiet man, easygoing but somehow removed, funny but always from a distance” (Ehrenreich). Rogers notes that via his discovery, Stanford “realized that he wasn’t who he thought he was” and that he decided, “*I’m going to do what I want to do and be who I want to be*” (Shugars 65).

Evidently, what Stanford wanted to be was a poet and writer. According to Willett, the same summer (1968) that Stanford conveyed to him the revelation of his adoption, he also told him that he was working on a large-scale poem titled *St. Francis and the Wolf*—of which his published epic and magnum opus, *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, is an excerpt (C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, last page)—and the hero of *The Battlefield*, Francis Gildart, “is on a quest to find his biological parents” (C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, fourth page). Around fall 1968, Stanford met Jim Whitehead—English professor and co-founder, in 1965, of the university’s MFA program in Creative Writing (Whitehead Tribute 1)—and Whitehead was impressed with Stanford’s work to such the extent that he invited Stanford to join the graduate poetry workshop (Ehrenreich; Launius 120-121; Trussell; Stokesbury, 3.15.2015 email). Stanford switched from the College of Business to the College of Arts and Sciences (UArk), studying English (Shugars 12), and in spring 1969, he joined the graduate workshop as an undergraduate (Stokesbury x; UArk), meeting—either then or in short time—poets Leon Stokesbury, Jack Butler, John S. Morris, John Wood, John Stoss, R. S. Gwynn, Ralph Adamo, et al.

In 1969, when Stanford was 20 years old, an early version of his poem “Living,” which had been composed prior to entering the graduate workshop (Stokesbury x), appeared in the university’s literary journal, *Preview: 1968-1969*—an initial occasion in print—under Stokesbury’s editorship (“Living” 21). In May 1969, Allen Ginsberg visited Fayetteville and the MFA program and was immediately drawn to Stanford’s poetry. Several months later, in September, Ginsberg wrote to John Wood, encouraging Stanford to send poems to Charles Plymell, and again in October, noting that “Frank’s poems always seem slightly electric” (Wood, “With Allen” 49; Ginsberg). In late 1969, Stanford met Linda Lee Mencin, with whom he soon began to live—at 115 Skyline Drive, a cabin on Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville—and whom he would ultimately marry (Frank Stanford Papers; Walton).⁴²

STANFORD'S first publication appears to have been in the inaugural, spring 1970 issue of *Tansy*—a thin, stapled wraps magazine based in Lawrence, Kansas—which included poems by Plymell and whose pages Stanford's poems close ("Early Times..." et al, 38-40). More of his poems were printed in *Preview: The Literature*, the journal's 1970 issue.⁴³ In late June 1970, Stanford attended the two week-long Hollins Conference on Creative Writing and Cinema at Hollins College in Virginia,⁴⁴ where he met Irv Broughton, the founding editor of the *Mill Mountain Review* and Mill Mountain Press, and Broughton offered to begin publishing Stanford's poetry (Broughton, "Tracing..." 7; Launius 137-138). Returning from the Hollins Conference, R. S. Gwynn got Stanford hired by the land surveying firm Kemp, Christner and Associates—working as a chainman/rodman on his small crew—and taught Stanford the rudiments of surveying, which would serve as his primary line of work throughout most of the 1970s until his death (Gwynn, 2.26.2008 email; Gwynn, 2.11.2015 email 1; C. D. Wright, "A Wayfaring Stranger" 100).⁴⁵ Summer 1970 was the last term that Stanford attended the University of Arkansas (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email); he left the university without attaining a degree (C. D. Wright, "Frank Stanford" 339; UArk). Alan Dugan visited the University of Arkansas in October 1970 (Stokesbury, 3.13.2015 email; Ehrenreich), and the two poets began a lasting friendship. Stanford's poetry appeared in issues 2, 3, and 4 of the *Mill Mountain Review*, in 1970 and 1971,⁴⁶ and he published prolifically in 1971, with poems also appearing that year in *Aldebaran Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Kayak*, *The Little Review*, *The Nation*, *New American Review*, *Tansy*, and *West Coast Review*;⁴⁷ he was also the editor for *Preview: Eight Poets*, the journal's 1971 issue.⁴⁸

On August 21, 1971, Frank Stanford and Linda Mencin married in Benton County in the far northwest of Arkansas (Certificate of Marriage, Mencin), where her father—retired from the U. S. Navy as an Executive Officer and World War II flying ace—had purchased 300 acres outside of Rogers, Arkansas, near Beaver Lake ("Lt. Adolph Mencin"; Walton). Father Fuhrmann officiated the wedding (Certificate of Marriage, Mencin), and Willett and another longtime Mountain Home friend, "Big Time" Sonny Morris, were Stanford's groomsmen (Walton). The newlyweds continued living in the Mt. Sequoyah cabin—Linda working for Lyndon B. Johnson's social welfare initiative, the War on Poverty, and Stanford continuing to write and publish (Walton).

The marriage was short-lived. The couple separated in mid-May 1972 (Complaint in Equity), and—at least partially as result of his excessive drinking—Stanford's mother convinced him to commit himself (for what turned out to be a mere month-long residency) to the Arkansas State Hospital in Little Rock (Ehrenreich; Launius 147-149)—to and from which Fuhrmann drove him (Ehrenreich).⁴⁹ Mencin (then Linda Stanford) filed for divorce

on July 7, 1972, citing, among other reasons, “alienation and estrangement” by Stanford and litigating for him to pay both parties’ attorney’s fees and court costs (Complaint in Equity).

With a copyright of 1971, Stanford’s first book of poems, *The Singing Knives*, was published by Broughton’s Mill Mountain Press in 1972 (having been delayed in printing), collecting many of the poems from his various journal appearances to that point. *The Singing Knives* is an iconic first book of poetry. At 63 pages (in its 2008 reprint), it is more than double the length of Stanford’s next two books—*Ladies from Hell* and *Field Talk*—combined, and its 25 poems constitute a diverse range of material suggestive of the poet’s broad repertoire; its poems’ lengths range from 21 words (“The Minnow,” *The Singing Knives*, 2008, 28) and four lines (“Poem,” “Narcissus to Achilles” 32, 39) to 416 lines (“The Snake Doctors” 47-63), and the rural, Southern, era-specific landscapes of bizarre, grotesque mystery (e.g., “The Blood Brothers,” “The Singing Knives,” “The Snake Doctors” 7-13, 47-63) are contrasted with examples of exquisite classicism and wide historical reach (e.g., “The Nocturnal Ships of the Past,” “Wishing My Wife Had One Leg,” “Bergman the Burning Ship” 27, 38, 40-41) as well as tautly crafted instant narratives (e.g., “The Picture Show Next Door to the Stamp Store in Downtown Memphis” 29-31). The volume’s leadoff poem, “The Blood Brothers,” introduces eight characters, in addition to the poet’s own textual alter ego, that become recurring characters across Stanford’s poetry (see chapter IV [second paragraph] and VII, the appendix): Born In The Camp With Six Toes, Baby Gauge, Ray Baby, Charlie B. Lemon, Mose Jackson, BoBo Washington, Jimmy, and the midget. The book also introduces the poet’s knack for translational adaptations, or *after* poems—a trademark element of several of his later books, especially *Constant Stranger*, and posthumous works such as *Plain Songs*, *Smoking Grapevine*, and *Automatic Co-Pilot*; in *The Singing Knives*, the first such poem, “Wishing My Wife Had One Leg,” is an uncredited adaption of André Breton’s lengthier poem “L’union libre” (“Free Union”), which Stanford refashions into an ode to caryatids (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 38; Breton, “L’union libre” 30-35), and a second adaption, “The Intruder,” is a semi-acknowledged imitation of W. S. Merwin’s translation of Jean Follain’s poem “Exil” (“Exile”), which Stanford vernacularizes into Southern dialect (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 43; Follain 114-115). John Biguenet writes that the subsequent Stanford work published in the 1970s was “an elaboration and development of the themes, ideas and techniques of” *The Singing Knives* (Bigenet 396), which, Ralph Adamo adds, is “a hybrid of imagism and his own peculiar brand of narrative arising out of the black mud and brown water of the Mississippi delta” (Adamo, “Frank Stanford’s...” 231).

Reconstructing the chronology of Stanford’s mid- to late-1972 movements is arduous, but the gist is as follows. In late July, Broughton and James Babij, a student, picked Stanford up in Subiaco (Babij; Willett, “Correspondence” 409),⁵⁰ and the three traveled by car together to

New England to interview and film several poets (ibid; Launius 148-149), beginning with John Crowe Ransom along the way (in Ohio), followed by a lengthier visit with Richard Eberhart—first in Hanover, New Hampshire, then traveling with Eberhart to his cottage in Cape Rosier, Maine, in early August, for several days (Babij; Eberhart 137; Launius 148-149, 151; Willett, “Correspondence” 409). Eberhart later wrote that Stanford had told him “that he was wanted in Arkansas” and that he “could not go back into the state” (Eberhart 137). After visiting Eberhart, the trio drove south to Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where they boated on a boat of one of Broughton’s relatives (Launius 149) and where Stanford, solo, visited Alan Dugan (ibid; Willett, “Correspondence” 409). Babij left the tour, returning to Seattle (Babij), and Broughton and Stanford proceeded to film Richard Wilbur (in Massachusetts) and Malcolm Cowley (in Connecticut) (Launius 149; Willett, “Correspondence” 409). Broughton then dropped Stanford off in New York (Launius 148; Willett, “Correspondence” 409), where he lived at 56 Harvard Avenue in Staten Island with a dancer from Little Rock, Arkansas named Cheryl Campbell (Willett, “Correspondence” 408-411; Frank Stanford Papers; C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, last page).⁵¹ Stanford attended museums and saw numerous films in New York but only lived there for upwards of a month (Willett, “Correspondence” 408-409, 411-412); his relationship with Campbell failed, and leaving her on September 15th (Willett, “Correspondence” 410-411), he was in Washington, D.C. the following day (Willett, “Correspondence” 411). In a postcard (written September 14th) and letter (postmarked September 16th) to Willett, Stanford wrote, “for now I hold [Linda] closest to my heart. Before, I couldn’t. . . . I will go my way; she will go hers, knowing we are still close. Now we can love. I love everyone” (ibid) and “Now I love her. For I know we will never again be together. . . . Apart forever, we can endure. . . Cheryl was the brightest star. . . Linda is a constellation all by her little self” (Willett, “Correspondence” 412-413). Stanford left the East Coast on a bus (Willett, “Correspondence” 413).

On October 18, 1972, 14 months after their wedding, the divorce between Stanford and Linda Mencin was finalized, with Stanford “neither appearing nor being represented” in court (Divorce Decree). Either that fall or by winter, Stanford was back in Arkansas, living and writing at the New Orleans Hotel in Eureka Springs, where he opened a short-lived cinema named Number Eight, Center Street Theater (Willett, “Correspondence” 414).

On March 3, 1973, while in Neosho, Missouri on a weekend away from Eureka Springs, Stanford met Ginny Crouch, a painter; Stanford and Crouch spent that weekend together, and Crouch visited him the following weekend at the New Orleans Hotel (G. Stanford, 3.4.2008 email 2). At the time, Stanford was writing poems whose publications would be spread across his next several books, and he was working on his epic, *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* (G. Stanford, 3.4.2008 email 1). Stanford and Crouch began living

together, first in a small cabin on the White River in Busch, Arkansas, west of Eureka Springs, in spring/summer of 1973—with Stanford renting a smaller cabin for writing, nearby at Spider Creek—then in a house on the same property beginning in late summer (G. Stanford, 3.4.2008 email 2), and later that year, they moved to a house in Rogers, Arkansas near Beaver Lake (G. Stanford, 3.4.2008 email 1; Shugars 88). During this period, Broughton and Stanford also collaborated on a 25-minute, “dream-like documentary” about Stanford, *It Wasn’t a Dream; It Was a Flood* (“Third Northwest” program), named after a line from Stanford’s poem “The Double Suicide of the Mirror and the Rose” (*What About This* 660-661; 3).

Mill Mountain Press published Stanford’s second book, *Ladies from Hell*, in 1974, followed by three books in 1975: *Field Talk*, *Shade*, and *Arkansas Bench Stone*. The first three of those books contained drawings by Ginny Crouch Stanford, and *Arkansas Bench Stone* contained “Painting/Photograph/Drawings” by her (*Arkansas Bench Stone*, title page). In the early- to mid-1970s, three magazine editors were essential publishers for Stanford: Irv Broughton, John McKernan, and Michael Cuddihy; each editor published at least 14 Stanford poems across three issues each of their magazines—*Mill Mountain Review*, *The Little Review*, and *Ironwood*, respectively—while Stanford was living, for a total of 45 poems between them.⁵² In August 1975, *It Wasn’t a Dream; It Was a Flood* screened at the Third Northwest Film & Video Festival, where it was one of the six winning works (“Third Northwest” program).

In fall 1975, Stanford returned to Fayetteville, where he met and began a relationship, both professional and romantic, with C. D. Wright (*The Battlefield* 385; C. D. Wright, “The Poet...”; Mueller, “Investigator’s Notes”; Shugars 13)—then a student in the MFA program at the University of Arkansas (Colburn)—thus beginning what would become a double life for Stanford between his wife and Wright (Mueller, “Investigator’s Notes”; G. Stanford, 3.6.2008 email; Trussell). In 1976, Stanford’s sixth book, *Constant Stranger*, was published by Mill Mountain Press; the book’s poems repeatedly personify death, as his previous books’ poems had done, but in generally lengthier format—in both their line counts and in their striking titles, such as in “Death and the Arkansas River” and “A Black Cat Crossed the Road I Was Born On” (*Constant Stranger*, 13-15, 44-45). That year, Stanford founded Lost Roads Publishers, an independent literary press (C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 99); he expressed that his intentions, with both his writing and Lost Roads, were to “reclaim the landscape of American poetry” (Hall, “A Major Voice” 29; C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, second page). Lost Roads eventually made great headway under sizable funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, which Stanford applied for and which was granted (Hall, “A Major Voice” 29, “Clean, Well-Lighted” 33). In fall 1976, the Stanfords moved to a house

in southwest Missouri, north of Joplin, on the farm that Ginny Stanford's parents had inherited from her maternal grandparents (G. Stanford, 3.4.2008 email 1; G. Stanford, 3.6.2008 email).

IN 1977, Stanford began publishing Lost Roads's first titles (Hall, "Clean, Well-Lighted" 33), working out of the house that he shared with Wright at 705 Jackson Drive in Fayetteville (Ehrenreich; Mueller, "Incident Report"). The press's first seven titles (numbers 1-12) are copyright 1977; the first six titles were poetry chapbooks—by C. D. Wright, John Stoss, Ralph Adamo, John S. Morris, John McKernan, and Irv Broughton, respectively—and the seventh title (numbers 7-12), whose publication wasn't completed until after Stanford's death, was Stanford's 15,283-line epic, *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, one of the longest poems in American literature.⁵³ *The Battlefield* is a daunting, complicated, cavernous, intellectual work. Bob Holman writes that "[f]or many, it stands as *the* epic poem of the last half of the 20th century, matching up with the work of Pound and Williams" (Holman 12), and Brett Ralph adds that "[i]t just might be our *Ulysses*. . . . There's certainly nothing like it in 20th-century American letters" (Ralph 38). Stanford claimed that he had "got[ten] rid of half of it" and that *St. Francis and the Wolf*, from which it was excerpted, was "also a partial [manuscript]" (Letter to Walker, 4.1974).⁵⁴ The poem is a single stanza of almost entirely unpunctuated poetry.

In 1978, Stanford's separate relationships with Ginny Stanford and C. D. Wright grew increasingly complicated, as Stanford's misrepresentations of his relationship with each woman to the other began to flounder. "He continually denied he was having an affair," Ginny later said (Trussell). Stanford had told her that if she ever left him, he'd kill himself (ibid; Mueller, "Memorandum"); he commonly swore "on his honor as a poet," so that winter, she explains, she "made him swear on his honor as a poet that he wouldn't kill himself" (Trussell). However, in May, she found love letters among his poems, which led to communication with Wright (ibid), and ultimately, to him admitting the nature of his deceptions in writing (Letter to Stanford/Wright, 5.21.1978). In late May, he traveled to New Orleans for a little more than two weeks—spending time with poets Ellen Gilchrist, Ralph Adamo, Kay DuVernet, et al (ibid; Stanford, 6.3.1978 Letter; Trussell)—and on May 21st, he wrote a letter to Ginny and C. D., explaining his accumulated mendacities, writing, "In the beginning things were very simple," and "I hurt you very much but that was never what I wanted to do" (Letter to Stanford/Wright, 5.21.1978). The next day, he wrote a will, bequeathing his entire estate to his wife and Wright and including instructions for the publication of what would become his posthumous books *Crib Death* (1978) and *You* (1979), and other posthumous works, such as *One Finger Zen* ("Will"). No attempts at reconciliations

were successful in the days to come, and Ginny Stanford filed for divorce on June 1st (Divorce Petition).⁵⁵ On Saturday, June 3rd, Stanford returned to Fayetteville, and he wrote another letter to both women, briefer than the May 21st letter—solemnly moving in tone. “Since I have been in New Orleans I have been preparing for something which will soon take place,” he began, writing, “I feel light and I feel pain going away. . . . I have known about this journey for a long time, . . . I feel like an explorer, embarking on a journey I have been charting and studying for many years. I know something of death, so do not be afraid or terrified or lonely. The living spirit, now, is my concern” (Letter to Stanford/Wright, 6.3.1978). Stanford, Ginny, and C. D. talked at length about his transgressions, but arrived at no immediate resolutions (Mueller, “Memorandum”; Trussell). Shortly after 7:00 PM in the evening, Stanford walked into a bedroom, to the bed, and with a .22 caliber revolver,⁵⁶ ended his life with three self-inflicted wounds into his chest near the heart at the age of 29 (Mueller, “Incident Report”).⁵⁷

STANFORD’S second book, *Ladies from Hell*, includes an ominously titled poem, “Death in the Cool Evening” (*Ladies from Hell* 28), containing the lines, “I move / Like the deer in the forest / I see you before you / See me” (1-4),⁵⁸ while another adumbrative line in *Shade*, from “The Hearse on the Other Side of the Canvas” (*Shade* 30-32), reads “I have come to know the timing of my death” (19). An untitled, 3-line draft poem of Stanford’s reads, “I wanted to be a family man / but I couldn’t keep my heart / under a map in a glove box” (*What About This* 615).⁵⁹ In his own words, Stanford was a student of death: “I was studying about death. . . .” he wrote offhandedly to Cuddihy (Letter to Cuddihy, 9.1974, 121). Stokesbury notes of Stanford: “He really was working on a 30-year life span. None of us knew that. But he sure did” (Stokesbury, 4.9.2015 email). Indeed, Stanford’s biography and poetry are irretrievably concatenate, intertwined such that each illuminates the other. A pattern of transitoriness, with elements of brokenness, evidently persists throughout Stanford’s biography, even his bibliography. Stanford’s surname changed from Smith (or, theoretically, first from another surname to “Smith”; see endnote 29) to Alter to Stanford, and while his given name was Francis, he was called Frankie, then Frank. As Francis Gildart says in *The Battlefield*, “I didn’t know what to say when they / asked me my name cause by now I had changed my name so many times I couldn’t / recollect which one I was using,” claiming that he had “done forgot” his original name (10285-10287, 10290). In his brief life, Stanford’s homeplace changed numerous times—a simplified list includes Perry County, Mississippi (his place of birth) to around and in Greenville, Mississippi to Memphis, Tennessee to Snow Lake, Arkansas, back to Memphis, Tennessee (multiple residences) to Mountain Home, Arkansas to Subiaco, Arkansas to numerous residences in Fayetteville, Arkansas to a period of

vagabonding and Staten Island, New York to Eureka Springs, Arkansas to the White River in Arkansas to Rogers, Arkansas, and ultimately, to both Fayetteville, Arkansas, again, and southwest Missouri; as noted, within the earlier transitions, Stanford attended at least eight schools from first through twelfth grades. Many of these locales are represented across his poetry. Stanford's relationships were often similarly ephemeral. His biological father, who—along with his biological mother—departed from his life before he was aware of it, was replaced by an elderly man who passed away when Stanford was 15 years old, arguably before having the opportunity to know the man well,⁶⁰ and his relationships with women were often passing, brief in duration, or diverged prismatically. His oeuvre suffered reflexively from such transitory, broken experiences, as he continually, complicatedly moved poetry across various draft manuscripts, allegedly destroyed some manuscripts, and simply lost others.⁶¹

In an existence marked by such evanescence, Stanford sought out transcendence, interminableness. While the moon was his spatial “familiar,” death was more his temporal link to perpetuity than a terminus. “Really, I visualize the dead as well as the living,” he wrote. “I visualize *you* who I will never know” (“With the Approach” 300). In “Toward Innumerable Futures: The Offering of Frank Stanford’s Poetry,” Pamela Stewart writes that “Stanford’s own taut love *for* the dead is equal to his love for the living,” that his epic’s “very generosity . . . shows him to be interested in everyone’s experience. Suffering is a *fact*,” and that his poetry centers on “timelessness, the diminishment of boundaries” (Stewart, “Toward” 5, 7, 11).

Another pathway out of the prosaic transitions inherent in life and into some lasting sense of identity for Stanford was via a solo inquiry into his origins—a quest for determining the identity of his biological parents and perhaps his genealogical lineage through history. When asked about his biological parents, he frequently quipped “that since he knew nothing about them, he could make them up” ([C. D. Wright], *The Singing Knives*, 1979, [61]); yet, his desire for connecting with his origins is evident across his biography and poetry. Regarding his heritage, he allegedly said, somberly, “Well, I don’t know. I’m adopted” (Moore 37), and he wrote, “I don’t know my past” (*The Light* 86). He utilized his poetry as a means for executing such an ongoing interrogation. I will now move into examining such textual and paratextual instances of Stanford conducting a poetic investigation into the black hole of his own origins as a means for grounding his sense of self.

III. THE POETIC PARENTAL FIGURE: REAL, ADOPTIVE, & IMAGINED

“I want to know
where my real folks is”

The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You

Frank Stanford intentionally obfuscated both his biography and bibliography, conveying details about his life, his publications, and possibly his work, itself, that were actually mere fabrications.⁶² “He was purposefully very mysterious about himself,” Stokesbury explains (Trussell), and Wright notes, “He created a mythology of his life, and his death took on one of its own. Neither the memories nor the myths add up to the true cut of the individual or his art” (C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 100). Consensus has generally held that Stanford composed some variable quantity of poetry in his teens (if not earlier), but authentically dating his early compositions is as difficult a task as clarifying some chronological aspects of his biography. Nonetheless, it was a mere matter of months after he apparently learned of his adoption by Dorothy Stanford that his first poem appeared in print, and he began publishing professionally within two years.

Stanford’s poem “Living” appeared in the University of Arkansas’s literary journal, *Preview: 1968-1969*, published in spring 1969 (“Living,” *Preview* 21; Stokesbury, 3.15.2015 email). The 20-line poem (revised to 19 lines by *The Singing Knives*) depicts the narrator’s mother in its opening quatrain, transiently describing a prayer devotional: “I had my quiet time early in the morning / Eating Almond Joys with Mother. / We’d sit on the back porch and talk to God. / We really had a good time” (1-4). The four stanzas that follow, however, casually divert into time-passing or otherwise inconsequential activities (looking for bottles, intentionally causing a truck to backfire, etc [7, 10]), and much of the poem depicts a character who would become a recurring one across Stanford’s work: Jimmy, modeled after the poet’s cousin, Jimmy Lee (Launius 25).

Indeed, Stanford may have stated that he felt free to make up his biological parents, but delving into that unknown territory appears to have been somewhat out of the poet’s comfort zone—especially in the earlier books. More frequently, Stanford portrays his adoptive parents, and while he does occasionally poeticize his biological mother, he generally refrains from doing so with his biological father; most portrayals of a father figure in the poetry comprise some varied semblance of Stanford’s adoptive father, A. F. Stanford, who, incidentally, was also called Frank.

In *The Singing Knives*, the father figure is referenced but frequently absent, marked by a tone of lateness—looming larger in absence than in a materialized presence. In the volume’s title poem, “The Singing Knives” (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 9-13), amid an unrestrained chant of a list of dreams, the narrator includes, “I dreamed my father was wading the river of death / With his heart in his hand” (35-36), and “The Albino” concerns a raucous man named MacCulduff (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 19-21), who, the narrator notes, is “[his] father’s foreman” (2)—though the father is absent in the poem—but the poem in the book that most overtly concerns a parental figure (father or mother) is “Elegy for My Father,” an elegy for A. F. Stanford (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 22-23). “Elegy for My Father” contains the dates “1883 - 1963” below the title, which are, erroneously, A. F. Stanford’s vital dates; A. F. Stanford lived from September 24, 1884 until August 1963 (U. S. SSDI, A. F. Stanford). He worked as a successful levee engineer for many decades, retiring with ailing health in 1961 at age 76 (Shugars 137); he died at age 78. The poem was printed in *Preview: The Literature* in 1970 with the aforementioned dates (“Elegy for My Father” 5), then appeared under a different title, “Fish on the Trees” (with merely the notation of “*elegy*”—no dates included) in the *Chicago Review* in 1971 (“Fish on the Trees” 7-8), before being collected under its earlier title in *The Singing Knives*, again with the same vital dates; it is unclear how or why Stanford mixed up his adoptive father’s birth year.

“Elegy for My Father” is a 34-line poem of seven stanzas, framed by two italicized sestet alluding to an episode of *Our Gang* (*The Little Rascals*). A. F. Stanford is not a present character in the poem. After the introductory *Our Gang*-focused stanza, the poem’s immediate narrative begins, “The devil was beating his wife / In the Bear Creek Woods” (7-8), referring to the forest area of eastern Arkansas actually known as the St. Francis National Forest that contains Bear Creek Lake and connects with the St. Francis River—along which A. F. Stanford built levees (C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, fourth page). As in “Living,” nugatory activities are described; the narrator’s fingers are in his ear and in his toes “looking for jam” (11-12), as he waits for a black levee worker to “set off the dynamite” (13-14). The subsequent three stanzas describe the before-and-after setting of the scene, in which “sticks of powder / Under every stump” (16-17) and a diving kingfisher (22) transition into the explosion of dynamite and swim bladders (23). The narrator nonchalantly describes the aftermath of A. F. Stanford’s everyday work in the following stanza, in which a bisected bullfrog flies “under the rainbow,” landing on the riverbank (24-26). “It hopped for the rest of itself,” the narrator observes; “It hopped for the rest of its life” (27-28). The bookend sestet mystify the poem’s linearity. The opening sestet allusively describes the latter half of the August 28, 1937 *Our Gang* episode, “Fishy Tales,” in which Butch demands that Alfalfa’s leg be “dislokated” as retribution for a skit gone awry, so Spanky and Buckwheat insert a fish

into a sock to pass for Alfalfa's leg; as Junior and a crab tickle Alfalfa's foot beneath the bed, he makes bizarre reflex noises (he "sang" [6]) in turn (1-6; "Fishy Tales"). The closing sestet is effectively divided into three couplets, presented in jumbled order—a present tense repetition of the Bear Creek Woods lines (29-30), another allusion to the "Fishy Tales" episode (31-32), and a direct acknowledgement of A. F. Stanford: "My father's socks sit in the drawer / Like old bullfrogs" (33-34), disjointedly connecting the sock of Alfalfa's fake leg with the dismembered bullfrog. Implicit in the closing two lines is, again, the very absence of A. F. Stanford; the socks and bullfrogs are disconnected from life, and A. F. Stanford had been deceased for seven years by the time that "Elegy for My Father" was first printed. Death is treated merely as a fact of life; the father has departed, and the narrator appears to have simply observed it happen. In his posthumous book, *Crib Death*, Stanford reuses a few associations from "Elegy for My Father" in a line in "Living the Good Life" (*Crib Death* 48-49), "My father would sing like a bull frog" (37), which is followed by a cryptic trio of lines: "I thought my father was a flat-out wonder, / A faraway and constant stranger in my midst. / He wasn't even my father, the cuckold" (38-40). It is generally believed that Stanford respected, even idolized, his adoptive father.

Apart from "Elegy for My Father," Stanford's poem most obviously composed as an elegiac remembrance of A. F. Stanford is the 9-line uncollected poem, "A. F. Stanford," effectively an elegiac dirge ("A. F. Stanford" 397). "My window is long and quiet, / Like my father fishing in the rain. / The moon is his dead hand" (1-3), the narrator begins, before switching narrative mode to second-person to address his father directly for the poem's closing six lines. The father has cast his good lure into the tree limbs (5-6), and the narrator offers a directive close framed in a traditional rhythm and rhyme: "Back off, old man, into the deep, / So you can throw with your eyes / Closed, so you can fish in your sleep" (7-9).

BOTH the biological and adoptive parental figures of Frank Stanford (or his textual alter ego) appear infrequently through the mid-1970s Mill Mountain Press books. The narrator's father is decidedly absent from *Ladies from Hell*. A reference to A. F. Stanford's levees, likened to burial grounds, is included in Stanford's third book, *Field Talk*, in "Fire Left by Travelers" (*Field Talk* 28): "I walked down these levees / my father's long graves / which he raised like a pharaoh" (27-29). Two poems in *Shade*, the fourth book, depict the narrator's father, again absent. The poems consist of single stanzas—14 lines and eight lines, respectively. "Soybeans" describes an encounter with a book handled and read by the narrator's gritty father the evening before (*Shade* 5). "The book is full of my father's eyelashes / He treats the pages rough / like a woman," the poem begins (1-3), noting that the book's onionskin pages smell of Four Roses bourbon (8-10), and implying, perhaps, that no

tears appear to have hit the pages, in “He will not weep He knows / most folks don’t keep their word” (11-12). The second poem, “A Man Born in the Forest,” is an 8-line totem of surrealism (*Shade* 21), in which a deer exiting a woods is like “a light skinned woman” (1-3); the deer speaks to the narrator’s father (4), whose Panama hat blows in the wind (7). The poem’s series of hallucinatory images are nonetheless grounded in physical experience, as the woods are identified as the “Snow Lake Woods” (3), or those near Snow Lake, Arkansas—a small levee camp village along the Mississippi River which appears in *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* (459, 1508, 2309, etc) and elsewhere in Stanford’s work, the village where he began first grade (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email), and, as C. D. Wright notes, one of the locales of his childhood summers (Henriksen 366).

Again, consensus is that Stanford respected and idolized A. F. Stanford, and a note in the poet’s fifth book, *Arkansas Bench Stone*, includes the following: “I dedicate this book to my mother, Dorothy, my grandmother, Carolyn, and to the memory of my father, Albert Franklin, legendary figures” (*Arkansas Bench Stone* copyright page). R. S. Gwynn, who taught Stanford the rudiments of land surveying, believes that surveying appealed to Stanford’s desire to connect to A. F. Stanford, whom he “clearly admired” (Gwynn, 2.26.2008 email; Gwynn, 2.11.2015 email 1), and Stanford’s poem “Lament of the Land Surveyor” in *Arkansas Bench Stone* turns to reminiscence in its closing two stanzas (*Arkansas Bench Stone* 18), when the narrator is reminded of his hair falling on his own father’s boots (25-26)—“And the smell of his jacket / And his straight razor like a lamp / Glowing in the window before me” (27-29). As with the image of the socks resting in the drawer in “Elegy for My Father,” the lateness inherent in absence and memory is a key trait of these image associations—again centered on specific articles of clothing, relics. It is as though the detachment of Stanford from his biological father (or parents) was merely relocated to—resumed its place in—the forced disconnection between Stanford and his adoptive father. The motif is continued in “Will,” a 48-line poem of 12 quatrains in the same volume (*Arkansas Bench Stone* 23-24), in which the narrator mentions shirts that his father bequeathed to him. A. F. Stanford died when Frank Stanford was entering the tenth grade (U. S. SSDI, A. F. Stanford), and in the poem, the narrator notes, “My father left me his wool shirts,” explaining that he proceeded to wear them “All through high school and college” (1, 5, 7). After some years (9-16), “Word came I was a bastard,” the narrator continues (18), and he describes a psychic effect with an onset of apathy and nocturnal behavior that aligns with the type of change in disposition and outlook that Stanford’s family and friends recall noticing in him after he learned of his adoption from Dorothy Stanford (25-32). He explains, “In the tavern / The old men who knew my father / Get drunk to tell me / What a no count I am // So I gave them the beautiful shirts / The houndstooths and plaids / And the

herringbone” (33-39), before summarizing, “I left the heavens for the taverns / And the shirts for the old men on pensions” (45-46).

The mother figure, presented as a character resembling Dorothy Stanford, also appears in *Arkansas Bench Stone*, in the 42-line muted narrative, “Inventory” (*Arkansas Bench Stone* 28-29), in which O.Z.—a recurring Stanford character introduced earlier in the book, in “Island” (*Arkansas Bench Stone* 16)—plays a tertiary role. In the nuanced, understated poem, a shady, distracted character, nonetheless clothed in new attire, enters the family store to purchase a knife (1-2, 5-7), and the percipient mother tends to him (with her naïve, presumably young son present), complimenting his “beautiful shirt” (6), explaining that the knife he chooses is expensive as “It’s from Sweden” (19-20), and attempting, hospitably, to sell a whetstone to him (25-26, 31-32); implied in the poem’s supporting details is that the man is recently released from incarceration and seeking reprisal—the mother maintains a collected demeanor to balance the situation. (In “The Gospel Bird” [*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 16-18], the narrator mentions that his father, who resembles A. F. Stanford, “bought the burnt-out land and store” [III.1-2].) In *Constant Stranger*, Stanford’s sixth book, the mother figure appears in “A Black Cat Crossed the Road I Was Born On,” a 55-line poem primarily comprised of a series of personifications of death—Death as a child abuser (13-14), Death as a laborer (21-22), Death as an auctioneer (33-35), etc (*Constant Stranger* 44-45). A quatrain near the poem’s center, however, functions as a narrational aside: “My mother used to beg, / ‘Son, don’t write about Death, / We’ll cross that ditch soon enough.’” The poet’s alter ego, however, concludes, “I ask you to have respect for the dead” (23-26). Incidentally, Launius remarks Dorothy Stanford’s alleged preference for a conservative, courtly poetics (Launius 149-150), and Ruth Rogers notes that Dorothy thought that her son’s poetry “was awful” (Rogers, 12.4.2008 conversation); both Launius and Rogers observe that, at least in some respects, Dorothy considered her son a failure (Launius 264; *ibid*).

In *Constant Stranger*, depictions of the father figure are again marked by absence, lateness. One of the personifications of death in the volume’s leadoff poem, “Death and the Arkansas River”—arguably Stanford’s archetypal poem of death personifications (*Constant Stranger* 13-15)—portrays the father as deceased, with coins over his eyes: “Death would signal ahead / That the half-dollar you stole to flatten / You lifted from your father’s eye” (23-25). Likewise, one of the personifications in “A Black Cat Crossed the Road I Was Born On” also locates the father figure as presumably deceased: Death “is selling a bed / That belonged to your father” (36-37). However, the poet’s most striking mention of a father figure in *Constant Stranger* begins the poem “The First Twenty-Five Years of My Life” (*Constant Stranger* 21), ostensibly referring to A. F. Stanford: “I met my father in a library in Memphis, Tennessee. / Bees flew out of the sun” (1-2). It’s unclear where or when Francis

Gildart Alter met A. F. Stanford, but A. F. Stanford is actually listed as one of the sponsors of Francis's baptism, a mere month after his birth (Baptismal Register).

NOTABLE explorations by Stanford into origins—including genuine experimentations at fathoming the biological parental figure—are unquestionably undertaken in *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*. The hero of *The Battlefield*, Francis Gildart—a 12-year-old clairvoyant poet (2844, 12012)—is on a quest to locate his biological parents. “I broke into State Govment building and stole my case history,” he hyperbolizes (10594). Francis is adult-like (in experience and intellect) on his quixotic quest, and chivalrously, he even rides a horse (which mysteriously metamorphoses into a mule, pony, stallion, etc).⁶³ The journey is loosely structured within a Civil Rights era, freedom ride-focused narrative—the bulk of the narrative takes place c. 1960⁶⁴—and the epic is generally composed in “an African-American vernacular of the rural South, a speech more familiar to [A. F. Stanford's] generation than the poet's own” (C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, fourth page). By a considerable margin, *The Battlefield* is the work of Stanford's that most intensively probes into the questions of his origins—expected, perhaps, considering the poem's magnitude—both depicting his adoptive parents and, though still to a lesser extent, speculatively imagining his biological parents in attempts to “make them up” ([C. D. Wright], *The Singing Knives*, 1979, [61]).

In the epic's third line, Francis imagines his “first” mother as deceased: “I am waving goodbye to the casket of my first mammy” (3). Early in the poem, Stanford experiments with ruralizing the adoptive parents into backwoods savages in, e.g., “after the funeral a drunk peckerhead pulled a pistol on daddy / mother had a double bit axe just in case but daddy kicked his teeth in” (30-31), but he soon settles for depictions of them that double remarkably well for A. F. and Dorothy Stanford. In short order, they are educated, informed individuals, e.g., “I know daddy is a mathematician I know mother was a communist” (268), and, in a description of the mother resembling that in “Living”: “I know mother reads on the porch mother reads in the boat to me” (414).

As the poem develops, Francis's functioning parental figures become virtual replicas of Stanford's adoptive parents, and the depiction of A. F. Stanford as an educated figure—indeed, a levee engineer, “a big shot” (3792)—is substantiated. The astronomer, a developed character persistent in the poem, “talks to daddy about physics and floods,” Francis explains (386); “my father,” he notes, “is a scholar” (8967), and he mentions his “father's drafting instruments” (14359). Even the rare physical description is a match—A. F. Stanford was a tall, slender man, 64 years senior to Frank Stanford (WWI Draft Registration Card), and Francis notes, “everytime I looked out the window I saw a tall man on a horse that was / my daddy” (153-154); in *Shade*, “A Man Born in the Forest” mentions the Panama hat of the

narrator's father, and in *The Battlefield*, Francis likewise mentions, "I gave daddy a new Panama hat" (6396). Clear examples of Francis's adoptive father resembling A. F. Stanford, the levee engineer, include: "daddy makes us live like the crew in a shack or a tent" (237), "the house was headquarters for my daddy's camp fifty years ago when they used / mules instead of cats" (6447-6448), "I was riding alone with an old negro born in the 1880's like my father" (7640), "I found out a very long time ago in my father's camp are many tents" (7685), "there was a good time in camp that night daddy shut the camp down the next day / for a holiday" (8913-8914), and most definitively, "the funnel probably done bounced off Albert Franklin's levee" (6518). As with representations of A. F. Stanford in Stanford's briefer, earlier books, in *The Battlefield*, Francis's adoptive father generally isn't a present, active character as much as an absent, referenced individual, and like Death, personified across Stanford's poetry, Francis's father does not participate in dialogue and rarely expresses himself with words; he is removed, distanced, elevated, "legendary." A. F. Stanford died roughly three years after *The Battlefield's* narrative action, and in one of the poem's ethereal asides, Francis mentions, "I dreamed I was sitting at the end of the table cause daddy was dead" (5335).

Francis's adoptive mother is focused, disciplined, erudite, and religious—a character composite of unequivocal likeness to Dorothy Stanford. Francis remarks, "she was so pretty her hair like smoke" (159). Launius writes that Dorothy Stanford pushed Frank to "become well-versed in the classics," including Shakespeare, even as early as elementary school (Launius 67), and Francis's adoptive mother reads both for herself and to him, he notes (414), and apparently encourages his friends to read, as he mentions that O.Z. "read all the books mother gave him" (6380). "I know the old legends mother told me," Francis adds (403), and in "The Books"—a 460-line poem from *St. Francis and the Wolf* with Francis as the protagonist ("The Books" 381-392)—Francis says, "well these books mother gave me are full of lies / whatever they tell me / I'm still going to dream" (403-405). Nonetheless, he responds to her passion—either catering to her own reading tastes or looking to influence her with his own—mentioning, "I gave mother The Poetry of Emily Dickinson" (6400); in an interview with Irv Broughton, Stanford rates Dickinson as one of his favorite poets (Broughton, "Frank Stanford" 307). Francis continues, "I know she woke up one night / she said look Frankie at the cross / in the heavens / it was as she said the cross was a flaming mast" (6401-6404). Maintaining consistency, nearly 2,000 lines after mentioning that his mother had been a communist, he repeats the notion (2112). His mother possesses an air of gentility, and Francis has streaks of rebellion; Jimmy, Francis's cousin and sidekick—approximately six years his senior (7641, 11441; see VII.A for "Jimmy" in the appendix)—remarks, "you scare

me sometimes boy I know when you have to you act like your mother wants / but I seen you do some crazy looking shit” (5283-5284).

Despite painting these piecemeal collages of his adoptive parents across thousands of lines of the epic’s poetry, Francis acknowledges that—given the narrative’s sizable scope—their place in the poem is relatively muted:

it is strange that at my age I mention my mother and father least of all
 I feel guilty
 it is like they would read a play where everyone but them was mentioned
 this problem won’t ever go away it comes back ever year like the geese (10104-10107)

Perhaps Francis’s hushed portrayals of his adoptive parents are aligned with the very fact that he is attempting to locate his biological parents; in a sense, he positions his biological mother and adoptive mother in opposing corners. He fantasizes:

I broke into State Govment building and stole my case history but before I
 had time to read it all the batteries went dead on my flashlight just think
 if I hadn’t a stayed up all night with the flashlight under the covers
 the night before reading that book mother gave me I’d a knowed I really would
 (10594-10597)

The titles of father (often “daddy”) and mother interchangeably refer to Francis’s adoptive and biological parents. Francis’s use of “mammy” in referring to his “first” mother arguably invokes a sense of infancy (3, 9782). Stanford portrays his biological parents variously across his work. In *The Battlefield*, Francis envisions his biological mother as deceased: “I am dead like my mother I hold my hands over the fire / like the lightning that struck her” (3164-3165). He describes the relationships to his biological and adoptive mothers as yoked: “I who was betrothed to my mothers twice Mary Magdalene and I of the darkest tower” (13274). Just as Dorothy Stanford, having adopted her children as a single parent, referred to Frank as a “chosen child,” to Frank and Ruth as “chosen children” (Launius 22, 153; Shugars 64), Francis highlights the distinction and its inherent absence of a father figure: “I was not chosen so I don’t accept the curse of the father I am chosen by a / woman didn’t the Laws shake creation my fust mammy said” (9781-9782). A legitimate reading of a largely undeveloped character, Mama Covoe (or Auntie Covoe [12762]), and one that Shugars adopts (Shugars 68-69), locates her—a presumably black, early caretaker of Francis—as his “first” mother, as, shortly after he mentions waving goodbye to the casket of his “first mammy” (3), Mama Covoe is mentioned as deceased (36), she is indeed motherly to him (50-51), and he later calls her “Mammy” (4281-4282). The reading arguably entails an

interpretive subtext, as Stanford allegedly wondered if he might, to some variable degree, have been African-American (Trussell). When Vico—a deaf and mute late-poem character with whom Francis converses via sign language—observes, “I’ve also noticed in your / speech by reading your lips how you can change your dialect like the gait of a / horse” (9494-9496), Francis replies, “I don’t want to talk about that / you see when I’s small I thought I’s double exposed I don’t know what I / thought I still don’t know” (9496-9498). The quest toward solving the mystery of his origins continues onward, unsolved; “I don’t know” is Stanford’s repeated choice of words in referring to his and Francis’s beginnings. Another reading of the poem’s opening could interpret the ambiguities less literally, indeed as a double entendre—Francis’s biological mother as deceased (“I am dead like my mother”), as if that past is a kind of past life, and the poem charts his post-adoption life; “if I go into all my past lives it will take all day,” he says (355).

In Francis’s incognizance of his biological father’s identity, he innocently reimagines his father to be Charlie Chaplin’s vagrant character from 1914-1936, the Little Tramp; Francis says, “ain’t but one man alive could be my / daddy and they run him out a ways back I had a dream bouten it but I believe it / only one fellah and that’s the Little Tramp he gone be my pappy I knows he will” (10472-10474). Francis explains that he mailed eleven letters to the Little Tramp (10475), telling him why he “aimed to have him for a daddy” (10476): “you is just the / opposite from what you do and what you mean and that is the way I am” (10476-10477). Francis’s supposed hopes are dashed at the get-go, though; he explains, “the Unity States sent them all back and said return to sender no such person / no such place damn if that didn’t send me off when I knowed he was real” (10479-10480). Blending cinematic fiction with reality, Francis continues that he and a friend “went to see him a thousand times at that place in Memphis” (10481), rhetorically asking, “how else / I gone get the idea him that has a tear in his eye when the rest is laughing” (10481-10482).

Francis’s intended adoption, as it were, of the Little Tramp as his father continues, in scenes both humorous and touching. Slightly later, Francis says to a peer, “you want to see a pitchu of my daddy” (10903), then pulls the picture from his wallet; “shit this ain’t yo daddy man” (10916), the boy replies, “that’s a pretty good line I believe I’ll pull that someday” (10918), and when Francis persists, the conversation ensues as:

look now I know this ain’t yo pappy
 yes it is I promise I really do I swear cross my heart and hope to die
 this is a pitchu of Cholly Chaplain man
 he says you ain’t fooling me he ain’t yo kin
 I promise he is I do I really mean it he really is really and truly
 he’s my daddy I know he is he might not but he does true blue I promise (10922-10927)

Francis's overt naiveté stands in contrast to his general precocity and acuity throughout the epic. Near the poem's close is a series of its most frequently cited lines: "I'll just bleed so the stars can have something dark / to shine in / look at my legs I am the Njinsky of dreams" (15041-15043). Stanford infuses a cinematic humor into them with the lines that follow, though: "my new daddy is going to be C.C. and he done what he done cause he was / Miss Pavlova's best friend how else you think he done it" (15044-15045).⁶⁵

ALL of Stanford's poetry volumes following *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* are, naturally, posthumous works. Apart from "Living the Good Life," *Crib Death* contains few new depictions of the narrator's father figure. The mother is mentioned in mere passing in "The Home Movie of Those Who Are Dead Now" (*Crib Death* 24), amid scattered visions of coexisting chaos and injustice: "My mother changing a tire / For Martin Luther King's father" (24-25). However, the 26-line, single stanza declarative, political poem "Terrorism" is roughly framed around directive notes to the narrator's mother, to whom the narrator is respectful, but from whom the narrator must disengage (*Crib Death* 46). The narrator slips out the back door with his pistol and his mother's money (6-8), lighting out for Washington, D.C. (10-11), determined to efface an incorrigibly corrupt machine (20-23). He says, "They are evil, mother, and I am / Going to take it all out, in one motion, / The way you taught me to clean a fish, / Until all that is left is the memory of their voice" (ibid). For the narrator, ratification (or overhaul) of the political system is the meaningful, pressing concern, not the religion to which his mother holds (1-2), and not daily trifles, to which the narrator metaphorically likens the short-lived mayflies (18-19). The poem closes mystically, "Mother, the sad dance on fire" (26). The assumed differences in perspective, presented as respectful disagreements, mirror ones endured by the poet and his adoptive mother.

Often, Stanford's depictions of parental figures are pastoral, if atavistic. The penultimate stanza of *Crib Death*'s 32-line closing poem, "The Light the Dead See," describes a specific image that those who have recently died espy (*Crib Death* 50). "They see their father sitting in a field," it explains (23). "The harvest is over and his cane chair is mended. . . / Then they see their mother / Standing behind him with a pair of shears. / The wind is blowing. / She is cutting his hair" (24, 27-30). The bucolic, even idyllic existence of the parental figures in "The Light the Dead See" is not misaligned with that in "The History of John Stoss," from Stanford's subsequent posthumous volume, *You* (*You* 46-47). The second half of the poem describes the empathy held by John Stoss, Stanford's friend from the University of Arkansas, for the types of pastoral individuals described in the poem's first three stanzas; the second stanza renders "farmgirls" on "front porches" (6), mentioning "their fathers' fields" (9), and noting that "They did not want to hear their mothers weeping / Over their

cracked plates” (10-11). The narrators’ own fathers, however, continue to generally bear likeness to the poet’s adoptive father. The poem “Source” from *You* depicts a mysterious undertaker-like, bass-playing, wayfaring figure, whom the young narrator struggles to identify (*You* 13-14); however, the narrator’s father—who possesses a preference for whiskey and a sagely aura (not unlike the narrator’s father in “Soybeans,” from *Shade*)—knows the figure’s identity. The narrator remarks that when the man quit playing his bass, “my father came with a bottle of whiskey” (12), and “I asked my father who the man was, / He said you’ll know him one of these days” (15-16).

Apart from isolated poems, Stanford’s subsequent published poetic works are included in *What About This: Collected Poems of Frank Stanford*. In *Plain Songs*, a collection of translational adaptations—“versions” and “improvisations” (*What About This* 381)—after 20th century French poet Jean Follain, the 17-line, single stanza poem “Branches Pushed Away by Scarred Birds” begins with a traditional Southern image, “My mother used to pour me ice tea / from a pitcher so heavy she needed / both her stout arms” (1-3), before shifting focus (*What About This* 398), and the opening tercet of the 12-line, four tercet poem “Death and the Young Man” from *Flour the Dead Man Brings to the Wedding* presents a similar, comfortably nostalgic depiction (*What About This* 522): “The birds swirl in the afternoon / Like fixings in the dark pot / My mother stirred” (1-3); likewise, in *The Battlefield*, Francis remarks his “mother’s Thanksgiving dressing” (4377). In *Smoking Grapevine*, the poem “Past Times” (*What About This* 423-424), after Nicanor Parra’s “Pasatiempos” (Parra 88, 90), and consisting of seven quintains and a closing line, displaces the poet figure—whose past times include “writing surrealist poetry on the walls of the funeral parlor” and “submitting poetry” for publication (9, 20)—into a narratee of second-person narration (i.e., the reader becomes, arguably, the poet’s alter ego); in another act suggesting absence or lateness of the father figure, the narratee untunes his father’s guitar (6). A couple surrealist poems in *Automatic Co-Pilot*, a collection of translational adaptations after various poets, mention the father figure in passing, again as mental images of disconnection, unenhanced by any contextual bases;⁶⁶ “The Horse’s Blood,” a 7-line poem after Yukio Mishima, contains the image, “Light bread my father put in his shoes” (2), and “Whorehouse,” a 7-line poem after Comte de Lautréamont, mentions, “And my father looks at me swimming the river” (6), presented as a mere glimmer (*What About This* 457, 460). Via his narrators, it is as if the poet continually struggles to connect to his late adoptive father—just as he struggles to fathom his biological father (despite feeling free, allegedly, to invent his identity).

In *Mad Dogs*, in the 40-line, 10-quatrains dream-narrative poem “Porch Chair”—first published in July 1976 in *Out There* (“Porch Chair” 87)—the struggle continues, affording a legitimate biographical reading arguably centered on A. F. Stanford’s deteriorating health

and death (*What About This* 475-476). The narrator explains that “About seventeen years ago” (or roughly the late 1950s, if subtracted from the mid-1970s), he traveled with his father and “[t]he chauffeur” (i.e., Charlie B. Lemon) to New Orleans, then to Atlanta, in search of “him”—presumably Death (1-2, 6-8); Charlie B. Lemon (1926-2003)—introduced in *The Singing Knives*’s leadoff poem, “The Blood Brothers,” and a central character in *The Battlefield*—was a Memphis resident and A. F. Stanford’s chauffeur (U. S. SSDI, Lemon; C. D. Wright, “Note on *The Battlefield*” 159; Coleman, 2.18.2015 email). The poem blurs reality with dream, manifested, e.g., in a conflation of tense, as in “We get on a boat. No, we got on a boat” (17). Finding Death in neither city (2-3, 9), they return to Memphis, to the luxury Peabody Hotel (22, 26-28), where A. F. Stanford had an office (Letter to Cuddihy, 9.1974, 122). There, in Memphis, they have nearly tracked Death, as “All the sinners / They had to run” (21-22), and the narrator’s father begins to prepare for his formal departure, as he “changes his shirts seven times” (22); his ill health is mentioned, as he is “Drunk from sickness and dreams” (23), and, in a deathly image of levees reminiscent of the “long graves” in “Fire Left by Travelers,” his levees are allusively described as “his islands around him, / His deathward dirt” (23-24). Death, himself, has apparently been lurking in the gardens, perhaps for some time (or else the reader is): “Long ago, in the South, Charlie B. Lemon, / Tangle Eye, and I scaled fish in the fountain in the lobby of the Pea / Body Hotel. Stranger in the garden I thought you should know” (26-28). In one of the rare moments in Stanford’s poetry in which the father figure verbally expresses himself, the narrator’s father, sitting up in bed, exclaims, “Death I’m gone coldcock you” (29-30), but the poem’s late lines allude to an alternate fate, then describe its aftermath. The narrator announces to the “Strangers in the field, smoothing your clothes” that the past is essentially irreparable, the future unavoidable, that they will “have no luck” with their regrets (35-36); “It is summer,” the reader is informed (39), and life and its mundane routines simply carry on: “The spots on the dog grow into berries, the men are loading / Sacks of shit one minute, unloading ice the next” (39-40).

The Last Panther in the Ozarks contains another dream-narrative for the narrator’s father in the 12-line poem “Riverlight” (*What About This* 492). As with the conflation of tense in “Porch Chair,” action and memory, or dream, are rubbed together again in “Riverlight” to create a unified flame of tense, as though the narrator’s memories and dreams are so lucid that the poem’s narrative action could be occurring in the present. “My father and I lie down together. / He is dead,” the poem begins (1-2), before describing a present tense narrative action in which the father is participant. Father and son watch the stars (3), and the narrator recalls the spiritual effect that his father felt from his work (6-7). The sentence that follows suggests that the father’s work aligns with the levee contract work

of A. F. Stanford, as “And I imagine the way he had fear, / The ground turning dark in a rain” invokes images of failing levees (8-9). The poem closes with a role reversal, again blending past and present, reality and reverie: “Now he gets up. // And I dream he looks down in my eyes / And watches me die” (10-12). An alternate penultimate stanza in a draft manuscript of the poem notably includes further remembrances of the father’s articles of clothing, as with those of socks, shoes, and shirts in other poems: “He asks if he ever hit me. / Then I remember his hands. / I imagine them under his gloves” (*What About This* 488). A brief, uncollected poem, “Spilled Yolks,” also associates the death of the narrator’s father and violence (*What About This* 631), beginning, “Seen after my father died / I was in my boat / Reading about the poets of times past” (1-3), before the narrator describes a disconnected hillside scene implying that a stranger has beaten a dog (4-12).

Clearly, Stanford portrays his adoptive parents more frequently than he imagines his biological parents in the poetry, but *The Battlefield* is not the only work that ventures into the latter, to “make them up.” In *Ladies from Hell*, the narrator of the poem “Twilight”—a 20-line poem alternating tercets and couplets (*Ladies from Hell* 27), adapted after John Knoepfle’s translation (also titled “Twilight”) of César Vallejo’s 11-line poem “Medialuz” (Vallejo 192-193)—repeatedly expresses romantic longing, in “I have dreamed of escape” (1, 6, 11), “a forever” (7); the lines are nearly identically worded to Knoepfle’s translation (which employs “flight” as opposed to “escape”), but Stanford’s version thrice enounces the former line (instead of twice, as in the Vallejo poem), once beginning each tercet, and rephrases and reformats a trio of mid-stanza lines in the Vallejo poem to begin the fourth tercet with a distinct variation, an ultimateness: “I have dreamed of a mother / some fresh greens in a newspaper / and the stars of dawn’s trousseau” (16-18). Thus, the poem’s first couplet, “Along the dock some mother / and at fifteen giving her breast to the hour” (4-5), might arguably be read to refer to the narrator’s own biological mother (though the lines are similar in the Vallejo poem). Resolving that his escape is “buried on the beach / like a bowsprit” (12-13), however (which is entirely Stanford’s addition), the poem despairingly concludes, “The length of a dock . . . / the length of a drowning throat” (19-20); the closing couplet is also lifted nearly verbatim from Knoepfle’s translation but, in light of Stanford’s stanzaic reformatting and textual repetitions/additions, reads with a personal finality.

Aligning with that arguable vision of the biological mother as unfit, in another poem in *The Last Panther in the Ozarks*, “Pits” (*What About This* 497), the narrator presumably imagines his biological mother as a kind of trollop, one who transmitted gonorrhea to him, in “I go on and I tremble / With your back in my blood, / The clap my mother left me” (19-21), and that vision of the biological mother—the same vision in which Francis Gildart imagines himself as a “low born” “bastard”—is continued in another posthumous collection, *Flour the*

Dead Man Brings to the Wedding, in the poem “1949.” For Stanford, self-mythology appears to have functioned as an escape, and his fanciful imagination traveled far. “His imagination was more factual than his real life,” C. D. Wright notes (Trussell). The phantasmagorical front matter sections and copyright pages of Stanford’s books comprise one example of such experimentations. Another such experimentation relates to age; Stanford routinely claimed that he was born on August 1, 1949, not August 1, 1948. Possibly the first such instance in print was in 1971, in *Preview: Eight Poets*, for which he was editor; his contributor’s note begins, “Frank Stanford born 1949 in Greenville, Mississippi” (*Preview: Eight Poets* contents page). Stanford’s Mill Mountain Press books contain no biographical notes, but he continued the fabrication in his contributor’s note for his anthology appearance in *Fifty Contemporary Poets: The Creative Process* in 1977; his note begins, “Frank Stanford was born in 1949, Greenville, Mississippi” (“With the Approach” 304), and the same language begins his biographical note for his first posthumous volume, *Crib Death* (*Crib Death* 55). The myth is difficult to eradicate and remains strong even today, as the Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data on the copyright pages of both his selected poems (1991) and collected poems (2015) volumes begins, “Stanford, Frank, 1949-1978” (*The Light* copyright page; *What About This* copyright page). Understanding the extent of that particular bit of self-mythology illuminates the reading of the 1-line poem “1949” (*What About This* 513). The stolid poem reads simply:

1949

A whore blowing smoke in the dark.

The poem simultaneously perpetuates the poet’s self-mythologized birth year and imaginatively suggests his entry into the world; as, according to the mythologized tidbit, he would have been conceived in 1948, the interpretive reading is that the woman in the poem is smoking not after a sexual experience but, rather, after giving birth. These readings of “Pits” and “1949” shed light on other poems, such as “The Cross” in *Smoking Grapevine* (*What About This* 428), which begins, “Before long I’ll be going back home / to the wide open arms of the cross. . . / what a whore / what a mother the cross is” (1-2, 7-8).

A biographical reading of the 15-line poem “Day After Tomorrow” from *Some Poems Who Dreamed They Were Mandolins and a Dark Bread* could locate the narrator’s father in a rare instance in Stanford’s work of an imagined biological father (*What About This* 549). The poem’s opening describes a dead bride (1-4), before mentioning a traveling carnival splitting off from “the trick rider my father / traveling through the courtyards” (5-7). The father mutters to himself (9-11), and the narrator continues, “he said these things he must have / been a gypsy / there are times I think he was / like this” (12-15).

Indeed, and naturally, Stanford wrote more of his adoptive parents than his biological parents—who remained a mystery to him; as he allegedly “knew nothing about” his “real” parents, writing them in his poetry required imagining, conjuring, fancying them—a task which he nonetheless undertook, albeit intermittently. However, Stanford’s most comfortable compositional zone consisted of familiar topics, and as an adopted child, the topic of afflicted children and orphans was atop them; such is the focus of the next chapter.

IV. BLUE YODEL OF THE LOST CHILD: THE POETIC CHILDREN & ORPHANS

“I just felt sorry for you
because you didn’t have any folks”

Blue Yodel of Those Who Were Always Telling Me

While Frank Stanford imaginatively presented his biological parents as unstable or lost souls, himself as a bastard, he presented his child poetic persona as an orphan—an orphan among orphans. Children in Stanford’s poetry are often orphans, and orphans or not, they are generally autonomous, occasionally precocious, and frequently united in spirit—a collective whole, strong in unison, adultlike as self-willed children in an adult world. As Stanford strove to find his identity through determination of origins, he elected, textually, to remain among the lost children, at times serving as their voice.

The Singing Knives’s leadoff poem, “The Blood Brothers,” introduces four recurring adult characters (Charlie B. Lemon, Mose Jackson, BoBo Washington, and the midget), one recurring late adolescent character (Jimmy), and four recurring child characters: Born In The Camp With Six Toes (or Six Toes), Baby Gauge, Ray Baby, and the child version of the poet’s alter ego (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 7-8). The age of the poet’s alter ego, frequently the homodiegetic narrator in Stanford’s poems, isn’t mentioned in *The Singing Knives*, but Six Toes and Baby Gauge—who appear, in the volume, in “The Blood Brothers,” “Tapsticks,” and “The Snake Doctors” (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 7-8, 24-25, 47-63)—are levee camp characters (as is Ray Baby) and often appear in Stanford’s poetry alongside Jimmy (who, in *The Battlefield*, is approximately 18 years old and six years Francis’s senior), and as representations of these characters appear consistent across Stanford’s work, the child version of the poet’s alter ego in *The Singing Knives* is thus approximately 12 years old (C. D. Wright, “Note on *The Battlefield*” 159; see VII.A for “Francis Gildart” et al in the appendix).⁶⁷ That approximate age is overtly evident in another poem in the volume, “The Picture Show Next Door to the Stamp Store in Downtown Memphis” (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 29-31), in which the homodiegetic narrator, unaccompanied by any levee camp characters, appears comparable in age to a group of schoolgirls who are in the seventh grade (43).

In *The Singing Knives*, the child characters often shed their innocence, as though for the first time. Such thresholds are central to the childlike experimentations of multiple poems, as in “The Minnow”: “If I press / on its head, / the eyes / will come out / like stars. / The ripples / it makes / can move / the moon” (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 28). Grotesqueness and

death are presented with a matter-of-factness, as though any analyticity on the child narrator's part were irrelevant—powerless to change the course of events in the cycle of life. Compare the above instance with that in “The Gospel Bird” (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 16-18). The narrator's father buys land and a store with the directive “to kill all the birds / And sell the meat to the levee camps” (III.2, 5-6), so the presumably preteen narrator proceeds, in a kill session with Jimmy (III.9-12), by “knocking / Their heads off with a tomato stick” (III.11-12)—the morbidity again presented casually. As in “The Minnow,” though, the child's violence functions as an experiment, a means for acquiring knowledge through experience, as the narrator continues: “Everytime I connected / I'd go check the bird out. / They'd bat their wings and squirt blood, / Winking at me” (III.13-16). The nonchalance idiosyncratic to the child narrator in the face of such morbidity produces a shock-value effect. In “Elegy for My Father” (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 22-23), the child watching the dynamite explosion is merely an observer and not an active participant, but the theatrical intensity of his watchfulness similarly appears perverse in its nonchalance, as he watches “fish bladders . . . blow up” and “half a bullfrog / Fly under the rainbow / And land on the bank” (23-26). These characteristics are amplified in the book's violent, image-driven closing narrative, “The Snake Doctors” (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 47-63), in which the child narrator sees men “beating the hog over the head with sledge hammers” (II.33), the narrator stabs the hog seven times and runs “the knife across his throat” (“And the blood came out like a bird”) (II.57, 60-61), Six Toes cuts the child narrator “with a knife” while “Baby Gauge sucked the poison out” (V.76-77), etc. In these poems that depict the violence of the rural South—either senseless or inherent to its way of life—the child characters are observers absorbing the chaos of nature, regardless of whether they are active participants or mere bystanders.

Not all poems in *The Singing Knives* depict the early entrance of violence into children's lives in the rural South, though. The 57-line instant narrative, “The Picture Show Next Door to the Stamp Store in Downtown Memphis,” portrays the shedding of childhood innocence as well, but of a different kind: Pamela Stewart describes the poem as merging “Stanford's impeccably clear eye and voice . . . with complete absorption into the scene” and as being one “of taut balance, episode and image poised into a statement of ephemeral sexual innocence” (Stewart, “On Stanford's” 113, “Toward” 7). The poem describes three adjacent scenes occurring simultaneously and instantaneously, over perhaps a few seconds—between a stamp collector outside of the movie theater losing his stamps in the wind (27-42), a group of seventh grade girls from a private school being directed by a nun inside the theater (1-8, 14-18, 43-54), and the narrator (“like a gloveless hunter” [20]), who, at the drink machine and apparently unchaperoned, is caught in a moment of unexpected hyperawareness, observing both surrounding scenes with such focus that he distractedly fails at the simple task of

filling a drink cup with ice and cola (9-13, 19-26, 55-57). The schoolgirls are the poem's central focus; the stamp collector distracts the narrator from them, and both parties distract him from his simple task at the drink machine. The narrator and the schoolgirls are both entering adolescence, maturing variously. "Why are they afraid of me?" he innocently wonders (18), noticing their buttocks (which he refers to as "booties") "rounding out like the moon" (49-51), yet he nonetheless acknowledges that he is like a lethal hunter (19-26); he, too, is undeveloped, but possesses aggressive instincts.

As subjects, orphans remain largely absent from *The Singing Knives* and Stanford's five 1974-1976 Mill Mountain Press books—a distinctive contrast to the poetry that would follow. However, children continue to occupy the poems, if less presently than in *The Singing Knives*. In "Linger" (*Ladies from Hell* 12), the narrator comments, with no context, that he dreamed that he "was showing children through a museum" (11, 14)—a line that will appear more contextualized against the discussion of orphans in the poetry. In *Field Talk*, the poem title "Lullaby to a Child Who They Say Will Not Live Through the Night" conveys more directness of feeling than the eclectic image transitions of the poem's actual text (*Field Talk* 11). The lines "The strange country of childhood, / Like a dragonfly on a long dog chain" (3-4), from "The First Twenty-Five Years of My Life" in *Constant Stranger*, appear to set up the manifold representations of children later in the volume, in "Eyelids Noticed Only in the Seventh Minute of Twilight," an 83-line poem of irregular stanza and line lengths, composed after Italian poet-turned-filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci (*Constant Stranger* 21, 35-38).⁶⁸ The initially rapid-fire images become increasingly sporadic, then all but cease. The poem opens:

Children trying on gloves. Children in the garden of their retinas.
 Children forgetting
 The mystery of the ambushed clock, the mirror
 Weighing down the thigh like a heavy knife.
 Children like bullets in pain. Children
 Like a cemetery of dreams, ships running guns. (1-6)

The irregular lengths of and enjambments in the poem's opening lines reinforce the omnipresence of children, the nature of children as a Dickensian force—a force rendered evermore vividly in Stanford's subsequent representations of orphans—and read with familiarity like the list-like observations introducing *Bleak House* (of "Fog everywhere. Fog up the river . . . fog down the river. . . . Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards. . .," etc [Dickens 1]). Injustice is a consistent theme in Stanford's work, frequently addressed racially, but also in representations of the oppressed, the

dispossessed, the neglected, the underrepresented—he clearly identified with those treated unjustly, and he portrays children with a counterbalance, as subjects desperately deserving of increased attention, love, and understanding. The ubiquity continues in the poem: “Children warning, children sucking, children spitting / Allegory of love, whistles of dust” (20-21); as a collective force, they are both terrene and spiritual, unpolished yet possessors of insight, unexpected prudence. The maltreatment is clear, e.g., “And finally children sucked up like dust in a vacuum, and that isn’t all” (32); thus, it is a natural Stanfordian progression for the poem to arrive at one of its late metaphorical associations, “As if love was a common grave and death a child. Encore” (71). As such, the sentiment expressed four poems later in “A Black Cat Crossed the Road I Was Born On” (*Constant Stranger* 44-45)—“I ask you to have respect for the dead” (23-26)—could as well have been composed variously, requesting respect for children. When Stanford writes that he visualizes “the dead as well as the living”—“*you* who I will never know” (“With the Approach” 300)—he essentially is insisting on the empathic connection inherent in a triumph of justice which poetry is capable of achieving. Pamela Stewart writes of the heart that “speaks to the countless,” the “multitude of voices,” in Stanford’s poetry—and, of the poems’ empathy, that people may “hear one another and touch somehow” (Stewart, “Toward” 11); Stanford’s poetic children are a countless multitude of voices, a choir of simultaneous beauty and agony, silenced—one which he aims to empower and exalt and whose cantata he aims to hear, as though to tactilely connect.

IN *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, children are the dominant, driving force—self-sustained, wise, unrestrained. Stanford’s clairvoyant poet hero, Francis Gildart, is all of 12 years old. In a sense, Francis is one child standing for many; in *The Battlefield*, he is an orphan among orphans (“call me orphan of silence . . . I am the children chained down in Plato’s cave” [4319, 11955]), and with that comes the discussion of the infant or child as a lost figure. Through these compositions of children, Stanford seeks out his origins. More so than in “Eyelids Noticed Only in the Seventh Minute of Twilight,” in *The Battlefield*, the orphan and orphanages are Dickensian in their presentation: the orphans are angelic, the orphanages despicable, hellish. In reality, Stanford was adopted on the day he was born (Launius 23; Shugars 12, 59); he never spent time in an orphanage, so to encapsulate the emotional anguish of being a “lost child,” he variably fictionalizes such a residency in Francis’s case and, additionally, writes of other orphans and Francis’s desire to liberate them. Functioning as a kind of accompaniment to the poem title, “Blue Yodel of the Lost Child” (*Crib Death* 35), is an autobiographical line (amid a lyric flourish of descriptions of death) in *The Battlefield* which reads, “death who also says forget the lost child throwing

photographs at the moon” (9811). The notion of children or infants unfairly treated or tortured is recurring for Stanford; in “The Lies,” c. 1973 (*The Light* 85-87), he writes of “the ship of drowned infants” (45), and in “Sister” in *Plain Songs* (*What About This* 393), of the “infants who suffocate / in their sleep” (6-7), while in an inscription to Donald Justice, he explains of the composition of “Strappado” (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 35) that he had, actually, essentially had Plato’s cave in mind: “what did the infants feel before they were bound and chained” (Letter to Justice).

Fittingly, when he meets Vico midway into the epic, Francis has a momentary flight of fancy, imagining that he tells Vico an autobiographical lie, saying:

they kicked me out of school because I was a communist I wanted to sing
Tramp Tramp Tramp Hear The Feet Of Many Children⁶⁹ but they said it was a communist
inspired melody then why in the fuck is it in the songbook is what I told them
over the microphone when it was my turn to lead the song. . . (9418-9421)

Francis’s choice of song aligns with Stanford’s continued representation of children as standing in unison, a collective whole. In an earlier scene, Charlie B. Lemon and Francis ride around in the family’s black Cadillac (1211; “We always had a Cadillac, usually black,” Ruth Rogers recalls [Ehrenreich]), and in the prolonged scene, Charlie B. refers to Francis as “Francois” (1217, 1306)—presumably after François Villon (1431-c. 1463), the late Middle Ages French poet who, like Stanford, was an adoptee with a well-to-do adoptive father (Stevenson, “Critical Biography” 1, 4, 39). In the scene, Charlie B. allows Francis to take the wheel of the Cadillac—Francis is driving “bout five miles an hour” (1325)—and Francis, in childlike excitement, attempts to tilt the opportunity to his advantage:

. . . we are cruising slow like through the section
and I say hey boss we got time to go by the orphanage and spring somebody today
and he says let’s wait till next week we been going past that place too much and
you is liable to get caught and then it’s gone be this nigger’s ass all on account
of you and I think the best thing in life is to help an orphan escape from Saint
Blaise Home of Destitute Children. . . (1319-1324)

Francis’s unabashed, unbridled sincerity in lines 1323-1324 is illuminated, vivified, by the lines’ estrangement from the casual, colloquial narrative tone of lines 1319-1322; Stanford’s use of “and” near the start of line 1323 in dividing the two tones is jolting, almost misleading, and enhances the closing sentiment’s directness in impact.

The sense of Francis’s revolt against orphanages is emphasized elsewhere in the poem as well, in, e.g.:

. . . it was a coincidence
 like the time I got caught in the girls' orphanage that night shoot I told
 them I was disturbed and a suffering from somnambulation I was Francis
 Gildart the funambulle to hell with it I told them. . . (8998-9001)

and also in:

there was only one guy worth a shit who worked in the orphanage
 he had a oboe and when this boy put hisself outen his misery the guy
 had the decency at least to play Kindertotenlieder⁷⁰ on the gramophone
 somebody had ought to told the newspaper why he done it but shoot
 the night the night no song
 can do it justice when it rains. . . (1760-1765)

Stanford's metaphor of Francis as a "funambulle" in line 9001 functions as a kind of double entendre, as a funambulist is both an acrobat (tightrope walker) and an individual who displays great mental agility (as Francis does, since he is clairvoyant), and, as Francis often does, he doubles into European classicism (as Francois, essentially) in employing the French word, *funambulle* (alt. *funambule*). In the second excerpted passage, Stanford continues the mixture of low and high culture, in adjacent lines, juxtaposing rural Southern vernacular ("this boy put hisself outen his misery") alongside European high classicism (Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*). Two of Friedrich Rückert's lines that Mahler set in one of the five *Kindertotenlieder* (*Songs on the Death of Children*), translated, read: "They have merely gone on ahead of us / And will not ask to come home again" (Fischer 407). Stanford clearly pits orphanages in a corner, a place from which orphans must rebel. Francis doesn't actually reveal why the boy committed suicide, though the indication in line 1763 suggests that Francis is nonetheless privy to the knowledge. Francis, himself, later notes, "just another bastard childhood is not worth living no matter what you hear" (9840).

Appearances of orphans and children in struggle of liberation continue endlessly in *The Battlefield*. Children visit the levee camp tent and pay "a dime to see Think Fast Mr. Moto and Orphans of the Storm" (2297-2298).⁷¹ As noted, Francis says, "call me orphan of silence" and also "there are flying children of those I am one" (4319, 9055). A "thirsty orphan / is murdered in her sleep is sold into bondage" (12200-12201), while "yet another / orphan hangs herself in the attic with the belt of her lover" (12207-12208). These instances are sporadic and scattered, but nonetheless imprinted in the narrative's élan.

If *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* is a heroic epic, what renders 12-year-old Francis Gildart a hero? One argument, then, is that Francis serves as a symbolic hero for all orphans, their speaker; always, the orphans are by his side in spirit. If he cannot liberate

them, he entertains them. In a cinematic scene of placid oneness, he imagines himself to be their performer:

the orphans are happy and clap and I put my finger over my lips and say
shu then I go over to each bed and kiss the orphans goodnight and one holds
out her hand with a pillow feather in the palm and I blow her a kiss and the
feather goes sailing away with me. . . (9032-9035)

and after a lyrical aside:

. . .now another round
of applause however the authorities at the orphanage made certain I could
never return disguised or not my dreams have become silent
like picture shows unmade in the twenties not made at all just dreamed by the
dead directors and actresses. . . (9046-9050)

One wonders what sympathetic sentiments Stanford may have held for orphans in orphanages, or any senses ranging from guilt to responsibility that he may have felt as a chosen child. Children and orphans propel *The Battlefield* even if a number of the epic's primary characters—Charlie B. Lemon, Jimmy, Dark, Sylvester Martingale, Tangle Eye, Vico, et al—are adults (or entering adulthood, in Jimmy's case).

ANOTHER notable element of the portrayal of children in *The Battlefield* is Stanford's revivification of his recurring child characters—Born In The Camp With Six Toes, Baby Gauge, and Ray Baby (dormant since *The Singing Knives*)—and the introduction of a minor child character, Melvin. Along with O.Z. (who had been introduced in *Arkansas Bench Stone* and who is slightly older than Jimmy [6374-6375]), they begin to recur more frequently in the poetry—beginning with *The Battlefield* and continuing through some of Stanford's posthumous works. Most of these characters are based on actual individuals—names unchanged—who were children of the levee camp hands (C. D. Wright, “Note on *The Battlefield*” 159, *The Battlefield*, third page); thus, they are not orphans, yet they tend to stick together in a tight bond, typically unchaperoned as though they were adults themselves. Michael Waters writes that Stanford's spiritual forefather “remains the Mark Twain of the failing riverboat towns along the Mississippi. No wonder his poems are populated with, even spoken by, so many damaged children—mostly orphans and accident victims” (Waters 117). (Of the accident victims, specifically, Waters is referring to many less-developed characters—the “one-legged boy” in “Strange Roads Before Light” [*Crib Death* 11], the blind [see VII.A for “The Blind Child” in the appendix], etc [Waters 117].) Waters

describes these child characters as “burnt-out archetypes” who “will no longer inherit the burgeoning legacy of America,” calling the characters named above Stanford’s “tribe of lost boys” who perform “rituals of violence” while “retaining a borderline innocence” (ibid). They are lost children, just as Stanford autobiographically describes himself as a “lost child” (9811; *Crib Death* 35).

Born In The Camp With Six Toes only appears in one line in *The Battlefield*, line 6389. After mentioning O.Z.’s relation to Jimmy in age and that he reads well and is a “photographer” (6374-6375, 6380-6381), the recurring child characters named in the above paragraph appear in a nonchalant succession that highlights the similarities and disparities between them:

I got a telescope and the complete songs of Roland
 Jimmy got a beat-up car and a gun
 Baby Gauge got some cool shoes
 Melvin got sick and a coat with a knife in the pocket lucky stiff
 Ray Baby’s folks were too poor so he didn’t get nothing so I gave him
 the radio I got last year so I cried
 Born in the Camp With Six Toes got to go see his daddy in prison (6383-6389)

As Francis cries in line 6388, the unspoken indication is that he is being directed—likely by his adoptive mother—to give his radio to Ray Baby, but no parent is mentioned; these lost boys stand alone. Stanford presents the racial divide blatantly, as the newly acquired possessions of Francis and Jimmy are the only valuable ones (a telescope and a car), while the other boys are fortunate to receive anything at all; the shoes and coat, respectively, that Baby Gauge and Melvin receive are items of need—not ones of want or desire, like Francis’s and Jimmy’s—and Ray Baby and Born In The Camp With Six Toes receive no physical items at all. Stanford doesn’t mention any holiday or birthday that would contextualize these acquisitions: their list is placed randomly in the poem, and the juxtapositions illustrate the socioeconomic dynamic between them. Throughout the recurring child characters’ appearances in Stanford’s poetry, he rarely bothers to identify their race. It is simply understood that, as destitute levee camp children, they are black; early- to mid-20th century levee camps along the Mississippi River consisted nearly entirely of black workers (Lomax 217, 233, 327-328). In keeping with the textual descriptions above, Stanford writes in “The Brake” that “Ray Baby and Six Toes stood there / In my hand-me-down elastic band shorts” (21-22), so the portrayals of these levee camp peers as destitute is consistent (*The Light* 80-84).

While a number of the recurring characters in *The Battlefield* are adults, the child characters above—apart from Six Toes—do appear in the poem as roughly developed

entities. Though at least a few of them—e.g., O.Z., Baby Gauge, and Melvin—can read and write (6380, 11701, 11735, 15213), Francis is the fully literate one among them; in an early scene, he recites Robert Louis Stevenson’s lengthy short story “The Beach of Falesá” to them—from memory (364-371). Baby Gauge and Francis desire “to go / to school together at last” (8910-8911), after seeing newspapers “with headlines about the Supreme Court” (8912)⁷²—as Baby Gauge wants them to “get knowed / like Huck and Tom and them was” (15212-15213)—but the reader is sadly aware of the scenario’s socioeconomic unlikelihood where the boys are not. Indeed, following the landmark May 17, 1954 Supreme Court decision abolishing racial segregation in schools, the real-life Francis Gildart did begin first grade in September 1954 at Snow Lake Elementary in the levee camp village of Snow Lake, Arkansas, but by the next semester, he was enrolled in the private Catholic school, Our Lady of Sorrows Elementary School, in Memphis (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email); reality trumps the boys’ idealism. As for Ray Baby, he is even poorer than his black levee camp peers (2346, 6387, 8905-8906).

Having been absent through the mid-1970s books, these recurring child characters—Stanford’s gang of lost boys—appear, following *The Battlefield*, more frequently in the posthumous works. Much of the somber, 57-line poem “In This House” is a dreamed remembrance of Baby Gauge (*Crib Death* 18-19), as he and the poet’s alter ego raft together in chase of a hundred-pound catfish near the Mississippi Delta community of Panther Burn (10-12, 16), taking turns holding the carbide lamp and spear (13, 17-18). The two boys are cohorts again in “The Wolves” (*You* 26), a 29-line, single-stanza poem of childlike imagination in *You*, in which Baby Gauge and the narrator roam aimlessly at night with knives (1-4), cutting up rattlesnake watermelons together (5, 8-9). The boys imagine that the rattlesnake watermelons are men they dislike and that the new moon watermelons are wolves (5-7), electing to only slice up the former, as the poem repeats, “we wanted to be wolves” (15, 27).

The complete gang—including the two older boys, Jimmy and O.Z., another boy, “the blind child,” and Mose Jackson—come together in the volume’s subsequent poem, “The Burial Ship” (*You* 27-28),⁷³ a tightly crafted 45-line, single-stanza dialectal narrative of a burial ceremony, with brief eulogy, for Jimmy’s wolf cub, which (if the poem’s scene is not entirely conjured) may actually have been a puppy.⁷⁴ Leslie Ullman writes that “The Burial Ship” contains a “finished nakedness” and “the wild eloquence of gospel music” and, like both Michael Waters and Baby Gauge, draws on the similarities to Mark Twain’s characters: “Jimmy, O.Z., and the others seem homeless and river-wise, like characters from Huckleberry Finn,” she writes (Ullman 133-134). In the poem, each child appears to play a contributing part. O.Z. builds a “coffin ship” (3), which the boys augment with a stolen “tent

flap” that Six Toes paints red with a black cross as the ship’s sails (14-15). Baby Gauge sings the gospel traditional “Back to the Dust” while the Francis character plays air harmonica and Mose apparently plays fife in the distance (27-29). “Woe is the wolf,” somebody eulogizes (26), and Jimmy and O.Z. row to the coffin and light the ship ablaze (39-41). In “The Burial Ship,” these recurring child characters again appear, or are presented, as grown up, “river-wise,” unchaperoned; the boys view themselves as outlaws or pirates, with everyone wearing a “black mask” (7).

Half of the child gang—consisting of Ray Baby, Six Toes, and the Francis character—again appear as roaming rebels in the 101-line energized narrative “The Brake” (*The Light* 80-84), in which they are walking through cotton rows to raid Mose Jackson’s Sorghum Brake (28-30, 45), believing Mose to still be in the penitentiary before realizing that he has actually escaped and is home (77-78, 88-90). Much of the poem is structured around an inconsequential conversation about what each boy would do if bitten by a rabid dog. Just as Ray Baby and Six Toes wear the narrator’s hand-me-downs (21-22), Six Toes, at least, is even shoeless; walking barefoot through the field, he repeatedly jumps in the ditch, explaining, “my feet is hot!” (50-51). The economic divide, presented clearly in these lines and in the abovementioned lines from *The Battlefield* (noting that Ray Baby got “nothing” and that Six Toes got “to go see his daddy in prison”), is paralleled with a social divide in “The Brake,” as Ray Baby and Six Toes comprehend the scope of Mose’s prison break (or “brake”) immediately upon seeing “a blue shirt with a number on the front” (78), and before the poet’s alter ego does; “We got to leave!” Ray Baby says (75), and Six Toes says, “I’m getting my young ass out of here” (80), while the Francis character has yet to grasp the situation, asking, “What are y’all talking about?” (81).

Apart from Jimmy and O.Z., who appear in “The Books” (29, 383-389)—O.Z. is also mentioned in “Vague Sonnet” (*What About This* 561)—the recurring gang of child characters does not appear in the remainder of the posthumous poetry thus far published, but the 20-line, single-stanza leadoff poem in *Plain Songs*, “Schoolboys and Their Hound,” could well have been written about them (*What About This* 382). The poem is composed after Jean Follain’s 10-line poem “Chien aux écoliers” (“The Students’ Dog”), which Stanford reworks into Southern dialect and lengthens (Follain 66-67). Whereas, in the Follain original, the students are by no means degenerate and are not even specified as males, in Stanford’s adaptation, the students are schoolboys, their dog a hound, and they break the pond’s ice “For the hell of it” (1-2). From Follain’s description of the students as warmly dressed, Stanford roughens the language, describing the boys as “stained with axle grease / and dove blood / and chalk and cum” (6-8). In another addition bearing similarity to the “damaged” children, as Michael Waters describes, Stanford adds of the dog that he “is too deaf and

lame / to hunt” (16-17). Stanford’s world is indeed a world of the damaged—arguably a world of the irreparable—a world left behind in the poverty and injustice that result from socioeconomic and racial disequilibria.

JUST as Stanford includes his recurring child characters more frequently in the late poetry than in the mid-1970s books, he also writes more freely of orphans in the late and posthumous work. In “With the Approach of the Oak the Axeman Quakes” (1977), Stanford begins by noting that Dorothy Stanford sent him to Subiaco Academy after A. F. Stanford died, and writes, “There, I learned I was an orphan” (“With the Approach” 299). Consider the weight lifted; having refrained from writing about the topic in his earlier books, *The Battlefield* and posthumous works discuss it openly.

In “The Angel of Death,” in *Crib Death* (*Crib Death* 14), Death overtakes the narrator sleeping in the middle of the road and questions him (1-4). “I said I was an orphan,” the narrator explains (5); “I sleep where I please, says I” (8). As in *The Battlefield*, Stanford continues to poeticize his alter ego’s biography; in “Why the Moon Is in the Outhouse” (*Crib Death* 25-26), he notes, “In the orphanage the other boys would / Put minnows in my underwear” (8-9). As discussed, however, Stanford, himself, never passed time in an orphanage, though Rogers recalls that Dorothy would play “mind games” with Frank and her when frustrated with them, telling them once, “*If you all don’t stop fighting, I’m going to put you back in the orphanage you came from*” (Shugars 62-63). The illusion continues in *You*, contextualized in “Desire for a Killing Frost” (*You* 17); the narrator notes that as the world and nature carry on (1-2), “I remember dressing in the dark, / Serving the early mass at the orphanage, / I remember the hobos” (3-5). In a variant of the poem, the four-part “Frank Stanford Calls Back to the Owl Who Lives a Hundred Years” (*What About This* 635-636), the lines are phrased as “And the prostitutes are dressing in the dark, / and the orphan is serving early mass, / and the hoboes are remembered” (III.10-12). The poet’s persona appears to feel a responsibility to the disinherited and the oppressed. That responsibility continues in the last of four 10-line stanzas in “Instead” (*You* 24-25), when the autodiegetic narrator, very much the poet’s alter ego—a young individual who “became a monk” at an even younger age (9, 11-13)—seeks out his estranged friends by visiting “prisons, / Orphanages, joints” (33-34). He continues the outcast association with the pairing of “orphans and criminals” in a passing line in “Homage to Jacques Prévert” (14), *Smoking Grapevine*’s leadoff poem (*What About This* 414-415). In a handwritten manuscript poem, “The Slaying of My Father in Nineteen and Sixty Three” (*What About This* 438), Stanford actually intertwines two origins-related themes between the title and poem text; the portrayal of A. F. Stanford (or any father figure) is absent entirely from the poem text, which

is another orphanage-imagined poem, describing the nuns in the orphanage as “dragging their rosaries,” “patrolling our sleep,” etc.

Perhaps Stanford’s sympathetic portrayals of the orphan as outcast—variably vagrant, lost, or having succumbed to desperation—are summarily encapsulated in a poem in the posthumous work *Automatic Co-Pilot* composed after another poet-turned-filmmaker, René Clair (*What About This* 441):

Orphans

We lived in the big house, we lived
 In the ditch like a hubcap. We stole
 Eggs, we stole flour. In town they accused us:
 Dreaming without sleeping, of wearing our hands.
 We swam with our hair, we sold black wind
 To soldiers who went by in summer,
 We held our breath, passed on the road.

Children and orphans propel Frank Stanford’s poetry—especially the early and late work—molding a composite of beauty and tragedy, purity and loss of innocence, and seemingly irreparable injustice. Often, Stanford’s very poem titles express his recurring sentiments, as children’s presence frequently drives them. Among such striking poem titles not discussed in this chapter—the texts of which frequently support my argument that Stanford presents children as lost and autonomous along his poetic quest for determining origins—are: “Plowboy,” “Lullaby to a Child Who They Say Will Not Live Through the Night” (*Field Talk* 10-11), “The Boy Who Shot Weathercocks” (*Crib Death* 20), “Allegory of Youth” (*You* 22), “The Dark Child,” “The Strange Boy” (*Plain Songs; What About This* 390-391, 409-410), “Boat Boy” (*During the Night of the High Water; What About This* 540), “The Girl” (*Poems Floating Up Eyeless on Sunday Morning; What About This* 554), “Eloping Boy” (*Poems Who Left Without a Word of Farewell; What About This* 565), “The Child Who Enchanted Deadly Snakes” (*Poems Drunk from a Paper Sack Long Before I Came of Age; What About This* 579-580), “The Molested Child Goes to the Dark Tower Again 140 Years to the Day,” “The Shepherdboy and the Moon” (*Some Poems Who Suffocated like Lightning Bugs in the Bootlegger’s Jar; What About This* 586, 590), “When We Are Young the Moon Is like a Pond We All Drown In,” “Children at the Point of Death” (*One Finger Zen; What About This* 605, 612), and “Youth” (*What About This* 637).

V. THE LOWBORN BASTARD: THE MANY SELVES OF FRANK STANFORD

“Is that you, Frank?”

Oxford

Perhaps even more than in his representations of biological and adoptive parents, children, and orphans in his poetry, Frank Stanford investigated his origins through intense self-questioning. In the Rimbaldian “Je est un autre” sense,⁷⁵ Stanford adopts innumerable personae, refusing to limit the versions of himself to one, and yet, Stanford’s alter egos almost invariably comprise a Whitmanian self-portraiture—containing multitudes—that is unabashedly autobiographical, as though he knew well that his biography could be gleaned from his poetry, perhaps even intended for it to be. In a sense, Stanford’s poetic self reaches further than both Whitman’s and Rimbaud’s selves: Stanford’s autodiegetic self celebrates the self autobiographically, yet travels infinite distances through time and space to wear masks of disguise or exchange. Since the true identity of that autobiographical self was forever lost as an adopted individual, there was only one path forward through the poetry: for the self to transcend itself and stand for others, including the voiceless—as will be evident, these innumerable masks are especially worn in *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*. It is not without precedent, then, that Stanford has been hailed as “our Rimbaud” (C. D. Wright, “The Poet”)—and his boldness and amplitude compared to Whitman (*What About This* 374; Hall, “A Major Voice” 30; Stewart, “Toward” 5; et al).

Stanford infuses his poetry with his self. He was an orphan who became a poet, a fishing guide who became a land surveyor, and a Mississippi-born levee camp/Memphis, Tennessee dual resident who lived most of his later life in Arkansas, and all of these autobiographical and geographical details—and many others—are mainstays throughout his published poetry, even amid all of his self-mythology.

Beginning with *The Singing Knives*’s leadoff poem, “The Blood Brothers” (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 7-8), Stanford establishes that his poetic self will be both a realistic and fictionalized version of his actual self, as the poet indeed played on levees (28), and his levee camp peers indeed had such names as Baby Gauge (3), Ray Baby (7), and Jimmy (20), yet it appears certain that he never killed a midget with a frog gig (24-26). Stanford would continue to fuse actual, even intimate, autobiographical details with outlandish fabrications throughout his poetic works, yielding a creative product that is both artfully imagined and which functions as a kind of safeguard—a disclaimer, a way of burying truths within

conjurations. “The Blood Brothers” also marks the start of another truth-meets-fiction game, as the poem is dated “1964”; whether or not Stanford actually composed the poem in the year after A. F. Stanford died and during which he entered Subiaco Academy is unclear. As discussed, a number of Stanford’s poems contain early dates, though authenticating these dates is an altogether difficult task.

Except for a lone instance in “Wishing My Wife Had One Leg” (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 38), in which one of Stanford’s additions to the Breton original is for a caryatid to have thoughts “of orphans sleeping” (8-9), *The Singing Knives* is absent discussion of origins, as it were. However, just as Stanford’s gang of recurring lost boys appears in *The Singing Knives* and is, for the most part, not reintroduced in the poetry until *The Battlefield*, children generally propel *The Singing Knives* but are a less dominant force through the mid-1970s books. In *The Singing Knives*, the poet’s autodiegetic alter ego is typically a happy-go-lucky child in the rural South with time to spare—looking for bottles (“Living” 14; 7), watching a dynamite explosion on the levee (“Elegy for My Father” 22-23; 11-14, 23), climbing trees (“Tapsticks” 24-25; 2 and “Belladonna” 46; 4), going to the movies (“The Picture Show Next Door to the Stamp Store in Downtown Memphis” 29-31), etc—portrayed in scenes frequently set in and around levee camps. As such, the child narrator doubles well for a young Stanford. However, Stanford distorts that realistic portrayal of self into one obsessed with violence—“I killed one white man” (“The Blood Brothers” 7-8; 24), “I stabbed him seven times,” “I threw a knife at the midget” (“The Snake Doctors” 47-63; II.57 and III.5), etc—and possessed by hallucinatory visions: “I dreamed the blacksnake rode the guitar” (“The Singing Knives” 9-13; 40), “I see / a limb, the fingers of death, the ghost / of an anonymous painter” (“Transcendence of Janus” 33-34; 1-3), “I dreamed I saw Holy Ghosts walking around the campfire” (“The Snake Doctors” 47-63; III.41), etc.

From at least as early as May 1963 until November 1964, Stanford had been a guide on Norfolk Lake near Mountain Home, Arkansas (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email),⁷⁶ and various instances across his poetry comprise a portrait of the experience. In “Slow Rag of the Yearbook” (*Shade* 45-46), Stanford’s persona explains:

All I get is twelve bucks a day guiding the lost men
 I take them into the waters they want to remember
 When they didn’t have shit for money when they didn’t have guts
 I give them one chance at the big one the legend no one tells
 What they want doesn’t swim doesn’t sound like a man full of bull
 What they want they’re scared to land they’re scared to death (40-45)

The narrator's cynicism is voiced more overtly in *The Battlefield* when Francis utters a variation of line 40: "I suffered and earned twelve dollars a day being a guide" (12673). In reality, \$12 per day in 1963/1964 would have been respectable earnings for a mid-teen (equivalent to more than \$90 in 2015), and Stanford may well have actually enjoyed the work. The poet's alter ego appears to be more disgusted with some unspecified, collective quality of the clients—perhaps the men's nostalgia, fear, sense of self-importance, or own "lost" identities (perhaps ringing too close to home)—than with his own wages. In the notably autobiographical and arresting 63-line list poem "Blue Yodel of Those Who Were Always Telling Me"—consisting of 36 stanzas of various directives spoken to the poet's alter ego (mostly by adults), followed by a closing autodiegetic stanza ("Blue Yodel of Those..." 24)—the eighth comment, presumably spoken by one of the "lost men," captures the condescending tone of the men's sense of self-importance: "Bait my hook that's what I'm paying you for" (13). The posthumous five-quatrain poem "Living with Fishermen" pays a more ambiguous or mixed respect to the men (*What About This* 642), beginning "I never had any money / Neither did they / But I spent the best part / Of my life with them" (1-4), before adding to descriptions of their weaknesses as described in the lines from "Slow Rag of the Yearbook": "They were the only people I knew / Who . . . / . . . wept over drowned children" and "They drank more than their guts could handle" (5-7, 17). Again, the narrator dissociates himself from them: "I read great poetry in their quivering houses" (8).

It has often been published that Stanford studied civil engineering at the University of Arkansas, "as his father had done" (*The Battlefield* 385), but before he studied in the College of Arts and Sciences, he was based in the College of Business (UArk; Rogers, 12.9.2008 email). Perhaps the confusion was a ruse in Stanford's own self-mythology; in *The Battlefield*, he writes, "I who vanished to become my father" (13268). In any case, what Stanford became was a poet ("I who made poetry alone" [13266]) and a land surveyor—and he writes much about the gritty profession that became his primary source of a meager income. The 29-line meditative poem "Lament of the Land Surveyor" is relatively linear and literal (*Arkansas Bench Stone* 18). "Here it is the last day of November / And I am still working the hills / Without a shirt or a new pair of boots," the narrator begins (1-3), and Stanford mixes his work and his biggest love affair in the phrase "Forties of death" (17), referring to an area of 40 acres of land, or a "quarter-quarter section" (or one-fourth of one-fourth of one section, which is equal to 640 acres, or a square mile). As noted, R. S. Gwynn observes that surveying appealed to Stanford's desire to connect to A. F. Stanford (Gwynn, 2.26.2008 email), so it's no surprise that "the smell of those flowers" reminds the surveyor-narrator of his hair "Falling on my own father's boots," and that that thought would lead to other closing thoughts of his father (23-29). Surveying appears across other poems as well,

including the first part of “Frank Stanford Calls Back to the Owl Who Lives a Hundred Years” (*What About This* 635-636), in which the narrator describes receiving word from a satisfied client on a morning on which it is “raining too much to work” (I.1-5), “How I Showed the Men No-Man’s-Land,” about a group of chainmen and their field chief (*What About This* 644-645), and “Translators” in *Smoking Grapevine* (*What About This* 416), in which Stanford likens translators to “Blindfolded surveyors walking around a cliff / near the sea” (1-2).

WHILE Stanford’s poems are speckled with autobiographical mileposts such as these relating to his jobs and profession, his awareness of being an orphan was arguably always lingering in his mind. “He felt that he was a bastard,” C. D. Wright explains. “The only advantage to that was that he could create his own identity” (Ehrenreich). Stanford poeticized his unknown backstory, flipping the notion of his having been a “chosen child” to the image of an unwanted bastard, electing to focus not on his adoptive mother but on the root of his identity issue—his forced disconnection from his biological mother and father. Another note buried among the long lines of “Slow Rag of the Yearbook” reads, “Everyone knows you’re poor and a bastard” (15), and the alter ego’s turn of spirit is further explained in “Will” (*Arkansas Bench Stone* 23-24): “One day in the planetarium / Word came I was a bastard” (17-18), he proclaims. He describes how the discovery led to his increasingly degenerate behavior: he “swore” (22), and he now shoots “pool all day” and runs “around at night / Like a bloodhound with a lost voice” (25, 27-28).

Just as André Breton named the narrator of his iconic Surrealist novel, *Nadja* (1928), André, Stanford’s narrator in *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* shares his own name, and as *Nadja* opens with the question, “Qui suis-je ?,”⁷⁷ attempting to answer the question in the novel that follows, *The Battlefield* is likewise a perpetual attempt at determining identity through the quest for identifying origins (Breton, *Nadja* 11). Though Francis Gildart doubles into rebellion and experiences hallucinatory visions that *The Singing Knives*’s narrator introduced in only the barest of terms, *The Battlefield*’s hero is an unmistakable double for Stanford. When an adult male character asks Francis what he does besides play sports, collect stamps, build rockets, etc (2842-2844), he replies, “I consider myself poet” (2844), and Francis’s teacher has told the man’s wife of Francis’s “collection of private papers” (2841-2842). The comment by 12-year-old Francis is evocative of Stanford’s claim to Broughton of having written “more when I was between the ages of twelve and eighteen,” that at Subiaco, the epic poetry, lyrics, and dramatic monologues that he composed likely totaled “several thousand pages” (Broughton, “Frank Stanford” 308).

Stanford presents Francis as a grounded version of his young self, but the conceptual orphan assumes the one-stands-for-all role, indeed assumes other roles; the “I” skips

seemingly endlessly, always returning to the autobiographical self like a pendulum, albeit one let loose in a hurricane. “I must be some memory some bastard son of David / why do I pet this harp so much where do all these songs come from,” Francis exclaims (8007-8008), but then shifts to, “I am the son of the river / just another bastard childhood is not worth living no matter what you hear” (9839-9840). The paratactic associations of line 8007 thrust unexpected image juxtapositions forward with bold velocity, inviting pause for reflection at one if not all three points: *what does it mean to be a memory? A son of David?* For starters, per the Old Testament, King David had eight wives, numerous concubines, and at least 19 sons as well as daughters (only one listed Biblically—the total number of his children is unknown);⁷⁸ Stanford, via Francis, likens himself to an issue lost in numbers. Stanford is consistent with this Biblical image when, in “The Lies” (*The Light* 85-87), his persona narrator describes himself as “a long lost / prince in a black cloak” (33-34), and he directly suggests that his anonymity is equivalent to death in:

night has put her coins over my eyes
 I don't know my past
 like the back of my hand
 I have forgotten what flag I fly
 If I am drowned it is all the same as a tarnished looking glass (53-57)

While suggesting that he is a memory, numberless son of David, etc, the question of “where do all these songs come from” functions as a double entendre: a rhetorical question as to the poetry’s inspirational source as well as a heartfelt question as to the alter ego’s genetic or genealogical background. Meanwhile, the arresting and disturbing line professing that “just another bastard childhood is not worth living” reads as a kind of twin sentiment of line 57 from “The Lies.” Thus, it is no surprise that *The Battlefield* contains such terminal sentiments as “I am the rider called death” (7344), “I am Death” (2960, 3112, 7642), and “call me Death I’m tired of Ishmael” (3448). These sorts of scattered, subconscious metaphors are ever-present in *The Battlefield*, which is composed in a kind of surrealist, free-range voice—a series of random thoughts in constant procession. In a February 1974 letter to Maine poet David Walker, Stanford claims that he is, actually, “not a surrealist,” writing, “no theory accommodates me,” but in the same letter, he does refer to his early, allegedly c. 1958-1972 writings as “Huckleberry Rimbaud [manuscripts]” before paraphrasing Jean Cocteau (Letter to Walker, 2.1974), and he composed adaptation poems after numerous Surrealists—Antonin Artaud, André Breton, Luis Buñuel, René Clair, Jean Cocteau, Salvador Dalí, Robert Desnos, Jacques Prévert, et al;⁷⁹ another letter to Walker in April 1974 discusses both Cocteau and Buñuel (Letter to Walker, 4.1974). The French Surrealists were clearly a

formative and lasting influence on Stanford, and it appears that from them, he learned the power and effects of unexpected and distant image juxtapositions, which he employs routinely in *The Battlefield* as Francis wears one mask after another. The word “adoption” or its inflections appear just thrice in *The Battlefield* (1668, 2632, 9577), and the instances are unrelated to Francis’s adoption; Stanford handles excavational discussion of Francis’s origins in more ingeniously resourceful ways, continually creating unusual linguistic expressions.

Early in *The Battlefield*, Francis begins his prismatic *je-est-un-autre* spawn in a discussion allusive to his name’s confusing history:

the principal that old crawdad asked me my name I told her I am
 the Marquis de Lafayette Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier⁸⁰
 I got it down pretty good don’t I
 better known around these parts as Francois Gilbert the gambler and duelist
 sometimes I am Jean Lafitte the pirate⁸¹ I am the Japanese bowman
 if I go into all my past lives it will take all day
 but I was the rascal and rogue after I read the Lodging for the Night
 I was Francis Villon (350-357)

A common Stanfordian tactic is to seamlessly shift between Europeanism—high classical or modern—and the raw, low-brow vernacular of the American South, and such adeptness is present in lines 350-357 as Francis tries on mask after mask with light agility; Stanford endows high-culture perceptions and linguistic expressions with a strange warmth and immediacy by removing them from their conventional locations and relocating them within the context of rural, mid-20th century Mississippi and Arkansas. As the Gildart and Gilbert of Stanford’s own and adoptive mother’s names confusingly overlap (as do the two Dorothys—Stanford’s biological and adoptive mothers), Stanford elects to blur his actual name with Dorothy’s surname in the above passage, forgoing actual identity entirely; the “Alter” from Dorothy Gilbert Alter was remnant from Dorothy’s first marriage to Carl Alter, whom she had apparently divorced c. the late 1930s (Shugars 61), so it’s possible, sensible, that Dorothy (or even Stanford) could have been commonly referenced as “Gilbert” in the first years of Stanford’s life, prior to her becoming Dorothy Stanford. The various name confusions serve the poet well for the sake of his self-mythology in the passage above—it behooves Francis to refer to himself not as “Francis Gilbert” but “Francois Gilbert” (removing the Mississippian to be relocated within European classicism), just as, on the other hand, the protagonist in Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1877 short story “A Lodging for the Night” is not properly François Villon but the anglicized “Francis Villon.” The actual Villon was a notable influence on Stanford (Shugars 76), and he receives nods elsewhere in the epic

(12969, 13227);⁸² e.g., late in the poem, Francis alleges, “I ran away from home to become a bullfighter and master francois villon” (13227). Thus, the double reference of line 357 was quite possibly a conscious construction on Stanford’s part, as is the general effect of confusion of the Francis/Francois/Gilbert/Gildart (though unmentioned) conflations of the overall passage.

Set in Paris in November 1456, “A Lodging for the Night” is Stevenson’s fictionalized portrayal of François Villon (or “Francis” Villon)—a poet and enfant terrible (a “rascal” and “rogue”) impoverished after his purse is lifted by a member of his “thievish,” debaucherous crew—as he wanders, aged 24, homelessly in search of lodging for the night as respite from the snow and cold (Stevenson, “A Lodging” 249-251, 255, 268, 272). To what degree Stanford may or may not have read and become familiarized with Villon’s significant 1461 work, *Le Testament*, is perhaps unclear, but it is not difficult to understand the ease with which Stanford empathized with Stevenson’s biographical rendering of Villon. “The poet was a rag of a man, dark, little” and with “thin black locks,” Stevenson writes. “He carried his four-and-twenty years with feverish animation . . . [t]he wolf and pig struggled together in his face” (Stevenson, “A Lodging” 251). Comparisons between Stanford and Villon—or Stevenson’s portrayal of him—can be drawn at numerous points; like Stanford, Villon was an orphan who was also later adopted by an educated, well-established father and took on his adoptive father’s surname (Stevenson, “Critical Biography” 4). Stevenson’s short story continues: “Master Francis Villon . . . remembered his mother. . . . His mother! If he only knew where she lived, he might make sure at least of shelter. He determined he would inquire upon the morrow” (Stevenson, “A Lodging” 250, 261-262). Similarly, in *The Battlefield*, Francis frequently appears close to locating his biological mother, but the truth of her identity (or whereabouts) remains as a mirage, slightly out of reach, or perhaps he never makes an aggressively decisive, persistent effort to find her.

The above-cited lines from *The Battlefield*, 350-357, illuminate a passage much later in the poem when a boy—the boy with whom Francis later converses about Charlie Chaplin (10496-10497)—has found Francis’s catcher’s mitt, but Francis can’t reclaim it from him: “I was thinking I can’t say look at my initials cut on the inside strap / cause when I cut them on there I done had changed my name again / and it say F V so he’d think I stole it” (9908-9910). Francis continues his play at combining anonymity or unclear identity with unlimited identities. Slightly later, in a further, reconciliatory conversation with the boy, he reflects:

. . . I didn’t know what to say when they
asked me my name cause by now I had changed my name so many times I couldn’t
recollect which one I was using so I just say I go by Inigo and the kid says
I thought you was Mexican you look like a wetback and I nodded and Vico gives

me the eye like why didn't you tell them your real name and I give him the hand
 signal for I done forgot it and he says that's impossible I ought to know you
 can't forget your REAL name the name of your parents but I did that I sho did
 (10285-10291)

Francis's passing transposition of himself as "Inigo" (probably more at Iñigo/Íñigo)—a somewhat nondescript name from the Spanish, meaning "fiery" (Yonge lxxx)—isn't clarified, but shortly before the above passage, in line 10279, Inigo speaks Spanish: "hermano no es bueno pensar en lo pasado" (*brother it is not good to dwell on the past*). As the boy observes that Francis looks "like a wetback," Stanford also allegedly wondered about his own ethnic makeup (Trussell).

Francis's revolving identities continue seemingly endlessly in *The Battlefield*, early and late in the poem: "my name is David my name is Wyclif" (1493), "the field is my basilica and my name is mud / I am the unknown minstrel" (13045-13046), "I who signed my name Arasmas in the libraries with a mirror" (13241), etc. In some sense, Stanford's self-displacement metaphors function collectively as a single metaphor, executing a singular concept—the Rimbaldian concept of the self as another. Stanford extends the concept liberally, claiming great geographical and historical reach ("I am the truant trouvere so I am told" [1212], "I am the young bull in the snow" [12326], "I am the Don Juan of your spirit the Dante of your body" [14419], etc), and just as Whitman believed that a leaf of grass was "no less than the journey-work of the stars" (Whitman; 663), Francis likewise refuses to limit himself to earth: "I who have wandered farther than NASA will go" (13255). In essence, *The Battlefield*, channeled through Francis, is Stanford's own song of himself: "I vanished to sing a blue yodel of that low born bastard / brought up by the finest of families" (11959-11960). Additionally, like Whitman, Stanford doubles his celebration into his own variation of patriotism: "I grew up early I compose the great poem of death and these States" (12329).

Francis also doubles back on himself; he is the epic's antihero while being its hero, refusing to be pinned down, limited. Consider the following attempt at, and refusal of, self-categorization:

I sing but I am not a singer
 I write but I am not a writer
 whew I thought I'm glad of that I wouldn't be caught dead calling myself that
 that's like me being a bastard I know I am but I wouldn't allow nobody
 to call me one unlessing they was just joking around like Negroes do when they
 say hey nigger to one another no suhree I wouldn't be caught dead (10713-10718)

The passage is angular and performs a speedy, unexpected loop as though on rails; it begins with chant-like repetitions that are not overwrought, only to be succeeded by lines of a vernacular, even comical tone that are, jarringly, more than twice their length. In those four latter lines, a bold sentiment hypothesizing Francis's origins (10716-10717), and a provocatively casual racial comment (10717-10718), are both bookended within the repeated sentiment of lines 10715 and 10718, "I wouldn't be caught dead," which Francis seems to feel is the sentiment deserving the most focus. A point of note is that Francis is, actually, content with an unuttered label—poet—as he calls himself earlier ("I consider myself poet" [2844]).

Mixed into these seemingly infinite personae and antiheroic self-contradictions is, as it were, the real Francis Gildart—i.e., arguably, the actual Frank Stanford. Francis twists the "chosen child" bit of the Dorothy Stanford doctrine into a poeticized, Biblical bent, claiming that he had been "under suspicion" upon birth (10583): "they sent one clear over from Rome Italy when I was born he come by boat / and I was nigh a month old when he got there wherever it was the orphanage / I reckon but maybe camp I don't know" (10584-10586). He likens his biological mother to Mary, alleging that "she claims she never done nothing to have me I don't know if she / was one them Catholics or not I sho hope not" before stating—in a sentiment reminiscent of lines 4-5 of "Twilight" (*Ladies from Hell* 27)—that "she was about fourteen year old I hear" (10591-10593). Furthermore, always the self-mythologizer, Francis preposterously claims to prodigious memory capabilities, stretching precocity beyond its believable limits, in "I learned how to ride when I was twelve days old I remember / but I still had a hobby horse" (6684-6685), and in "I remember when I was one" (3282). Francis utters several disturbing passages which, in light of Stanford's biography, read like portentous omens: "if I'm 18 if I ever make it that age" (11521), even more chillingly, "I who will be dead before one word is read a suicide note which is sung too late" (13282), and the related metapoetic lines referring to insights shared by a late-poem character, Deacon Oakum: "he said my saga was like a levee / he said they'd find it one day when I was dead" (14656-14657).

ULTIMATELY, Stanford's own biography is unavoidable across his work, as though he considered it unnecessary to fictionalize his poems' homodiegetic narrators. "The Brake" is set in late July (*The Light* 80-84), as Ray Baby, Six Toes, and the poet's alter ego are walking through the cotton fields; the narrator explains, "It was almost the first day of August, / My birthday, a full moon rising" (9-10). The question of origins was ever-lurking. In *Shade*, the 22-line mystery-narrative "All in My Good Time" describes some actions of a lone countryman (*Shade* 24), then closes with: "That is how I came to be / born" (21-22). In "A Black Cat Crossed the Road I Was Born On" (*Constant Stranger* 44-45), the penultimate

stanza, synonymous with Francis's quest in *The Battlefield*, reads, "The Church has a record of your birth / But Death keeps its own dossier" (48-49). It is as though Stanford felt that successful identification of his origins was the single unattainable goal, and without that essential foundation, all else seemed futile. In Stevenson's story, Villon reaches total destitution—"Villon cursed his fortune" (Stevenson, "A Lodging" 256)—and in *The Last Panther in the Ozarks*, in "Pits" (*What About This* 497), alongside imagining his mother to have been a kind of promiscuous tramp ("The clap my mother left me" [21]), the narrator similarly curses his own fortune: "God you remember / You fucked me out of my hand" (28-29). However, in a forward-flashing passage in *The Battlefield*, "little Francis," "the rich boy" (14595), essentially asks for forgiveness:

you must forgive poor Francis down there by the water
writing his poem because he is so melancholy and afraid
one of his girl friends is pregnant for he knows not what
he does neither did his namesake. . . (14586-14589)

In the above passage, Francis appears to suggest that he was named after his biological father, but in one of the most intriguing and direct lines of *The Battlefield*, theoretically propelling Francis in his quest, he exclaims, "I know my great grandfather was Francis Gildart" (421). As of the early 20th century, all Gildarts in the South were directly descended from a Brit-turned-American named Captain Francis Gildart, who fought in the American Revolutionary War, then remained in the South (Barnes 1-2)—settling in Wilkinson, Mississippi until his death in 1814 (*ibid* 11). However, were he an actual individual, Francis's great grandfather would, naturally, be a descendant of Capt. Gildart as opposed to the Captain, himself. (Nonetheless, line 421 is curious and causes one to consider Stanford's claim that he "knew nothing about" his biological parents as possibly suspect; Ginny Stanford notes that after Stanford learned of his adoption, his adoptive mother described his biological parents to him as "the football player and the debutante" [Shugars 61].) Francis's fear (line 14587) evokes the poem "Man is so afraid." from *Flour the Dead Man Brings to the Wedding* (*What About This* 528-529), a heterodiegetic narrative composed in a kind of Neanderthal voice—lacking proper verb conjugations, articles, and prepositions—in which the protagonist nonetheless bears some small biographical semblance to Stanford, as he is an imaginative individual who moves from cabin to cabin (9-10, 38, 54), reads voraciously (34-35), has "two women" in his life (51), etc.

THESE themes of forlornness, destitution, and/or passage continue through the posthumous works, and they are especially present throughout *Crib Death* and *You*, in, e.g.: the

allegorical poem “Taking Your Life” (*Crib Death* 10); “The Angel of Death” (*Crib Death* 14), in which Death tracks the Southern orphan narrator (5, 16), who says, “I am getting out of here” (19); “Memory is like a Shotgun Kicking You near the Heart” (*Crib Death* 28), in which the narrator can’t sleep and wanders in the night to try, without success, to locate and aid the dying cat that he hears (1-4, 26-27), only to pass it off to his presumed spouse, when asked what’s wrong, as “an eyelash” (30-31); “Would You Like to Lie Down With the Light On and Cry” (*Crib Death* 34), in which the narrator, after describing his work and wondering “why we lie to one another” (4-5, 9), proclaims, “I remember my death / And I remember desire, / And they are not the same” (24-26); “Blue Yodel of the Lost Child” (*Crib Death* 35), in which the “lost child” is displaced from the usual homodiegetic narrator into a position of narratee, with the narrator noting, “I’ve thought about letting you / Search for your death” (14-15); the heterodiegetic “Everybody Who is Dead” (*You* 18), in which a man prepares for his death; “Instead” (*You* 24-25), in which the young narrator begins that “Death is a good word” (1), explaining, “You’ll have to say it / Soon, you know. To your / Wife, your child, yourself” (38-40), and saying, “I / Hold light for this boat” (9-10); “Dreamt by a Man in a Field” (*You* 31), which begins, “I am thinking of the dead” (1); etc. As Stokesbury suggests, Stanford was very arguably in preparations all along—especially in his eleventh hour, when composing much of the work that would be published posthumously. The quest of *The Battlefield’s* Francis Gildart to determine the identity of and locate his biological parents—the undercurrent of the epic—is most notably a failed quest, however quixotic Francis may be, and it is as though Francis, all grown up as Frank Stanford, has decided, with a finality, that the “bastard childhood” is also not worth living in its adult form.

In August 1972, Stanford visited and drank with Alan Dugan while in Cape Cod with Broughton and Babij (Willett, “Correspondence” 409), and in *Smoking Grapevine*, in “Assistance” (*What About This* 418-419), Stanford writes, “I weep in the streets / with my friends / Alan Dugan and Andrei Voznesensky / we drink like night / is an abortion we got for our mothers” (22-26). From the same work, “Past Times” (*What About This* 423-424), in which the narratee writes surrealist poetry, submits poetry for publication, and lies to the police (9, 11, 20)—none of which are present in the Parra original, “Pasatiempos” (Parra 88, 90)—reads as a roundabout companion piece, in a sense, to another autobiographical list poem, the uncollected “Blue Yodel of Those Who Were Always Telling Me” (“Blue Yodel of Those...” 24). The poem’s ninth comment reads as one spoken by a levee camp worker or peer (perhaps Ray Baby or Born In The Camp With Six Toes, who appear to have worn Stanford’s hand-me-downs), annoyed by the class difference of the Stanfords and the relative cosmopolitanism of Memphis—“Why don’t you go to Memphis / and buy your clothes” (14-15)—and the eleventh and twelfth comments function as a dialectical pair:

I ever catch you talking like that with my wife
I'll kill you you little shit

Frankie I love you really I do
with all my heart Do you
love me (17-21)

The degree to which the relayed anecdote is based on actual events is uncertain, though it evokes lines from “Death and the Arkansas River” (*Constant Stranger* 13-15), in which the “brother” of the narrator “raised hell / With women already married” (47-48), and they are two of the early comments in “Blue Yodel of Those Who Were Always Telling Me” that serve as comical, vernacular contrast to some of its impassioned and literary or intellectual later lines. Another such early passage is the 17th stanza, the poem’s lengthiest:

Did you and one Billy Richard Willet
steal the undertaker’s pick-up
break into the Junior Prom drunk
and thereby commence to dance together
like Russians on the gymnasium floor
boots and all or not (28-33)

The comment, uttered presumably by a police officer, or else the high school principal, contains humor in every line, from the rural nature of the chosen vehicle in line 29 to the paused delivery of line 33 that conveys the authority figure’s lack of patience; assuming that line 28 was printed correctly, Stanford’s inside joke in the misspelling of Willett’s name—phoneticized as the individual appears to have mispronounced it—functions as further humor, a subtle jab at the speaker. After a comment to the narratee that he “didn’t have any folks” (47-48), two allusions in single-line stanzas—presented by Stanford in indicative italics—guide the poem toward its close. The 32nd stanza, “*Beauty dwelt with her Not I*” (54), alludes to Canto IV, stanza LXXIII, line 4 of Lord Byron’s 1818-1823 poem *Don Juan* (in which Juan is less a seducer than a man seduced by women): “Valour was his, and beauty dwelt with her” (Byron 783). The line also evokes line 14419 of *The Battlefield* (“I am the Don Juan of your spirit. . .”). As Willett writes of Stanford’s escapades with various women, “Frank imagined himself as the hunter when he may have been the prey” (Willett, “Correspondence” 408). The other italicized late stanza is the 35th comment, “*Let him lay there*” (59), which alludes to the final, waterside scene in Elia Kazan’s 1954 film, *On the Waterfront*, when—after Terry Malloy, as played by Marlon Brando, has been beaten up by Johnny Friendly (as played by Lee J. Cobb) and Friendly’s thugs and lies barely conscious on the dock—Friendly says, “That’s enough. Just let him lay there” (*On the Waterfront*). Here

again, Stanford's alter ego sees himself as the victim, and the allusion is a careful and favorite authorial selection (the line is repeated as the final line of an untitled poem beginning "the Pre-Raphaelite's little brother" [*What About This* 629], and *Let Him Lay There: Some Early Poems* is also the title of an unpublished Stanford manuscript [C. D. Wright, "Bibliography" 13]); Brando was a hero of Stanford's, and in "The Truth," *Smoking Grapevine's* closing poem (*What About This* 432), he writes, "I don't have any hesitations / About saying I'd rather be Marlon Brando / Than I would T. S. Eliot, etc" (8-10).⁸³ In the closing autodiegetic stanza of "Blue Yodel of Those Who Were Always Telling Me," Stanford's alter ego both refers to death and suggests that death will not be a terminus: "You can bury my body down by the side / of the highway Lord my old spirit / can flag a Trailways bus and ride" (61-63).

One of the other highly autobiographical poems of Stanford's is "The Books" ("The Books" 381-392), from *St. Francis and the Wolf* and narrated by Francis Gildart, who, in the poem, is smitten with his Swedish schoolteacher, whose name is "Kristina or Rebecka" (222). "I was silence I know it / like the back of my hand," Francis says (67-68), as well as "naturally death is no stranger to me" and "everyday is like a death" (75, 127). As in *The Battlefield*, Francis's four-footed transportation changes from horse to pony to mule (1, 140, 246, etc), and Stanford likens him to a chivalric figure at multiple points, as in the description of Francis's enthusiastic, allusive reception of *Don Quixote*, a gift from the schoolteacher:

she gave me a book
I read it fourteen times for good luck
I'm only going to tell you it was wrote by a one-handed man
that went by Saavedra (344-347)

The poem closes with a vision and another, ominous allusion:

I see the lady I see the pyre
I see the riderless horse
it says in the good book
when I lie down in sleep I wake again (457-460)

From Psalm 3:5 (in the New International Version), the Biblical lines read: "I lie down and sleep; / I wake again, because the Lord sustains me." As Stanford wrote, the living spirit was his concern; death was but the commencement of a journey (Letter to Stanford/Wright, 6.3.1978).

Stanford's numerous textual alter egos comprise a composite of one Frank Stanford, a brilliant, wild-eyed, compassionate, lost individual—not lost from carelessness or refusal to

search, but lost at least partially against his own will, by force. It appears that the root of Stanford's emptiness, if he felt empty, was his own rootlessness; had Stanford, or his Francis Gildart, been successful in the quest of determining origins, the poet's biography could have possibly taken a different course. As it stood, however, it appears that Stanford saw no future mundane existence. In "With the Approach of the Oak the Axeman Quakes," Stanford paraphrases text from two pages of Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki's *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture*, and in that paraphrased excerpt exists the sentiment: "When I was still a boy and writing my poems, the thought came upon me that as a poet I ought to in no circumstances be afraid of death, and I have grappled with the problem of death now for some years, and finally the problem of death ceased to worry me" ("With the Approach" 302). The words may have well been Stanford's own.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the foreword to his translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialist study of Baudelaire, Martin Turnell notes that Baudelaire, himself, said that "Criticism . . . should be partial, passionate and political, that is to say, written from an exclusive point of view but from the point of view which opens up the widest horizons" (Turnell 8). Likening Sartre's critical system to such a method, Turnell argues that one of the compensations of such an approach is that "it does isolate aspects of the poet which have previously escaped notice or received insufficient attention" (ibid). In this thesis, I have brought to the surface an underlying, yet essential, motif in Frank Stanford's work—his poetic/textual quest toward identifying his biological origins—which functions as a recurring, connective thread in his poetry, increasingly in his later and posthumous publications.

Frank Stanford's incredible biography is distinguished by brilliance and valor, but also transitoriness and brokenness, and elements of that brokenness predate his own mental awareness, as an infant given up for adoption; the end product resulting from that brokenness, augmented by the extensive (and, in Stanford's case, often unusual) life experiences inherent in such marked shifts and transitions, is an honest, prodigious and often bizarre poetry that is visceral and brilliant. Considering the fleeting nature of Stanford's near-constant movements and relationships, it is astonishing that he actually managed such staggering prolificacy. He threw himself into his verse unabashedly, so a biographical thematic reading provides rich, illuminating insights into both his life and work. Stanford clearly journeys on a textual quest of attempting to determine his origins—a kind of poetic excavation into his own roots; I've argued herein that as Stanford portrays his adoptive parents with adoration or respect and attempts, with less fruition, to paint possible portraits of his biological parents, he returns to his sense of self—both multilayered and manifold (in the Whitmanian and Rimaldian senses)—and his compassion for maltreated or lost children and orphans as a means of heroically standing for them, as one among them ("there are flying children of those I am one" [9055]). Tragically, Frank Stanford's poetic quest remained unsuccessful, and the closest that he may have ever come to solving the mystery of his origins was to write a character with his birth given names, Francis Gildart; invariably, Francis's narrative returns to its home, to the autobiographical rendering of the poet, himself. Of Stanford's unmatched compassion and desire to find a lasting sense of identity above the prosaic transitions of a temporal existence, Pamela Stewart, near the close of her essay, writes:

Again, the timelessness, the diminishment of boundaries is why Stanford can speak both of and for whites, blacks, Indians, gypsies, men, women, convicts, the mutilated, lovers and the bereaved, the living and the dead. . . . Stanford's poems carry and give us something lacking in much of our contemporary poetry: a heart that embraces and speaks to the countless. A vital, workable connection between the living and the dead to describe for us all *one* world to hold a multitude of voices and possible outcomes. (Stewart, "Toward" 11)

"I want to *show* the origins," Stanford wrote, "the metaphors of reality, the free movement of the spirit" ("With the Approach" 303). The free movement of the spirit that Stanford mentions and Stewart describes was a basic component of his desire to determine and understand origins.

IN "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin wrote, "Works of art are received and valued on different planes. Two polar types stand out: with one, the accent is on the cult value; with the other, on the exhibition value of the work. . . . The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion" (Benjamin 224, 234). Frank Stanford was one of the preeminent American poets of the latter 20th century—original, visionary, and prolific; my aim with this study is to help advance his literary legacy to its right place, arguably that of a national icon, as Seth Abramson suggests (Abramson). In his foreword, Turnell adds that out of "partial, passionate and political" criticism, "something new emerges. . . . It is not the critic's business to do 'the common reader's' work for him. His business is to stimulate him to make his own discoveries, to provide fresh insights which will send the reader back to his texts to test their validity" (Turnell 9). I have attempted to provide fresh insights into Stanford's poetry that may bolster new avenues, new futures, in the perspectives on and legacy of Stanford's impressive oeuvre, which effectively reads as *truly new*, despite its age. Turnell continues:

No single critic can tell the whole truth about a great writer or speak with the same sureness all the time, and no age ever has the last word. The critic can only interpret an author in the light of his own age. His successors will add something to his portrait. . . . The individual critic therefore can only make a contribution to a portrait which in the nature of things must remain unfinished. (ibid)

To Bill Willett, Stanford wrote, "I can know the present through the past, by way of the future" (Willett, "Correspondence" 411). This thesis contributes to a portrait that remains unfinished, and my successors will add to it. May we collectively depart: toward innumerable futures.

VII. APPENDIX: COMPENDIUM OF CHARACTERS

This appendix consists of a selective, abridged compendium of generally recurring characters in Frank Stanford's published poetry; it excludes any appearances in unpublished poetry and fiction, and some instances include mere references. The compendium includes brief biographical contexts (textual characterization and actual biography, if known, may be conflated) and poem appearances.

A. Characters Not Exclusive to *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*

*Parenthetical numbers refer to line numbers in *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* or to page numbers of *What About This: Collected Poems of Frank Stanford* (denoted herein as "WAT"), unless otherwise noted. Poems herein listed apart from any larger books and that are not found in *What About This* are cited individually in the Works Cited.*

ABEDNEGO THE GYPSY: A quick knife fighter who is, according to Francis, "the most wanted man in the county" (presumably Desha County, Arkansas, home of the mouth of the Arkansas River and levee camps) (2258). A black man with "black-brown curls" and "wide shoulders" (2269, 2280) who is a stage performer (as clown) (2257) and has a sidekick who is his third cousin (2278) and whose name Francis cannot recall (2343). Abednego is shot by a baldheaded "man of God" (2355-2356), Reverend [sic] Willy Hocks (2362), who claims that Abednego has raped the Reverend's wife, Jenny (2360)—who, in turn, stabs herself (2262).

Appears in *The Singing Knives* ("The Singing Knives"), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, and is arguably alluded to in *You* ("Instead").

ALBERT FRANKLIN STANFORD (or **A. F. STANFORD**): Born 1884, died 1963 (WWI Draft Registration Card; U. S. SSDI, A. F. Stanford). The poet's adoptive father, through marriage to the poet's adoptive mother, Dorothy Gilbert Alter (*The Battlefield* 385). A. F. Stanford was a successful levee engineer for roughly a half-century (6447; WWI Draft Registration Card)—based in Memphis, Tennessee for the latter years and during the 1950s until his retirement in 1961 (*The Battlefield* 385; C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, fourth page; Shugars 137). Stanford presents his father variously, in mostly positive lights, and the poet's fifth book, *Arkansas Bench Stone*, is dedicated to the elder Stanford, a "legendary" figure.

Appears (concretely or presumably) in *The Singing Knives* ("The Singing Knives," "The Gospel Bird," "Albino," "Elegy for My Father," "The Picture Show Next Door to the Stamp Store in Downtown Memphis"), *Field Talk* ("Fire Left by Travelers"), *Shade* ("Soybeans," "A Man Born in the Forest"), *Arkansas Bench Stone* ("Lament of the Land Surveyor," "Will"), *Constant Stranger* ("The First Twenty-Five Years of My Life," "No Sign of Life: A Tragic Gag of Raymond Radiguet"), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* (by name, specifically, in line 6518),

Crib Death (“Living the Good Life”), *Mad Dogs* (“Porch Chair”), *The Last Panther in the Ozarks* (“Riverlight”), “The Books,” and “A. F. Stanford.”

AUNT JULINDA BAYOU (or **MAMA JULINDA**): The mother of Mose Jackson (WAT 354; Shugars 108), Julinda can cure rabies (WAT 351), fix black eyes (“Blue Yodel of Those...” 24), etc.

Appears in *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, *Crib Death* (“Island Funeral”), *The Light the Dead See* (“The Brake”), and “Blue Yodel of Those Who Were Always Telling Me.”

BABY GAUGE: A black child of one of the levee hands (5168; C. D. Wright, “Note on *The Battlefield*” 159), possibly Lawrence Gauge (14617), and a peer of the poet. One of Francis’s closest levee camp friends (WAT 265, 324, etc), Baby Gauge is probably similar in age to him (50, 15135; WAT 324), unlike O.Z. and Jimmy, and wants to “get knowed” with Francis (15212) and go to school together (8910-8911); he is presumably able to read and write, as he has “books on his shelf” (11701) and writes Francis a letter (15213).

Appears in *The Singing Knives* (“The Blood Brothers,” “Tapsticks,” “The Snake Doctors”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, *Crib Death* (“In This House”), and *You* (“The Wolves,” “The Burial Ship”).

BIG EMMA (or **MISS EMMA** or **BIG MAMA EMMA**): A woman in the levee camps (449), possibly a cook (5014-5015). Emma apparently shot a man in the past (6393-6394); she dies at an unspecified point (WAT 105, 515).

Appears in *Shade* (“Field Hands on Plantation Night”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, and *Flour the Dead Man Brings to the Wedding* (“The Biscuits”).

BIG TIME SONNY MORRIS: Born 1948, died 2014 (Morris Obituary). Included here despite only one poem appearance, as Sonny Morris was a friend of the poet’s ([C. D. Wright], *The Singing Knives*, 1979, [62]) and is mentioned in Stanford’s correspondence (e.g., Willett, “Correspondence” 408-409, 411, 413). Charles “Sonny” Morris and Stanford met in junior high school in Mountain Home, where Sonny was in the same class as Stanford and was friends, as well, with Bill Willett ([C. D. Wright], *The Singing Knives*, 1979, [62]; Morris Obituary). Sonny liked (the now obsolete) Big Time candy bars, which is why Frank called him Big Time Sonny Morris (Stokesbury, 3.13.2015 email). Sonny was born in Mountain Home, Arkansas and later became a resident of Arlington, Texas, where he died in November 2014 (Morris Obituary). Big Time Sonny Morris (credited as such) was an Assistant (along with John Stoss) of *Preview: The Literature* in 1970 (“Staff”).

Appears in “Lost Dog and a Wild Hair.”

BILL WILLETT (or **BILLY THE JEW** [in *The Battlefield*]): The poet’s closest friend (*The Battlefield* dedication page); met at approximately age 12, entering eighth grade at Mountain Home Junior High School in 1961 (Launius 81; Willett, “Correspondence” 414), roomed together in several residences while students at the University of Arkansas, and remained friends throughout the

poet's life ([C. D. Wright], *The Singing Knives*, 1979, [62]; Ehrenreich; Launius 120). In *The Battlefield*, Billy has the idea to “break into the Library” in the night “and read from the forbidden shelves” (14305-14306), and the actual Willett notes that Billy's act of opening “the dusty book of Blake” (14327) is based on an experience of Stanford having mailed a letter to him written on a page torn from a copy of William Blake's illustrations for Robert Blair's *The Grave* in fall 1972; when the two men met at the New Orleans Hotel in Eureka Springs later that winter, Stanford gave the book to Willett for him to reinsert the page into and keep (Willett, “Correspondence” 413-414).

Appears in *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, *Flour the Dead Man Brings to the Wedding* (“Willett”), “Lost Dog and a Wild Hair,” and “Blue Yodel of Those Who Were Always Telling Me” (as “Billy Richard Willet” [sic]).

THE BLIND CHILD (or MACK SON): A liberty is taken here in assuming that the blind child and Mack Son are the same character across all instances (3257). Little is known about this child other than that he is perhaps is a seer/clairvoyant of sorts (WAT 325) and that he is apparently the nephew of Aunt Caroline Dye (who appears in *You* [“The Burial Ship”]). Blindness, as a general motif, is common in Stanford's work (e.g., blind fishermen [34], horsemen [62], tigers [331], gospel singers [766], swordsmen [3405], children [5995], mechanics [7069], tailors [10779], fighting cocks [12052], etc).

Appears in *Shade* (“Born There”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, and *You* (“The Burial Ship”).

BOBO WASHINGTON: An incoherent, “loony” black friend of Francis's (2134-2136, 2146, 2165-2167) who is missing an ear (2038-2039). In *The Battlefield*, Francis claims that he is about the only friend that BoBo has (2484-2485), as BoBo's wife is “gone” (2056), and his children, at least one of which was a son, are no longer living (ibid, 2190); a rat “took” his ear “a long time ago” (2039), and Stanford writes that a rat also “sucked the blood / Out of his baby's head” (WAT 4). Considering their friendship, then, it is unsurprising that, in one scene (resembling Captain Ahab's struggle with Moby Dick), BoBo gives up a prolonged struggle to reel in a 200-pound catfish (2157) in order to rescue Francis, who is floating down the river in a boat and tied up in barbed wire (2236-2241). BoBo is later murdered (6398), though the circumstances surrounding his death are never explained.

Appears in *The Singing Knives* (“The Blood Brothers”) and *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*.

BORN IN THE CAMP WITH SIX TOES (or SIX TOES): A presumably black friend of Ray Baby, Baby Gauge, O.Z., Mose Jackson, Melvin, Jimmy, and Francis who was born in the levee camps and six-toed at birth (C. D. Wright, “Note on *The Battlefield*” 159); Six Toes's last name is apparently Lewis (WAT 354), his father is in prison (6389), and he wears Frank's hand-me-down clothes (WAT 351).

Appears in *The Singing Knives* (“The Blood Brothers,” “Tapsticks,” “The Snake Doctors”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, *You* (“The Burial Ship”), and *The Light the Dead See* (“The Brake”).

CHARLIE B. LEMON (or **CHARLIE B.** or **THE B.** or **MIDNIGHT BLUE** or **MIDNIGHT**, var. **CHARLIE B. LEMMON**): Born 1926, died 2003, a resident of Memphis (U. S. SSDI, Lemon). Charlie B. Lemon was the chauffeur for Albert Franklin Stanford (C. D. Wright, “Note on *The Battlefield*” 159; Coleman, 2.18.2015 email), driving a black Cadillac (1211), and is allegedly referred to as “the chauffeur in the red beret” (1202), “Midnight Blue” (1207), and “vitamin C” (1203). “We always had a Cadillac, usually black,” Ruth Rogers recalls (Ehrenreich). Charlie B. Lemon supposedly appears as an extra in Elia Kazan’s 1956 film, *Baby Doll* (7459, 7461), and, according to Francis, claimed that he was encouraged to go to Hollywood to become a movie star (7477-7478). He is known to wear long-toed shoes (1208; WAT 4). Jimmy Lee describes Charlie B. as having been “cool,” the “main man” (Lee, 2.10.2014 conversation), and Stanford writes, “yes, Charlie B. Lemon is one, real character, too tough and lean and good to be drowned out by any of the poet’s spices. He was a bad son-of-a-bitch when he wanted to be” (Letter to Cuddihy, 9.1974, 122).

Appears in *The Singing Knives* (“The Blood Brothers”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, arguably *Crib Death* (“The Home Movie of Those Who Are Dead Now”), *The Light the Dead See* (“The Kite”), and *Mad Dogs* (“Porch Chair”).

DARK (or **TOM BECK**): A stoic but violent (9857) black war veteran (7345, 9137; “The Books” 388) and heavy-drinking blues musician (7301, 7346)—a singer (7306) and accordion player (14877)—born in the 1880s (7640) “who envisions a racial and social revolution” (Shugars 135) of peace and serves as mentor and hero to Francis (13167-13169) after the death of Sylvester in *The Battlefield* (beginning at approximately the halfway point, at line 7032); he is “the ringleader” (12128), and he often rides a mule (7634, 8018; “The Books” 388). A hard-edged, unrepentant figure who has allegedly killed more than one white man (9134-9135, 9137-9138) and is a convict (12128) who had previously been in prison on second-degree murder, but supposedly escaped from his chain gang (WAT 106-107). A “long throated man” who “never said much,” Francis explains. “He was like an Indigo Snake where sunlight and shade / meet He beat things to death,” and he apparently had at least two sons (ibid). In *The Battlefield*, Francis notes of Dark, “when he spoke which was seldom / his voice carried over the fields,” despite it being quiet and deep (7303-7305). William Carpenter writes that Dark is “a mythopoeic creation, a figure that Stevens might call ‘the angel of reality’” (Carpenter 19).

Appears in *Shade* (“Field Hands on Plantation Night”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, *Poems Floating Up Eyeless on Sunday Morning* (“Vague Sonnet”), and “The Books.”

DEATH: Of the personified characters in Stanford’s poetry, Death is the most recurring—generally an amoebic, mythic shape-shifter, always progressed in thought and action, a genius (9792); “Death is fond of the double entendre,” Stanford writes (WAT 201). Death is occasionally presented as an omnipotent and omniscient joker or boss (WAT 199-200) who is subtle and

invariably triumphant, but Death “is no gentleman” (9785), possesses a pungent smell (WAT 179), and performs actions but doesn’t converse. Death might be wearing sunglasses (17) or peeling spuds (WAT 201), might be a vagabond traveling with his daughter (WAT 110) or “like an anchor” or “a ruined net” (9760). Death often drives a Cadillac in Stanford’s poetry (4-5; WAT 200)—of the Coupe de Ville series, specifically (9791; WAT 478)—yet is known to also drive a truck with snow tires (WAT 199). In *The Battlefield*, Death’s twin brother is Sleep (2960-2961, 7642), and Francis even expresses, “I am Death” (2960, 3112, 7642), invoking *Moby-Dick* with “call me Death I’m tired of Ishmael” (3448); he states, “I wrote my death warrant like an opera based on a koan” (14976). For Francis, Death itself is the second coming of Christ (9300), “the promised land” (WAT 232); he notes, “there is the phrase death is functional I made up two years ago” (9056). Elsewhere, Death “is also sagegrass, belladonna, and rose hips” (WAT 216), and Stanford writes, “My mother used to beg, / ‘Son, don’t write about Death, / We’ll cross that ditch soon enough,’ ” but closes the quatrain with, “I ask you to have respect for the dead” (WAT 229-230). Writing in *The New York Times*, Dwight Garner notes, “Among the first things you perceive about [Stanford’s] work is that death is everywhere in it” (Garner C6). For Stanford, Death is heavily intertwined with life, a means for transcending temporality within existence; thus, Stanford writes both, “I remember my death” (WAT 284) and “I have come to know the timing of my death” (92). His book title *Crib Death* suggests such interminableness.

Appears in nearly every volume.

DOROTHY STANFORD: Born 1911, died 2000 (U. S. SSDI, Dorothy Stanford). The poet’s adoptive mother (then Dorothy Gilbert Alter) (Decree of Adoption). The first female manager of a Firestone tire store, nationwide (*The Battlefield* 385; Shugars 60). Later, at the levee camps, Dorothy ran the kitchen tent, managing the various cooks (Lee, 2.10.2014 conversation), and after A. F. Stanford died, she lived and worked at Subiaco Abbey’s guest lodge, Coury House (Launius 15; Shugars 56). Unlike A. F. Stanford, she is never mentioned by name in the poetry. The poet’s fifth book, *Arkansas Bench Stone*, is dedicated to Dorothy—like A. F. Stanford, a “legendary” figure.

Appears (presumably) in *The Singing Knives* (“Living”), *Arkansas Bench Stone* (“Inventory”), *Constant Stranger* (“A Black Cat Crossed the Road I Was Born On”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, *Crib Death* (“The Home Movie of Those Who Are Dead Now,” “Terrorism”), *Plain Songs* (“Branches Pushed Away by Scarred Birds”), *Flour the Dead Man Brings to the Wedding* (“Death and the Young Man”), and “The Books.”

ELVIS PRESLEY: Based on the musician/actor from Mississippi and Memphis, Tennessee, born 1935, died 1977. The actual Elvis had begun to attract industry interest from major record labels in 1954-1955 but didn’t sign such a contract until late 1955 (with RCA Records), which led to a commercial breakout in 1956 (Tracy xi-xii); he purchased a house at 1034 Audubon Drive in Memphis in March 1956 and lived there for 13 months until March 1957, when he purchased Graceland (Elvis’s 1956 Home)—1034 Audubon Drive is less than a half-mile from 1118 Oak Ridge Drive, where the Stanford family moved in summer 1957 (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email), and the close proximity of the two residences is referenced multiple times in Stanford’s

poetry, with dates anachronistically conflated such that Elvis still lives “up the street” (215, 6998, 14298; WAT 588). In keeping with that anachronism, though Elvis was quite famous by the time of *The Battlefield*’s narrative—c. 1960 (4451, 5263)—he “ain’t famous yet” in *The Battlefield* and asks Francis (possibly in a dream) if he can borrow a comb (4852-4853).

Appears in *The Singing Knives* (“The Snake Doctors”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, and *Some Poems Who Suffocated Like Lightning Bugs* (“Irons”).

FRANCIS GILDART (or **FRANK STANFORD** or **FRANKIE** or **FRANÇOIS VILLON** [or **F V**] or **FRANCOIS GILBERT** or **SAINT FRANCIS**, etc): The poet’s alter ego, with “Francis Gildart” taken from Stanford’s birth given names (Decree of Adoption); generally, the poet’s poeticized self bears clear likeness to his actual self—in biography, philosophy, etc—but may occasionally be adorned with preternatural abilities (e.g., omniscience [9847], clairvoyance [1328-1329, 1712-1713, 12387], etc). In *The Battlefield*, Francis, the epic’s hero, is the “knight of the levees” (7028), a variably flawed hero and knight-errant in the lineages of Beowulf (13257, 14705) and Don Quixote (2650-2651): a 12-year-old (2197, 4451, 9801-9802) poet (2844, 12329) who was adopted and raised in a wealthy family, “the finest of families” (11960), and who possesses numerous impressive abilities—e.g., proficiency in sign language (7961-7962, 9446-9447) or classical musical composition (1419, 11561)—and phenomenal intellectual precocity, manifested perhaps as deep historical awareness (238, 9548, 11568-11569) or a knowledge of philosophy (9866, 14990). Francis is inspired by heroes such as François Villon to the extent that he imagines himself as Villon (9910, 13227) (or, after reading Stevenson’s short story about Villon, “A Lodging for the Night”—“Francis Villon,” per Stevenson’s anglicized spelling [356-357]), or the adapted “Francois Gilbert” (353), and even has Charlie B. Lemon refer to him as such (1217, 1306). Elsewhere in the poetry, the alter ego is less frequently Francis Gildart, specifically (as in, say, “The Books” 390), but is still roughly a composite resembling the poet and occasionally called Frank (“Oxford” [WAT 632]) or Frankie (“Blue Yodel of Those...” 24) and often a poet (“Past Times” [WAT 423]) and/or a land surveyor (“Lament of the Land Surveyor” [WAT 180-181], “Frank Stanford Calls Back to the Owl Who Lives a Hundred Years” [WAT 635]). One of the notable differences between the alter ego and the poet is that the alter ego often has a brother, and the poet has no brother, at least not adoptively (WAT 78, 200, 280-281, 311, 317, 361, 536, 595; *The Battlefield*); Francis exclaims, “don’t tell me I don’t have a brother either I’m bored with that talk” (10109).

Appears (by name) in *Ladies from Hell* (“Blue Yodel of the Wayfaring Stranger”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, “Oxford,” “Frank Stanford Calls Back to the Owl Who Lives a Hundred Years,” “Blue Yodel of Those Who Were Always Telling Me,” and “The Books.”

JIMMY (or **THE WOLFMAN** or **THE WOLF**): Modeled after the poet’s cousin, Jimmy Lee of Greenville, Mississippi, born 1942. Stanford spent a couple summers at the farm of Jimmy’s father, working with him and Jimmy (Lee, 2.10.2014 conversation). The character is approximately six years older than Francis Gildart in *The Battlefield*—as Jimmy is approximately 18 years old (7641, 11441)—just as Jimmy Lee was six years older than the poet. Jimmy Lee married at age 19 (Lee, 2.10.2014 conversation), and in *The Battlefield*, Francis and

Jimmy talk about whether or not Jimmy will likely marry in short time (5439-5443). Jimmy is one of the few constant characters throughout *The Battlefield*; he is essentially Francis's closest cohort or sidekick (hence, "*St. Francis and the Wolf*"). He is known to handle knives (6351, 11334; WAT 4, 6), drives a beat-up Ford (1185, 6384) which appears to be a pickup truck (10506, 13222; WAT 11) with drop fender skirts (7610), has a penchant for debauchery—driving fast (7829), drinking (5669, 6427), violence or roughhousing (4854, 5026-5027, 6354, 7140-7141, 14018; WAT 6), etc—and had allegedly been in the penitentiary (7352-7354, 10114). He is well-liked by women (5157, 10421) and is quick, like Francis, to befriend the black levee camp workers, defending them in the face of racism (5069, 7811). Francis likens Jimmy to "the devil" ("The Books" 391), but much of their conversation is relatively harmless; Francis clearly idolizes him (5174, 13167-13169) and occasionally teaches him (6129-6140), and Jimmy likes Francis and listens to him (5767-5771, 5944-5946).

Appears in *The Singing Knives* ("The Blood Brothers," "The Singing Knives," "Living," "The Pump," "The Gospel Bird," "Tapsticks," "The Snake Doctors"), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, *You* ("The Burial Ship"), and "The Books."

JOHN STOSS: Born 1940. Included here despite only one poem appearance, as John Stoss—poet, playwright, novelist—was a friend of the poet's and is mentioned in correspondence and other related writing. Born in Great Bend, Kansas, earned a bachelor's degree from Fort Hays State University, and attended the University of Arkansas's MFA program in creative writing in the early 1970s (Lost Roads Publishers brochure; *Preview: Eight Poets* contents page). Stanford later published Stoss's first book, *Finding the Broom* (as Lost Roads No. 2), in 1977.

Appears in *You* ("The History of John Stoss").

MELVIN: One of the levee camp children. Frequently paired textually with Baby Gauge in *The Battlefield* (370, 2254, 8898, 13130), so possibly of a similar age to Baby Gauge and Francis. Melvin can read and write (11735), and he appears to have a tendency toward illness (190, 6386).

Appears in *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* and *You* ("The Burial Ship").

THE MIDGET: Reading the midget as a consistent, recurring character might be tenuous in argument, but some variation of the midget appears across Stanford's poetry. In "The Blood Brothers," the midget is white (WAT 4), and the midget might be a kind of acrobatic, musical, or sideshow performer (916, 2252, 10987, 12084) with a predilection for vindictive violence (3499; WAT 45, 55, 477)—perhaps in a kind of duel with Francis/the poet's alter ego (5699-5702; WAT 4, 50, 55, 58). (For the character Count Hugo Pantagruel, the World's Smallest Man, see B. Characters Exclusive to *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*.)

Appears in *The Singing Knives* ("The Blood Brothers," "The Snake Doctors"), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, *Mad Dogs* ("What Claude Wanted to Tell Her"), and "The Books."

MOSE JACKSON (or MOSE): Mose Jackson is a “crazy” convict who has recently escaped from the Statesville penitentiary (WAT 354)—in actuality, possibly the Mississippi State Penitentiary (or Parchman Farm) in the Mississippi Delta (Shugars 106)—and thus is older than characters such as Baby Gauge, Francis, Melvin, and Ray Baby. Mose has a sorghum patch known as Sorghum Brake (WAT 352, 354), plays a fife (WAT 325), and likes to gamble (WAT 4). Mose is Aunt Julinda’s son (WAT 354; Shugars 108). He is murdered in *The Battlefield* (6398).

Appears in *The Singing Knives* (“The Blood Brothers”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You, You* (“The Burial Ship”), and *The Light the Dead See* (“The Brake”).

O.Z.: A black child whose mother was the Stanfords’ housekeeper in Memphis (Rogers, 12.4.2008 conversation); he became the Stanfords’ chauffeur and later visited them occasionally in Mountain Home (ibid; Coleman, 2.18.2015 email). Approximately six-ten years older than Francis, as he was a teenager when Frank and Ruth were in grade school (Rogers, 12.4.2008 conversation) and as he is older than Jimmy, who is six years older than Francis (6374-6375). The age difference is evident in O.Z.’s position in “The Burial Ship.” O.Z. reads well and is a “photographer” (6380-6381).

Appears in *Arkansas Bench Stone* (“Island,” “Inventory”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You, You* (“Faith, Dogma, and “Heresy,” “What About This,” “The Burial Ship”), *Poems Floating Up Eyeless on Sunday Morning* (“Vague Sonnet”), and “The Books.”

RAY BABY: A black child of one of the levee hands (C. D. Wright, “Note on *The Battlefield*” 159); unlike Baby Gauge and Melvin, Ray Baby is probably a few years older than Francis, yet younger than O.Z. and Jimmy; Ray Baby is pictured (with Frank and Ruth) on the rear cover of the 2nd edition of *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*. He appears to be from a poorer family than Baby Gauge’s or Melvin’s families (6385-6387) and, like Six Toes, wears Frank’s hand-me-down clothes (WAT 351); Ray Baby might dance (8914-8916), hold horse reins (2277, 2341-2346), or steal a gold tooth (WAT 4) for a little money.

Appears in *The Singing Knives* (“The Blood Brothers”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You, You* (“The Burial Ship”), and *The Light the Dead See* (“The Brake”).

RUFUS ABRAHAM (or MR. RUFUS): Primarily a character in *The Battlefield*. An old (1596), greedy (1586,1603), uneducated (1614), preaching (1644), black (1609) farmer who walks with a cane (1596) and occupies a spit of land called Abraham’s Knife (14741-14743), which is essentially a bend in the river (14851). Rufus worries that when he dies, white people will get his shack/outhouse, land, and money (5724-5725, 10222-10223), which amounts to change (mostly pennies) kept in buckets that Francis helps him count (1585-1589, 1595). Rufus dies (10160-10161); he leaves Francis a leather wallet (10905-10906), and the white people do get his land and money (10218, 10221-10222, 11735-11736, 11832). However, neither Mississippi nor Arkansas will claim his land (14743), so Francis and his cohorts occupy Abraham’s Knife in a racially integrated community (14797-14799, 14841), and Deacon Oakum carves the land into an island using a dragline (14851, 14854-14857, 14866).

Appears in *Shade* (“My Home”) and *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*.

SYLVESTER MARTINGALE (or **SYLVESTER THE BLACK ANGEL** or **THE BLACK ANGEL**): A key supporting character in the first half of *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, modeled after Stanford’s friend, Richard Banks, who appears in the opening scene of *It Wasn’t a Dream; It Was a Flood* (C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, third page). For a time, Banks was the sole black resident of Eureka Springs, Arkansas (ibid), and in *The Battlefield*, Francis notes that Sylvester was called “the town nigger” by the townspeople of his town (2721-2722, 9110). Sylvester is a Creole (3924) peanut farmer (2735) who works at a liquor store (3321-3322, 3557, 3602-3604) run by a bootlegger (3331, 5039) and claims to acquire his “notions” from three sources: mother wit, the Bible, and the Memphis newspaper (3639-3640). Francis calls Sylvester “the black angel” because he has “a black choir robe,” is “always alone,” and weeps “like an angel” (2757-2758). He often plays “a cane fife in the deep woods” (2752) and sings stories in his sleep (3325-3326). Francis and Sylvester have a humorous homophonous miscommunication (guerilla/gorilla) which consumes several pages of the epic (3567-4264). Sylvester is falsely accused by a white mob, led by a man named Guy Sipp (3343), of having raped a white woman (3433-3434) and is lynched (3343) by hanging (2727, 3342, 9136, 9139); Francis refers to the individuals responsible for Sylvester’s death as a collective Judas (2727). After his death, Sylvester reappears to Francis as the Black Angel (4321, 4737-4738, etc), and Francis regrets not having been nicer to Sylvester (3836).

Appears *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* and *Poems Buried in the Moon Lake Levee* (“Furious Ballad of Courting at the Ice House”).

TANGLE EYE (or **TANG**): An old (7599, 8351), black (7807, 8293), heavy-drinking (7470, 8346-8347), cross-eyed (Lee, 2.10.2014 conversation; Lomax 272) levee worker whose real name is Walter Jackson (Rev. of Parchman Farm). Tangle Eye had been in prison (Lee, 2.10.2014 conversation) at the Mississippi State Penitentiary, or Parchman Farm, where Alan Lomax recorded him as a vocalist on his Parchman blues recordings, referring to Tangle Eye’s style as a “holler”—of the songs referred to as “levee-camp hollers” (Lomax 272, 275-276). In *The Battlefield*, when Francis is twelve, Tangle Eye is perhaps 60 years old (Lee, 2.10.2014 conversation); Jimmy Lee describes Tang as the “funniest” character of the levee camp group (ibid). Tangle Eye had been married to an attractive singer with the Dixie Jubilee Singers (8253, 8255)—long ago deceased (8229) at age 18 (8253-8255)—and both she and Tangle Eye had allegedly been extras in King Vidor’s 1929 film, *Hallelujah* (7459-7460, 8244-8253). Francis often calls him Mr. Tang (7471, 7992). He occasionally shoots pistols, even randomly at passing cars (8421-8424, 8766-8767), and he frequently mumbles when he talks (7482, 7507, 7544, 7621, 8348).

Appears in *Arkansas Bench Stone* (“The Visitors of Night”), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, and *Mad Dogs* (“Porch Chair”).

B. Characters Exclusive to *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*

The text of The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You contains several hundred names; many of these names were developed by the poet into full-fledged characters, others are mere references, and others still are too obscure to definitely identify. Below is a selective, abridged list of a dozen characters, including some brief “biographical” information and some line numbers of their appearances in the poem.

THE ASTRONOMER: An intellectual and well-educated (386, 5462-5463, 6617) Egyptian (390) who is Francis’s neighbor in Memphis (2630) and who teaches college at Southwestern at Memphis (now Rhodes College) (2628; C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, third page). The astronomer visits Francis’s home, talking with A. F. Stanford “about physics and floods” (386), encourages Francis to read (1709) and to “be a saga” (2656), and loans him numerous books (14990), such as German classicist Werner Jaeger’s magnum opus, *Paideia* (14884-14885), a book of short stories by Japanese writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (14886)—who, like Stevenson, wrote about François Villon (Ryūnosuke 203)—and works by Hume and Kant (14990). The astronomer has no sons (2655) but has an adopted daughter (2632, 10409), who takes Francis to the cinema to see F. Richard Jones’s 1927 film, *The Gaucho*, starring Douglas Fairbanks (10409-10411).

CLYDE MILLER: A character in the latter half of *The Battlefield*. Proprietor of Clyde Miller’s Sunset Drive Inn theater (7735), locale of a key late-narrative scene, after Clyde refuses service to Tangle Eye, Charlie B. Lemon, Jimmy, and Francis because the former two are black (7778, 7807), as the drive-in theater is hosting a sunrise Easter service in the morning (7768-7769, 7778-7779, 7790). Clyde is married to an “ugly” (8527), “red-headed” (7929) woman named Ronnie (7781, 8527) and is known to interject comments to the audience (7724-7739, 7742-7743, 7747-7748, etc), which isn’t interested in listening and mocks him in turn (7740-7741, 7749-7751, 7763, 7773, 7821, etc).

COLDBLOODED MARGARET: An undeveloped character introduced late in the epic (14707) who, according to Francis, “smelled like butter in a skillet before you put the cornbread in” (14715); she steals a fire truck (14707) and lives on Abraham’s Knife in the commune with Francis and his comrades after Rufus Abraham dies. Coldblooded Margaret is blind in one eye (14716) and has a scar that runs from her left ear to her bosom (14720) because her father had attempted infanticide on her (14721). Francis finds her “strange” (14737) but is nonetheless “crazy / about her” (14728-14729).

COUNT HUGO PANTAGRUEL (or **THE WORLD’S SMALLEST MAN** or **THE MOUNTEBANK**): Based on the actual figure who was a regular feature at the Mid-South Fair in Memphis (C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, third page). Count Hugo Pantagruel (959) is from Brooklyn, New York (469), is 22 inches tall (470), can communicate in eight languages (483), and speaks in a pleasant, high-register whisper (468). Francis considers Count Hugo a friend (461)—the only aspect of the fair that he likes (460)—and visits him at the fair every day after school (481-482); Count Hugo asks Francis to write to him (487-488), but Francis is confident that he’ll be at the following year’s

fair (488), though he isn't (649). During that conversation, Count Hugo drugs Francis (492-493), which causes a series of poetic, hallucinatory visions in him (494-510).

DEACON OAKUM: A preacher (14752, 15114) introduced late in the epic (14652) who doesn't have a regular congregation (15122) and preaches to an empty church (15115) or while drunk (15169-15170). Oakum carves Abraham's Knife into an island using a dragline (14854-14857, 14866) for Francis's commune on Rufus Abraham's old land. Oakum says that Francis's saga is "like a levee" (14656), and Francis notes that Oakum said that his saga would be found "one day when I was dead" (14657).

MAMA COVOE (or **AUNTIE COVOE**, var. **MAMMA COVOE**): An apparent caretaker of Francis (50-51, 10455, 10457-10458) who dies early in, or preceding the start of, the poem (36, 10461). Francis arguably refers to Mama Covoe as his "first" mother, possibly conflating her with his biological mother (3, 4281-4283).

MAMA VIOLA: A black woman (5116) who lives and/or works at a lively (5138) juke joint (5131) known as Mama Viola's Place (5044), which is in close proximity to the liquor store where Sylvester Martingale works (3323). Jimmy takes a couple—Miss Cassie and HiLo (or Bacho) (5043-5046)—to Mama Viola's Place (5081-5082) near the middle of the narrative.

MULCIBER MCGILLCUTTY: Sylvester's gimp-legged (4026, 4031-4032) cousin (4009), who works as an undertaker (4018). One night, a black cat jumps over the fence (4166), and Mulciber chases after the cat (4170) and returns at dawn with the cat's bloody paw (4277-4278).

ROOD THE VISITOR: An undeveloped character introduced in the middle of the epic (5755). A black (ibid) snake swallower (5764) who had worked in the carnival (5791) but who is in prison at the Shelby County Penal Farm (ibid) in Shelby County, Tennessee (of which Memphis is the county seat). Francis notes that Rood's story is told in an unfinished libretto bequeathed to him by Count Hugo Pantagruel (5765-5766).

SONNY LISTON: Based on the boxer from Arkansas, born c. 1932, died 1970. The actual Sonny was defeated by Cassius Clay (later, Muhammad Ali), who thus became the World Heavyweight Champion in 1964. Muhammad Ali was one of Stanford's heroes; in an interview with Broughton, Stanford claims that he'd rather have been Muhammad Ali than T. S. Eliot (Broughton, "Frank Stanford" 305), and in "The Truth" (*Smoking Grapevine*), he writes, "I have more respect for Muhammad Ali / Than any other living man" (WAT 432). Sonny Liston enters *The Battlefield's* narrative late (13584), and Francis pounces on Sonny as though he (Francis) were in Muhammad Ali's place (13584-13585, 13920-13921, 14041-14043)—as Sonny cries in a café (13888), and Francis imagines Sonny dying in his arms (14031).

THOMAS MERTON: Based on the Trappist monk, poet/writer, and activist from France and Kentucky, born 1915, died 1968. The actual Thomas Merton was a formidable influence on Stanford; five of his poetry volumes (*Ladies from Hell*, *Field Talk*, *Shade*, *Mad Dogs*, and *Flour the Dead Man Brings to the Wedding*) contain epigraphs by Merton, and the title of Stanford's poem "There Is No Where in You a Paradise That Is No Place and There You Do Not Enter

Except Without a Story” (*Flour the Dead Man Brings to the Wedding*) is taken from the opening lines of Merton’s poem “The Fall” (Merton 354-355).⁸⁴ In *The Battlefield*, Merton only appears as a closing force, entering the poem in its final 50 lines. Francis finds himself on the luxury cruise liner Giotto (15218), sailing first class with Baby Gauge to Japan (15212, 15216-15217), and Thomas Merton appears, wearing a white robe (15237); the “soft-spoken” (15263) Merton conveys notions of the art of Henri Rousseau (15238) and Pablo Picasso (15240) to Francis.

VICO: An old (9436, 10446-10447, 10530-10531, 10665-10666, 11603), deaf and mute (9445, 9450, 9464-9465), mostly-Greek/quarter-African (9482, 9586-9587, 9589) runaway monk (11100), freedom rider (11107), and bank robber (9532) who was born in Italy (9482), possibly orphaned (10524-10526), allegedly sold to the monastery as a child (10523), became a famous castrato (10640-10644, 10826, 11077, 11603), and “lost his voice in the war” (11104) after a piece of shrapnel from one of his own troops gashed his larynx (9576)—named after and loosely inspired by the Italian historian and philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744).⁸⁵ Vico tears up when Francis first begins to converse with him in sign language (9446-9448), feeling that his “spirit is paroled,” that he is “no longer in the valley / of death and silence” (9459-9460). Vico enters *The Battlefield’s* narrative late (9413) but nonetheless becomes a well-developed character and serves as one of Francis’s mentors or guides through some latter parts of the poem. The bulk of Vico’s part in the epic’s narrative ends with “here endeth the tale of Vico” (11803).

VIII. NOTES

¹ **Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury***— This epigraph closes the second paragraph of the second section—"June 2, 1910"; Quentin's section—of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, on page 96 of the Modern Library edition, as published by Random House in 1946. In his September 1974 letter to Cuddihy, Stanford acknowledges his affinity to Faulkner:

[T]he last thing in the world I care about is the Fugitives and their narrated influence on poetry, etc. Dugan and a couple of others put it better than I could when they said, poetry-wise, I had more in common with Faulkner than the New Critics and that Nashville bunch. The domains of *The Southern Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, and *The Kenyon Review* are a far cry from Yoknapatawpha county, the terrain of the imagination. (Letter to Cuddihy, 9.1974, 121)

² **Stanford's "Blue Yodel of Poets..."**— This epigraph comprises lines 4-8 of the 40-line excerpt of Stanford's "Blue Yodel of Poets of Times Past" as published in *The Boston Phoenix* on December 18, 1973 ("Blue Yodel of Poets..." 15). The poem is rather obscure among Stanford's published works and has a peculiar history. In a letter to Alan Dugan, c. late 1972 or possibly 1973 (an undated fragment of which appears in *Ironwood* 17), Stanford writes:

news came that an old companion of mine, a poet manque, *hung* himself in his *bed*. Immediately I began a very long poem, it turns out, BLUE YODEL OF POETS OF TIME PAST [sic]. Almost a gentle war song of the poet warrior battling to stay alive. It is over 1,000 lines already. Too long. A very bad storm knocked the lights out, so I had to write it in the dark. . . . The poet's name is Neil Spearman [sic] (Frank means spear!). . . . Another poet, unknown, bites the dust. (Letter to Dugan, 1972-1973, 142)

Neal Spearman (correctly spelled) was the fourth roommate of three Fayetteville poet-peers of Stanford's—John Stoss, Ralph Adamo, and Leon Stokesbury—in 1971-1972, but according to both Adamo and Stokesbury, Spearman was, ironically, not a poet; he was a physics major (Adamo, 2.28.2015 email 1; Stokesbury, 2.27.2015 email) and a tennis player (Adamo, 2.28.2015 email 2). In late summer or early fall 1972, Adamo, Stokesbury, and Spearman each moved out of the house (toward different destinations), and in October 1972, Stokesbury received a letter from Stoss, notifying him that Spearman had hanged himself in his bed at his new residence (Stokesbury, 2.27.2015 email). Spearman had tied a rope around his neck and the other end to a cinder block, then thrown the block over the bed's headboard (Adamo, 2.28.2015 email 1; *ibid*). Adamo doesn't recall a friendship having existed between Stanford and Spearman (Adamo, 2.28.2015 email 1), which Stokesbury corroborates: "Spearman was not an old companion of Frank's. Frank knew him as only the fourth guy who lived with John, Ralph, and me" (Stokesbury, 2.27.2015 email). Nonetheless, Spearman is also mentioned in a typewritten manuscript page of Stanford's, in which he (or his narrator) explains that he has met Muhammad Ali on both of Ali's visits to Arkansas: "One of the times--it was at the Holiday Inn or at the Hogs gymnasium, I was with Lady Jane and Neal Spearman" (*What About This* 544).

However, Stokesbury, who attended the event at the gymnasium where Ali spoke, believes that Stanford wouldn't have met Ali there, as Ali was surrounded by an entourage (Stokesbury, 4.5.2015 email).

Neal Spearman is referenced in Adamo's Stoss-centered poem, "A Letter to John, Leaving Marengo," in which the narrator reflects on "what Neal did": "Three poets and a physicist in one house: / naturally it is the physicist who bows out" (Adamo, "A Letter..." et al, 58). The full version (in its alleged 1,000+ lines) of "Blue Yodel of Poets of Times Past" is unpublished and may or may not be extant, but the poetry editor of *The Boston Phoenix* in 1973, Celia Gilbert, doesn't recall asking poets to cut their lines (Gilbert).

³ **McCarthy's *Suttree***— This epigraph is from pages 27-28 of McCarthy's *Suttree*, as published by Vintage Books in 1986.

⁴ **the currents of . . . American poetry**— As singular poets go, I am reminded of a scene in *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* in which Vico expresses to Francis: "so far I am the only poet of my kind in this country / though you have probably noticed by now that I am from another country" (9466-9467). Vico and Francis notably have much in common. In any case, Eileen Myles writes that "[t]he ominous pitch of Stanford's writing reminds me of nothing I recognize as modern poetry. It's as ancient as fear" (Myles 93), and Pamela Stewart notes that "Stanford's poems carry and give us something lacking in much of our contemporary poetry: a heart that embraces and speaks to the countless" (Stewart, "Toward" 11).

⁵ **developed a talent . . . as a teen**— As to Stanford's alleged early start as a poet, he did place fourth in a poetry contest for students in the Memphis and Shelby County schools in April 1958 at age nine (*What About This* x); as Steve Stern writes, "[i]t is rumored . . . that he wrote poetry from the time he learned to write words [and that he] wrote an 800-page verse narrative in adolescence" (Stern, "Surveying" 222).

The four Stanford poems published in a 1972 issue of *The Iowa Review*—"The Buried Sword," "Keeping the Lord's Night Watch," "The Actresses of Night," and "The Paramour" (the former two of which remain uncollected)—are dated 1962, 1962, 1961, and 1961, respectively ("The Buried Sword" et al, 22-24), but those dates are alleged. Poems in some of Stanford's manuscripts are dated as far back as the late 1950s—e.g., "Canephorae" (1958) from *Some Poems Who Suffocated like Lightning Bugs in the Bootlegger's Jar* (*What About This* 592)—but again, the dates could well be part of Stanford's self-mythology (Frank Stanford Papers).

C. D. Wright notes that a Stanford family friend in Mountain Home told her that Stanford gave poems to her when they were in junior high school (c. 1961-1962), and the friend's recollection of the poems' "nocturnal" vocabularies ("knives, prows, wolves, and the cold, wet lure of the moon") is nonetheless consistent with Stanford's later themes (C. D. Wright, "A Wayfaring Stranger" 100). In a February 1974 letter to David Walker, Stanford writes that prior to moving to New York City (in August 1972 [Willett, "Correspondence" 411])—while having lived in a log cabin in Fayetteville (with Mencin)—he had worked in trying "to make fourteen years of early, Huckleberry Rimbaud [manuscripts] readable" (Letter to Walker, 2.1974). Launius alleges that

Stanford “had several volumes of juvenilia stored away” upon entering Subiaco Academy in 1964 and that he “had accumulated over a dozen manuscripts” before graduating from Subiaco in 1966 (Launius 87). Early manuscript titles include *Field Talk, 1957-1972* and *St. Francis and the Wolf: Some Early Poems, 1957-1964* (*Field Talk* copyright page; C. D. Wright, “Bibliography” 13), but such dates can be difficult to authenticate.

Re: epic poetry, specifically, in the interview with Broughton, Stanford states, “I wrote more when I was between the ages of twelve and eighteen,” continuing that at Subiaco, the epic poetry, lyrics, and dramatic monologues that he composed likely totaled “several thousand pages” (Broughton, “Frank Stanford” 308).

Despite Stanford’s apparent young start in poetry, no specific mentor appears to have pointed him toward poetry or the epic; “I know that his [adoptive] mother submitted him to a succession of tests to verify his brilliance,” Wright notes, “but I do not know whether he grew up in a house of books or that any direct encouragement was forthcoming” (C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 100).

⁶ **adopted on the same day**— Of Stanford’s adoption by Dorothy Gilbert Alter, the Decree of Adoption, dated August 20, 1948, states merely that “soon after the birth of said child it was permanently surrendered by Dorothy Margaret Smith, mother and only living parent of said child unto petitioner for adoption” and that “said child now resides with petitioner in [Washington County, Mississippi]”; it doesn’t specify the date on which Stanford was adopted (Decree of Adoption).

Both Carl Judson Launius and Murray Shugars conversed and/or corresponded with Dorothy Stanford (Launius 112, 156, 337; Shugars 19, 51, 97, 132, 261). Launius writes of the adoption:

On August 1, 1948, accompanied by her lawyer, [Dorothy Gilbert Alter] drove from her home in Greenville to a small town . . . where the administrator of a Catholic orphanage had informed her [that] an infant was expected. When Dorothy arrived the baby was waiting, nine pounds heavy and precociously alert for having been born only a few hours before. The legal work . . . had not been fully completed, but with the attorney’s persuasion it was deemed sufficient. Dorothy took the child and drove back to Greenville. (Launius 23)

Shugars corroborates that “[o]n August 1, 1948, the day he was born, Stanford was adopted by . . . Dorothy Gilbert Alter” (Shugars 12), and that she “took the child home with her the day of his birth” (Shugars 59), adding that she had “arranged her son’s adoption in Greenville before his birth” (Shugars 60). Shugars also notes that Dorothy’s trip from Greenville (“accompanied by her lawyer and a neighbor”) was to Richton, in Perry County—to the Emery Memorial Home—and that it followed a call to Dorothy from the Home’s Sister Cooper “to inform her that an alert, nine-pound baby boy was waiting for his new mother” (Shugars 58-59). Anachronistically, Shugars writes that Sister Cooper’s call to Dorothy occurred on August 9, 1948 (Shugars 59), though it’s possibly a typo.

⁷ **His first few years were**— Though Stanford spent his early years in Greenville, Mississippi, some of his biographical notes (e.g., *Ozark, Ozark: A Hillside Reader* and *Crib Death*

[M. Williams 175; *Crib Death* 55]) and obituaries (e.g., the *Grapevine* and the *Northwest Arkansas Times* [Neal 1; “Gunshot”]) state that he was also born in Greenville, and in 1949. As discussed in chapter III herein, Stanford was likely the source of this misprinted information.

⁸ **In 1970, he began publishing**— Excluding his appearance in *Preview: 1968-1969*, Stanford’s first publication appears to have been in the inaugural, spring 1970 issue of *Tansy*, a stapled wraps magazine based in Lawrence, Kansas under editorship of John Moritz (“Early Times...” et al, 38-40). As the publication was Stanford’s first, and as *Tansy* was a small, new magazine, Stanford may have had a lead-in—which could have possibly been Charles Plymell via Allen Ginsberg (Wood, “With Allen” 49). *Tansy* 1 contained work by 18 poets, including Charles Plymell, David Antin, Bill Berkowitz, and Ed Dorn, as well as Assistant Editor Brian Sulkis. Sulkis recalls that publishing Stanford “did feel like a discovery” and that there was a discussion regarding placing his poems as the issue’s closer, a “prestigious location, sort of a grand finale, or last word” (Sulkis, 11.10.2014 email). Naturally, Stanford’s contributor’s note for “The Gospel Bird” in the *New American Review* in 1971, claiming that the publication is “his first published poem,” is belatedly erroneous (“The Gospel Bird” 239).

In June 1970, Stanford met Irv Broughton, and Stanford’s next publications were in the *Mill Mountain Review*, issue 2, also in 1970. In 1971, Stanford began publishing widely, including another appearance in *Tansy* 4. Stanford published two poems in *Tansy* 1: “Early Times in a Mississippi Liquor Store” (uncollected) and “The Hole” (reworked into “The Albino”).

⁹ **He published . . . volumes . . . between 1971**— It is generally established that *The Singing Knives* was published in early- to mid-1972, despite the copyright of 1971. The copyright pages of the 1979 second edition and its 2008 reprint acknowledge the 1972 date, as does *The Light the Dead See: Selected Poems of Frank Stanford* (*The Light* v, 1). In a letter to Stanford postmarked December 3, 1971, Broughton explains the nature of prolonged delays with his printer, writing, “I wanted them certainly for X-mas” (Broughton, Letter to Stanford). James Babij received a copy of the book on his summer 1972 travels with Broughton and Stanford, which began in July (Babij, 4.2.2015 email).

¹⁰ **The Battlefield . . . executed that year**— *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*’s copyright page notes a publication date of 1977; though some of Stanford’s peers saw copies of *The Battlefield* prior to his death (Adamo, 2.18.2015 email; Stokesbury, 2.24.2015 email; etc), and Launius notes that the volume “lay on the coffee table” in Jim Whitehead’s house during Stanford’s wake (Launius 192-193), C. D. Wright clarifies that the book was published “after the poet’s death” (C. D. Wright, “Note on *The Battlefield*” 157), that “[a]t the time of Frank Stanford’s death, in 1978, the poem was printed but not bound” (C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, first page), and Stanford’s belated obituary in the *Arkansas Times* in December 1978 notes, “[*The Battlefield*] is the principal title being published by *Lost Roads* this year” (Hall, “A Major Voice” 30).* Some modicum of copies may have been presentable by the time of Stanford’s death, but the book is effectively a posthumous publication. While *The Singing Knives* has occasionally assumed the actual publication year (1972)—*The Battlefield* is typically referenced under its copyright year (1977).

*For that matter, Hall writes that all titles comprising the first 12 numbers in the Lost Roads catalogue were being published in 1978 (though they, too, have 1977 dates): C. D. Wright's *Room Rented by a Single Woman*, Lost Roads No. 1; John Stoss's *Finding the Broom*, Lost Roads No. 2; Ralph Adamo's *Sadness at the Private University*, Lost Roads No. 3; John S. Morris's *Bean Street*, Lost Roads No. 4; John McKernan's *Walking Along the Missouri River*, Lost Roads No. 5; Irv Broughton's *The Blessing of the Fleet*, Lost Roads No. 6; and Frank Stanford's *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, Lost Roads Nos. 7-12 (Hall, "Clean, Well-Lighted" 33). Adamo's recollection, however, is that titles 1-6 were out in 1977 (Adamo, 2.18.2015 and 2.19.2015 emails).

¹¹ **for decades, out of print**— The front matter of the second edition (2000) of *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* lists *Ladies from Hell*, *Field Talk*, *Shade*, *Arkansas Bench Stone*, and *Crib Death* as being out of print (and *Constant Stranger* was out of print as well). The preliminary bibliography that C. D. Wright published in *A Raccoon Monograph* (1981) notes that *Ladies from Hell*, *Field Talk*, *Shade*, *Arkansas Bench Stone*, and *Constant Stranger* were, already by that time, out of print (C. D. Wright, "Bibliography" 12). These works were returned to print in *What About This: Collected Poems of Frank Stanford* in 2015.

¹² **either uncollected or altogether unpublished**— A number of Stanford's posthumous collections were published in *What About This: Collected Poems of Frank Stanford* in 2015. Thus, according to the preliminary bibliography that C. D. Wright published in *A Raccoon Monograph* (1981), Stanford's unpublished poetry works appear to currently include: *Approacheth the Ship and Wonder*, *The Blue Yodels of Frank Stanford*, *18 Early Poems*, *Gospel Bird*, *Let Him Lay There: Some Early Poems*, *Loving to Death*, *Naegling*, and *St. Francis and the Wolf: Some Early Poems 1957-1964* (C. D. Wright, "Bibliography" 12-13); Stanford's will notes the existence of two further collections ("Will").

Wounds (consisting of 12 3-line poems of mostly 7-syllable lines) was published in *No: A Journal of the Arts* in 2003 (*Wounds* 180-183) and was collected in *What About This*, and select poems from some other manuscripts have sporadically been published in journals over the years. A number of the posthumous works appearing from pages 535-602 of *What About This* are contained in packets within the *Approacheth the Ship and Wonder* folder in Stanford's papers at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University. In his will, Stanford included dedication instructions for *Crib Death* and *You*, and also for *One Finger Zen*, which was to be dedicated to Kay DuVernet and Ellen Gilchrist ("Will").

¹³ **a canonical figure in American poetry**— As example, Stanford is currently excluded from Norton's relevant anthologies: *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (Ferguson et al; latest edition December 2004), *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry* (Ramazani et al; latest edition January 2003), and *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology* (Hoover; latest edition March 2013).

- ¹⁴ **growing interest in Stanford's work**— That Stanford's legacy is growing is abundantly clear, and in 2001, C. D. Wright noted, "Since his death his reputation has not waned. It has stood its ground. It has taken root and grown" (C. D. Wright, "Looking").
- ¹⁵ **"Frank's poems always seem slightly electric"**— The publication in *The American Poetry Review* omitted "always" from Ginsberg's note (Wood, "With Allen" 49); revision based on the original, courtesy of Wood (Ginsberg, Letter to Wood).
- ¹⁶ **he had "massively interesting ideas"**— In a rejection letter re: Stanford's story, "The Dream of the Rood," dated "25 Nov" (no year appended), Gordon Lish, *Esquire's* fiction editor from 1969-1976, writes, "You have massively interesting ideas and a remarkable hand at housing them" (Lish, Letter to Stanford). In a September 1974 letter to Dugan, Stanford notes, "I'm waiting to hear from *Esquire* about a story I hope they'll buy" (Letter to Dugan, 9.1974, 141). Stanford's contributor's note in the fall 1974 issue of *Road Apple Review* notes that Stanford's poetry had appeared in *Esquire*—as well as *The New Yorker* (*Road Apple Review* contributor's note)—and his biographical note in *Crib Death* also mentions the alleged *Esquire* appearance (*Crib Death* 55), but these appearances never occurred. In "The Truth," in *Smoking Grapevine* (*What About This* 432), Stanford writes: "Of course I've tried *Esquire*, / But my shoes aren't platforms / And I don't know shit about canoes" (13-15).
- ¹⁷ **"should be encouraged in his amplitude"**— In the September 1974 letter to Dugan, Stanford writes, "I am going to do this, and I'd like your opinion if I should spend the time and do it: I'm going to hire a typist to do a [sic] 800-1000 page manuscript and submit it to that Walt Whitman award by the Academy of American Poets. You saw about 500 pages of it, the older manuscript" (Letter to Dugan, 9.1974, 141). Stanford proceeded, and the Academy returned *The Battlefield*, reasoning, in November, that it was too long to read (*What About This* rear pastedown). On December 21, 1974, Dugan wrote to Jeffrey Mitchell at the Academy: "I think you have made a mistake..." (*What About This* 374). The recipient of the inaugural, 1975 Walt Whitman Award was Reg Saner for *Climbing into the Roots*, and the judge was William Meredith (*Ehrhart* 55).
- ¹⁸ **"superbly accomplished and moving poet"**— James Wright's comments were re: *Crib Death*, having received its proofs. "It is astounding to me that I was not even aware of this superbly accomplished and moving poet," he writes. "There is a great deal of pain in the poems, but it is a pain that makes sense, a tragic pain whose meaning rises from the way the poems are so firmly molded and formed from within" (J. Wright 105).
- ¹⁹ **10 Great Neglected Poets**— The full list in the *Asheville Poetry Review's* "Special Millennial Issue" included: Mina Loy, Pierre Reverdy, Yvan Goll, Lorine Niedecker, Kenneth Patchen, George Scarborough, Jack Spicer, Bob Kaufman, Amon Liner, and Frank Stanford (Flynn & Crowe).
- ²⁰ **"how Jesus got his followers"**— Gilchrist's words were adapted from a description of her fictional character Francis Alter (modeled after Stanford) in her short story, "A Wedding in Jackson," from *The Age of Miracles*: "He was my first true writer friend. The first blessed,

gifted, cursed poet that I knew. Also, the most beautiful human being I have ever seen. To be in his presence was to understand why men became the disciples of Christ. Existence changed when he was around, became finer, clearer, more alive. He dedicated his life to beauty, to art, poetry, freedom. Then he killed himself” (Gilchrist 39). For more on Stanford as represented in Gilchrist’s fiction, see note 22.

Stern corroborates, “[Stanford’s] personality was a magnet for outcasts and misfits of every persuasion, who presented themselves like volunteers for the population of his poems. Poor blacks, threadbare poets, genuine outlaws, maverick women. . . . You felt select in such company, as if the ship were an ark and the world in floodtime” (Stern, “Surveying” 223).

²¹ **he has frequently been elegized**— A comprehensive list of elegies for Stanford would be lengthy, but among them—inclusive of their occasional dedications—are: multiple poems by Ralph Adamo, including “Dream Court, *for Frank Stanford*,” “Saturday Night in New Orleans,” “A Love Song for F and C” (Adamo, “Dream Court” et al, 21-22, 32, 45), and “Frank Stanford at Spider Creek” (Adamo, “A Letter...” et al, 81); Floyd Collins’s “The Wharf, *for Frank Stanford, 1948-1978*” (Collins 15); R. S. Gwynn’s “Lies, *F. S., 1948?-1978*” (Gwynn, “Lies” 48); Thomas Lux’s “Elegy for Frank Stanford” (Lux, “Elegy...” 36-37) and “Frank Stanford at 63” (Lux, “Frank Stanford...” 13); John McKernan’s “At the Grave of Frank Stanford” (McKernan 77-78); Leon Stokesbury’s “A Few Words for Frank Stanford: 1948-1978” (Stokesbury, “A Few Words” 573-576); David Walker’s “Aftertraces: Passages, *Frank Stanford, 1949-1978*” (Walker, “Aftertraces” 27-28*); James Whitehead’s “Below Is What He Said That Troubles Me” (Whitehead 5); John Wood’s “Remembering a Young Poet I’d Known in College” (Wood, “Remembering” 50-51); multiple poems by C. D. Wright, including “Wanderer in His Thirtieth Year,” “Scratch Music,” and “King’s Daughters, Home for Unwed Mothers, 1948” (C. D. Wright, “Wanderer...” et al, 30, 48, 64-65); and Franz Wright’s “Poem with No Speaker (F. S.)” (F. Wright, “Poem...” 48) and “For Frank Stanford” (F. Wright, “For Frank...” 53).

*Walker’s elegy is centered within the larger “Aftertraces,” which contains compositions for three poets: Robert Lowell, Frank Stanford, and James Wright (Walker, “Aftertraces” 27-29). Notably, Walker’s endnote commentary for the poem asserts that its three components (or poems, as it were) are “less personal elegies than linkings, tributes to inheritances” (Walker, “Aftertraces” 38).

²² **a character . . . in multiple works of fiction**— As with the elegies, a comprehensive list here might be lengthy, but among such works are Forrest Gander’s *As a Friend*; multiple works by Ellen Gilchrist, including the short story, “Traceleen’s Telling a Story Called ‘A Bad Year’ ” in *Victory Over Japan* (1984), *The Anna Papers* (1988), and several stories in *The Age of Miracles* (1995), including “The Raintree Street Bar and Washerteria,” “Among the Mourners,” and “Going to Join the Poets”; and Steve Stern’s *The Moon and Ruben Shein* (1984). Mary A. McCay writes that “Frank Stanford was certainly the most influential poet in Gilchrist’s life. In fact, he may well have been the most influential person” (McCay xi). For a more in-depth examination of Stanford as represented in Gilchrist’s fiction, see McCay’s study, *Ellen Gilchrist*,

as well as Alyson Ward’s master’s thesis, *Biography as a Searchlight: Finding the Frank Stanford Story Cycle in Ellen Gilchrist’s Fiction* (UT Arlington, 2010).

²³ **death [was] . . . his “biggest love affair”**— C. D. Wright as quoted in “The Long Goodbye” (Ehrenreich).

²⁴ **the moon [was] . . . his “familiar”**— Ginny Stanford writes of Stanford that he “kept the moon in his back pocket” (G. Stanford, “Requiem” 152), and Stern adds, “The moon was Frank’s familiar. Throughout his poems he personified and disguised it, producing it from out of pockets and under hats” (Stern, “Surveying” 223-224). In *The Battlefield*, Stanford writes, “the moon is a death place that is dreamt by snake doctors,” “my dreams like full moons,” and “the moon was a garden where I picked roses at night” (434, 1002, 4305).

²⁵ **having been adopted by A. F. Stanford**— “He’d known for a long time that he was adopted by his father,” notes Bill Willett—Stanford’s “long-time,” “oldest,” “lifelong,” and “closest” friend (C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, last page; Lorberer 36; [C. D. Wright], *The Singing Knives*, 1979, [62]; Shugars 199)—to Shugars, “but he always believed that Dorothy was his birth mother” (Shugars 65).

²⁶ **shortly before he began publishing poetry**— The precise time or age at which Stanford learned that he was entirely adopted—i.e., by both A. F. Stanford and Dorothy Stanford—has been a source of conjecture, but consensus appears to be that it was in 1968 (possibly in summer), at age 19-20. “It was the beginning of our junior year,” Willett explains to *Rain Taxi*. “I was catching up with him and he just came out and said ‘I was adopted,’ and I said, ‘yeah, I know that.’ He said ‘No, no, I’m completely adopted . . . my mother is not my mother and my sister is not my sister’ ” (Moore 37). Ruth Rogers corroborates that Stanford’s discovery came “after he graduated from Subiaco” (Shugars 64), and C. D. Wright notes that both Willett and Rogers date the discovery as 1968 (C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, last page). Alluding to Subiaco, Stanford does begin his 1977 essay, “With the Approach of the Oak the Axeman Quakes”: “There is a monastery in Arkansas. I was there for some years. My mother sent me there to school after my father died. There, I learned I was an orphan” (“With the Approach” 299), but he doesn’t specify precisely when, nor the details of the discovery, and Dorothy was based at Subiaco long after Stanford graduated (see note 42). Other datings had placed the discovery as having occurred in high school; family friend Joan Williams wrote that, after Stanford’s death, Dorothy told her that he had “[come] home in high school one day and asked if she’d adopted him” (J. Williams, “Remembering” 108), and Stokesbury dated the discovery as having occurred following A. F. Stanford’s death in 1963*, when the poet was 15 (Stokesbury ix).

*Both A. F. Stanford’s birth and death years have been misprinted in Stanford writing or writings on Stanford (*The Singing Knives*, 1971, 1979, 24; 2008, 22; Shugars 12; Henriksen 360; etc). A. F. Stanford was born on September 24, 1884 (WWI Draft Registration Card**; U. S. SSDI, A. F. Stanford), and he died in August 1963 (U. S. SSDI, A. F. Stanford; “Albert Franklin”). He is buried in Baxter Memorial Gardens in Mountain Home, Arkansas, and his

gravestone is engraved with the correct years (“Albert Franklin”). Stanford’s poem “Elegy for My Father” originally appeared in *Preview: The Literature* in 1970 with the dates “1883 - 1963” (“Elegy...” 5), then appeared as “Fish on the Trees” in the summer 1971 issue of the *Chicago Review* with the subtitle merely of “elegy” (“Fish on...” 7-8); when it was collected in *The Singing Knives*, its title was reverted, and the dates “1883 - 1963” were reinserted below the title. Stanford’s confusions over his adoptive father’s vital dates are mysterious; in a handwritten manuscript poem, “The Slaying of My Father in Nineteen and Sixty Three” (*What About This* 438), Stanford crosses out “Four” in the title, revising to “Three.”

**Of note is that A. F. Stanford’s World War I Draft Registration Card (dated September 12, 1918, 45 years before his death) lists him, already by that time, as being self-employed under the occupation of “Levee Contractor”—and living in Driver, Arkansas, north of Memphis (WWI Draft Registration Card).

²⁷ **his biography . . . inseparable . . . for . . . close reading**— Stern writes, “Frank Stanford’s biography . . . certainly . . . deserves consideration within the body of his work” (Stern, “Surveying” 223). Launius writes, “as with many poets whose poetry is much more accessible, and more valuable, if the reader is familiar with the poet’s life—Byron comes first to mind, Hart Crane is another—Stanford’s work begs to be approached with at least a rudimentary knowledge of the twenty-nine years he spent alive” (Launius 18), and Shugars argues, “While Stanford’s poetry and fiction should not be construed as autobiography, or confessional for that matter, many instances in these texts are verifiably informed by autobiographical occurrences” (Shugars 4).

²⁸ **his biological parents . . . an utter mystery**— The afterword to *The Singing Knives* (1979) notes, “If asked about his ‘real’ parents his persistent response was that since he knew nothing about them, he could make them up” ([C. D. Wright], *The Singing Knives*, 1979, [61]). Willett remarks that c. the mid-1970s, he absentmindedly asked Stanford about his heritage, and Stanford replied, “Well, I don’t know. I’m adopted” (Moore 37). Shugars writes, “Where was the poet born and of whom? What were the circumstances of his adoption? The events leading up to Stanford’s birth remain clouded in conjecture, the circumstances of his adoption difficult to prove” (Shugars 56).

In late November and December 2014, I extensively developed an original theory as to the identity of Frank Stanford’s biological parents and many related aspects of his genealogical lineage; my research materialized in the form of a lengthy essay. Per my theory, Stanford was actually born into a literary family with at least three preceding, successive generations of poets (i.e., excluding Stanford’s generation)—as well as at least four preceding generations of writers and editors—and a prestigious, extensively traceable lineage; the surname “Smith” (long considered dubious in Stanford’s case) does not exist in the family’s recent lineage. As of this writing, my theory is untested and thus unproven, so it is not incorporated into this thesis’s body text. Should my theory be proven, a genealogical reading of Stanford’s work may be performable, which could theoretically yield interesting genetics implications.

²⁹ **Dorothy Margaret Smith . . . a fabrication**— Stanford’s adoption home was the Emery Memorial Home in Richton, Mississippi (Shugars 59; C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 99), which was run for 30 years by Rev. Mable Cooper until 1961, closed in 1963, and “burned under mysterious circumstances” in 1964 (“History of the Emery Home”), and the institution’s records burned as well (C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 99). The Home’s website notes that “[w]hile staying at the Home, the girls were assigned biblical names and their real names were kept confidential” (“History of the Emery Home”), and “Dorothy,” from the Greek, means “gift of God” (Yonge xlix), so the legitimacy of the mother’s name as listed on the Decree of Adoption could be considered dubious (Decree of Adoption); in 1984, Sarah Caldwell—who had directed the Child Welfare Services of the State of Mississippi in the 1940s and 1950s—told C. D. Wright that it was “common practice for the girls to give false names” (Shugars 60-61). Per my theory as to the actual identity of Frank Stanford’s biological parents (see note 28), “Dorothy Margaret Smith” is not his birth mother’s real name.

³⁰ **single divorcée named Dorothy Gilbert Alter**— Stanford’s Decree of Adoption lists Dorothy Gilbert Alter as “a widow,” but she was, in fact, a divorcée. Shugars notes, “Dorothy’s first husband’s name was Carl Alter. Though she had divorced him nearly ten years earlier, when asked, she claimed to be a widow, preferring to deny the relationship entirely” (Shugars 61), and as quoted in Shugars, Dorothy, herself, notes that in 1948, she “was thirty-seven years old and a divorcée” (Shugars 60).*

*At the time of Stanford’s birth/adoption in August 1948, Dorothy Gilbert Alter was actually 36 years old, as she was born on September 13, 1911 (U. S. SSDI, Dorothy Stanford; Dorothy G. Stanford [1911-2000]).

³¹ **was managing the Firestone tire store**— Launius writes that, while living at the farm outside of Greenville, Dorothy’s aunt and grandmother “helped in caring for the infant boy while Dorothy attended to running The Hideaway, a small tea room in Greenville which gradually grew into a well-known eating establishment” (Launius 23); Dorothy’s place of employment may have changed from the Firestone store to The Hideaway in the late 1940s.

³² **Dorothy[s] . . . Mississippi family had been well-to-do**— Ben Ehrenreich writes that Dorothy Gilbert Alter was “a descendant of what [Stanford’s] sister Ruth would with a mild sneer call ‘Mississippi aristocracy’” (Ehrenreich). Elsewhere, Rogers describes the Gilbert family as having been “[s]outhern Mississippi blue blood” (Shugars 65).

³³ **[Dorothy’s] father . . . became a [Parchman] foreman**— Several characters and anecdotes in relation to Parchman are a part of Stanford’s poetry; see, e.g., *The Battlefield* (87, 2094, 3477, etc). Tangle Eye had been an inmate at Parchman, and other characters have either been incarcerated or have had relatives who have (see VII, the appendix).

³⁴ **playmates in . . . Franklin and Carole**— In genealogical terms, Sarah Louise Coleman née Stanford (1921-2010) was Frank Stanford’s adoptive stepsister, and Franklin Stanford Coleman (b. 1949) and Carole Hess née Coleman (b. 1952) are Frank Stanford’s adoptive step-nephew and adoptive step-niece, respectively, but as Sarah Louise Coleman was 27 years older than

Frank Stanford and as her children were close in age to him, the terms do not adequately describe the nature of the relatives' adoptive relationship (U. S. SSDI, Coleman; Hess, 2.18.2015 email). Hess notes that she and Franklin considered Frankie and Ruthie more like playmates, describing their relationship as more comparable to that of close cousins (Hess, 2.18.2015 email). The Colemans routinely spent Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day with the Stanfords (Coleman, 2.16.2015 email; Hess, 2.18.2015 email), and Franklin Stanford Coleman ("little Frank") spent many weekends at the Stanford home with their family and also traveled several times with the Stanford family to the levee camps in the summers (Coleman, 2.16.2015 email). "We spent a lot of time with them," acknowledges Hess (Hess, 2.18.2015 email).

³⁵ **adopted him [in fall 1955]**— Rogers notes that the petition (#57503) was filed in Memphis, Tennessee on October 3, 1955 for Dorothy and Frank Stanford to adopt Francis Alter and that the adoption was finalized in Memphis on November 21, 1955 (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email).

³⁶ **moved . . . to 1118 Oak Ridge Drive**— This East Memphis residence, where Stanford lived from summer 1957 until summer 1961, is presumably the residence of Francis (age 12) in *The Battlefield*. In the poem, Francis says, "I know Elvis Presley lives up the street ten houses" (215), "Elvis lives right up the street maybe they'll drag race tonight" (6998), and "the Jewish fellow* and I the genius of dinosaurs and stamps / sneaked away from our homes in the city of the one evening / and walked the block to Elvis's house up the street / with notes in the wrought iron fence and leaves in the swimming pool" (14296-14299). In the posthumous poem "Irons" (*What About This* 588-589), the narrator explains, "now I wear blue suede shoes and live / down the street from Elvis" (27-28). Elvis Presley indeed lived less than a half-mile from the Oak Ridge Drive residence when he lived at 1034 Audubon Drive in Memphis for 13 months—beginning in March 1956, before purchasing Graceland in March 1957 ("Elvis's 1956 Home"). His home, which did have a wrought-iron fence and swimming pool, was indeed just more than "ten houses" from the Stanford home (Audubon Drive and Oak Ridge Drive connect), though Francis conveniently conflates dates—as Elvis had moved to Graceland by summer 1957 (ibid; Rogers, 12.9.2008 email). However, A. F. Stanford's nephew—Sarah Louise Coleman's first cousin—lived across the street from Elvis's house, and Carole Hess recalls playing with Ruthie as children in front of Elvis's house (Hess, 2.18.2015 email).

*This "fellow," possibly the son of a dentist, may have been the Stanfords' next-door neighbor at the Oak Ridge Drive home. Early in *The Battlefield*, Francis says that he made a computer with the assistance of the Jewish boy "next door" (1174), and Stanford's poem "The Picture Show Next Door to the Stamp Store in Downtown Memphis" was, earlier, titled "Remembering the Odor in the Jewish Dentist's House Next Door, I Recall the Picture Show Next Door to the Stamp Store in Downtown Memphis"; the poem appeared as such in *Preview: The Literature* in 1970 and in the *Chicago Review* in 1971 before its title was revised for *The Singing Knives* ("Elegy..." et al, 30-31; "Fish on..." et al, 12-13; *The Singing Knives*, 2008, 29-31).

³⁷ **Entering eighth grade, he met**— Willett writes, "I knew Frank since we were 12 years old" (Willett, "Correspondence" 414). Willett's recollections of their initial meeting—at the tryouts

for, or first practice of, the junior high football team—are included in various publications (Ehrenreich; Launius 81; Moore 38).

³⁸ **he worked for Norfolk Lake**— Rogers notes that the Lake Norfolk Recreational Association’s weekly publication listed Stanford as a fishman and guide from May 1963 until November 1964 (Rogers, 12.9.2008 email). In summer 1964, Joan Williams—whose father had been an associate of A. F. Stanford’s and whose second novel, *Old Powder Man* (1966)*, is about her father, as well as A. F. Stanford (J. Williams, *Old Powder Man*; J. Williams, “Remembering” 108)—visited Dorothy, Frank, and Ruth at the Mallard Point home for a month with her two sons, then aged 8 and 9, while researching the novel and recalled that Stanford suddenly appeared to refuel their boat at a pier one afternoon (J. Williams, “Remembering” 107-109).

*Williams writes that her month-long visit to the Mallard Point home was to glean “information” from Dorothy (J. Williams, “Remembering” 108), and Hess notes that her mother, Sarah Louise Coleman, described the novel as “a blended story” of Williams’s father and A. F. Stanford and that the wife of the fictionalized A. F. Stanford “would have been like Dorothy, as our grandmother [Edna Alexander Stanford] would never have worked at the camp” (Hess, 2.17.2015 email).

³⁹ **Around . . . A. F. Stanford’s passing**— The Stanfords converted to Catholicism either after Stanford’s freshman year (Launius 84), or after A. F. Stanford’s August 1963 death (Shugars 240).

⁴⁰ **Father Nicholas Fuhrmann . . . Father Wolfgang Mimms**— Along with being Stanford’s English teacher at Subiaco Academy, Father Fuhrmann was also his boxing coach and football coach; Shugars writes that “[f]amily and friends unanimously maintain that he exerted a greater influence over the adolescent poet than any other adult male” and that Stanford and Fuhrmann remained close friends into Stanford’s adulthood (Shugars 179-180). Fuhrmann officiated the wedding for Stanford’s marriage to Linda Mencin in August 1971 (Certificate of Marriage, Mencin).

When Stanford was a student at Subiaco (1964-1966), Father Mimms was not yet ordained (and was, thus, Brother Mimms); he was ordained a deacon and priest in 1969 and 1970, respectively (“Fr. Wolfgang”). Launius writes that Mimms was “the sole black monk at the monastery” (Launius 89), and at the time of Mimms’s ordination, Abbot Michael Lensing noted that he was the first African-American to be ordained at Subiaco (“Fr. Wolfgang”).

Stanford later dedicated poems to both men: “The Snake Doctors” to Father Fuhrmann and “Dante Gabriel Rossetti with His Head on the Virginal” to Father Mimms (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 47-63; *Ladies from Hell* 24).

⁴¹ **it was like day and night**— Ruth Rogers nearly replicated her words years later, including her own discovery: “From the time we found out we were adopted,” she said, “it was like day and night—Frankie just wasn’t the same” (Ehrenreich). She had told Shugars, “[Frank] told me that Mother made him promise that he’d never tell me” (Shugars 64).

⁴² **115 Skyline Drive . . . on Mt. Sequoyah**— Mencin and Stanford lived at the Mt. Sequoyah cabin both before and after their wedding (Walton); the 115 Skyline Drive address is listed on correspondence as late as June 6, 1972 (Dugan, Letter to Stanford). The address is crossed out on Dugan’s letter, replaced with Coury House in Subiaco—Subiaco Abbey’s guest house, where (for roughly 20 years, from the mid-1960s until c. 1984) Dorothy Stanford was caretaker (Launius 15, 116; Shugars 56). Ehrenreich’s article (2008) notes that the Skyline Drive cabin is “gone without a trace—just a big woody gap on Skyline Drive between numbers 117 and 111” (Ehrenreich).

⁴³ **poems . . . in *Preview: The Literature***— Stanford’s poems “Elegy for My Father,” “Remembering the Odor in the Jewish Dentist’s House Next Door, I Recall the Picture Show Next Door to the Stamp Store in Downtown Memphis,” “The Gospel Bird,” and “The Albino” appeared in *Preview: The Literature*, the journal’s 1970 issue, which Stokesbury edited and for which Stanford was Associate Editor (“Elegy...” et al, 5, 30-31, 39-41, 52-53).

⁴⁴ **the two week-long Hollins Conference**— The Hollins Conference on Creative Writing and Cinema—at which dozens of writers conducted workshops with more than 200 writing students—took place from June 15 - June 28, 1970 at Hollins College (Garrett 405).

⁴⁵ **taught Stanford [land surveying]**— A condensed overview of Stanford’s entry into, and work in, land surveying is as follows:

R. S. Gwynn had worked with a civil engineer/land surveyor in high school in the early 1960s, then reentered the field in 1970, working for Kemp, Christner and Associates in Fayetteville. After the Hollins Conference in late June 1970, Gwynn secured a roughly full-time job for Stanford as a chainman/rodman on his small surveying crew (of two or three men, and for which Gwynn was “party chief”) (Gwynn, 2.26.2008 email). Gwynn ran the instruments and taught Stanford the rudiments of surveying, including how to chain and give “shots”—Stanford’s work that summer involved much brush-cutting and stake-driving as the crew mostly worked on a new subdivision street and sewer in Fayetteville (ibid; Gwynn, 2.11.2015 emails 1 & 2). The poets’ summer employment turned into part-time, weekend work in fall 1970, and Stanford’s involvement ended mid-fall after failing to show up one day for a farm site assignment with Gwynn (for which Stokesbury filled in) (Gwynn, 2.26.2008 email; Stokesbury, 3.16.2015 email). At some point in the early 1970s, Don Kemp split from Kemp, Christner and Associates (ibid; Gwynn, 2.11.2015 email 2). In time, Stanford reconnected with Kemp, learning more of the trade, and working under him (Gwynn, 2.26.2008 email). C. D. Wright notes that, in the late 1970s, she sometimes “worked for Frank on the surveying line” (Trussell). Related stationery from Stanford’s employment with Kemp is housed at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library (Frank Stanford Papers).

⁴⁶ **issues [2-4] of the *Mill Mountain Review***— Stanford’s poems “The Professors” and “The Solitude of Historical Analysis,” “The Politicians,” “Holy Night,” and “Living” appeared in issue 2 of the *Mill Mountain Review* in 1970 (“The Professors” et al, 14-17); “If I Should Wake,” “The Bass,” “The Doe,” “The Minnow,” and “Cottonmouth” appeared in issue 3 of the *Mill Mountain*

Review in 1971 (“If I Should Wake” et al, 45-47); and “Planning the Disappearance of Those Who Have Gone,” “The Bandits,” “Bergman the Burning Ship,” “Bend Sinister,” “The Mother of Yánnis Rítsos” and “The Men” appeared in issue 4 of the *Mill Mountain Review* in 1971 (“Planning the Disappearance...” et al, 210-215).

⁴⁷ **he published prolifically in 1971**— In 1971, Stanford’s poems began to appear widely. His prolific publishing year included: “On Jesus Highway” (retitled as “Poem” for *The Singing Knives*) in *Aldebaran Review* (“On Jesus Highway” 10; *The Singing Knives*, 2008, 32); “Fish on the Trees” (retitled as “Elegy for My Father” for *The Singing Knives*), “The Albino,” and “Remembering the Odor in the Jewish Dentist’s House Next Door, I Recall the Picture Show Next Door to the Stamp Store in Downtown Memphis” (retitled as “The Picture Show Next Door to the Stamp Store in Downtown Memphis” for *The Singing Knives*) in *Chicago Review* (“Fish on...” et al, 7-13; *The Singing Knives*, 2008, 22-23, 29-31); “Wishing My Wife Had One Leg” in *Kayak* (“Wishing...” 18); “The Kite” and “The Pump” in *The Little Review* (“The Kite” et al, 20); “Belladonna” in *The Nation* (“Belladonna” 314); “The Gospel Bird” in *New American Review* (“The Gospel Bird” 48-49); “Tapsticks” and “Chimera” in *Tansy* (“Tapsticks” et al, 45-48); and 15 poems from the manuscript *Naegling** in *West Coast Review*: “The Intruder,” “The Quiver,” “Friends of the House of Momus,” “Momus,” “White Feather,” “Poet Manque,” “Becoming the Unicorn,” “The Tribade,” “The Arena,” “The Odor,” “Solus,” “Holy Night,” “The Bandits,” “The Smoking Mirrors,” and “Bergman the Burning Ship” (Poems from *Naegling*, 28-30).

*Four of the 15 poems in the *West Coast Review* issue later appeared in *The Singing Knives*: “The Intruder,” “The Quiver,” “Becoming the Unicorn,” and “Bergman the Burning Ship” (*The Singing Knives*, 1979, 38-39, 41-43). “Bergman the Burning Ship” was one of two poems added beginning with the 1979 edition “as was the poet’s intention” ([C. D. Wright], *The Singing Knives*, 1979, [64]); the other was “The Nocturnal Ships of the Past” (*The Singing Knives*, 1979, 28).

⁴⁸ **the editor for *Preview: Eight Poets***— Stanford was no longer studying at the University of Arkansas when its 1971 issue, *Preview: Eight Poets*, was printed, yet he was the issue’s editor. The eight poets that Stanford selected for the issue were John S. Morris, R. S. Gwynn, Leon Stokesbury, John Stoss, John Wood, Ralph Adamo, Jack Butler, and Frank Stanford (*Preview: Eight Poets*).

⁴⁹ **to and from which Fuhrmann drove**— Stanford was living with Mencin in Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville (in Washington County) in August 1971, but he is listed as being from Subiaco (in Logan County) on his Marriage License, dated August 18, 1971 (Marriage License), and he is again listed as a resident of Logan County on Mencin’s divorce filing, dated July 7, 1972 (Complaint in Equity).

⁵⁰ **In late July**— James Babij notes that his drive with Broughton from Portland, Oregon to Subiaco passed through Cheyenne, Wyoming during its annual festival, Frontier Days (Babij, 4.2.2015 email). The 76th annual Cheyenne Frontier Days took place from July 22-30, 1972 (Cheyenne Frontier Days brochure).

⁵¹ **56 Harvard Avenue in Staten Island**— Cheryl Campbell—a dancer, possibly from Little Rock, Arkansas (Willett, “Correspondence” 408-411; C. D. Wright, *The Battlefield*, last page)—lived at 56 Harvard Avenue in Staten Island (Frank Stanford Papers). In a passage of a letter to Broughton, presented by Launius with no date appended, Stanford writes, “Believe it or not, I’m going to Staten Island to live with Cheryl. For how long, I couldn’t tell you. Probably no more than nine months, then we’ll move on to somewhere else, maybe Seattle. I’m in love with her as I am death” (Launius 187). While living with Campbell, Stanford wrote to Willett of his writing poems and correspondence while aboard the Staten Island Ferry (Willett, “Correspondence” 408, 412). Stanford and Campbell apparently remained in touch at least into late 1972/early 1973, as the undated fragment of his letter to Dugan (c. late 1972 or possibly 1973) mentions, “Cheryl wants to come here, and I might let her” (Letter to Dugan, 1972-1973, 142)

⁵² **Irv Broughton, John McKernan, and Michael Cuddihy**— As magazine editors, Broughton, McKernan, and Cuddihy were especially instrumental in publishing Stanford’s work between 1970 and 1977. In addition to the 16 poems that Broughton published in issues 2-4 of the *Mill Mountain Review* in 1970-1971 (see note 46), McKernan and Cuddihy published another 29 Stanford poems in their magazines while Stanford was living. McKernan published “The Kite” and “The Pump” in issue 4 of *The Little Review* in 1971 (“The Kite” et al, 20); “Blue Yodel of Those Who Were Always Telling Me” in issue 9 of *The Little Review* in 1974 (“Blue Yodel of Those...” 24); and “Blue Yodel,” “Their Names Are Spoken,” “Island,” “Tale,” “Will,” “Shed,” “Blue Yodel of the Quick and the Dead,” “Lament of the Land Surveyor,” “Monk’s Dog,” “Women Singing When Their Husbands Are Gone,” “Lap,” and “Mouths Full of Spit” in issue 10 of *The Little Review* in 1975 (“Blue Yodel” et al, 13-17). Cuddihy published “Handling Paper with Cold Hands,” “Lost Recipe,” “Crest,” “Island Funeral,” and “Getting to Sleep” in issue 4 of *Ironwood* in 1974 (“Handling Paper...” et al, 61-66); “The Burial Ship” and “The Wolves” in issue 6 of *Ironwood* in 1975 (“The Burial Ship” et al, 76-77); and “Taking Your Life,” “Amaranth,” “A Woman Driving a Stake into the Ground at Midnight,” “Strange Roads Before Light,” “Only One Set in the Singer’s Eyes,” “The Angel of Death,” and “Death and the Arkansas River” in issue 9 of *Ironwood* in 1977 (“Taking Your Life” et al, 8-17). After Stanford’s death, Cuddihy continued to publish Stanford’s poetry in several additional issues, including a 60-page tribute to Stanford in issue 17 of *Ironwood* in 1981 (Cuddihy).

⁵³ **longest poems in American literature**— Quantifying poem length can be an arbitrary matter. According to *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics*, Herman Melville’s epic, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876), is the longest poem in American literature, at nearly 18,000 lines (Greene 1425). However, in the 20th century, a number of life-work American poems—fragmentarily published, sometimes across several decades and as sections or segments were completed—were published, such as Ezra Pound’s *The Cantos* (and, continuing in that Poundian approach of publishing in parts), Louis Zukofsky’s “A”, Charles Olson’s *The Maximus Poems*, etc. *The Cantos* is approximately 23,000 lines long (Perkins 220), and “A” and *The Maximus Poems* are a bit briefer. Stanford’s *The Battlefield Where the Moon*

Says I Love You is rather apart, in its intent and publication history, from many such works. C. D. Wright notes:

the long poem has [often] been . . . undertaken as in Pound's *Cantos* and Zukofsky's *A* as a life work. I know of nearly a dozen poets, including Tom McGrath, Clark Coolidge, Sharon Doubiago, and Ron Silliman who are writing poems with an unforeseeable last page. . . . *The Battlefield* was not intended to be a lifelong project. . . . Rather, it's of a whole cloth. . . . Thus I have not looked to understand *The Battlefield* in the context of the long American poem, but against the background of epic heroic verse." (C. D. Wright, "Note on *The Battlefield*" 157)

⁵⁴ **"got[ten] rid of half of it"**— In his April 1974 letter to David Walker, Stanford claims that *The Battlefield*, then 500 pages, had originally been in excess of 1,000 pages, or "40,000 lines." As, for years, the published poem was often referred to as being 20,000 lines but is in fact 15,283 lines, the alleged original poem might likely have been closer to 30,000 lines if not separately counting lines carried over from previous lines for space reasons. Stanford writes that the full title of the manuscript from which *The Battlefield* is excerpted is *St. Francis and the Wolf: Some Poems 1957-1964*—which C. D. Wright notes is 800 pages (C. D. Wright, "Bibliography" 13)—though Stanford was verifiably still writing *The Battlefield* c. 1970-1972 while living on Mt. Sequoyah with Mencin and in March 1973 when he met Ginny Crouch (Walton; G. Stanford, 3.4.2008 email 1). Humorously, the opinion of the late David Walker was that Stanford "wrote way too much" (Walker, 3.5.2008 conversation).

⁵⁵ **filed for divorce on June 1st**— According to the police report, Ginny Stanford had filed for divorce on May 26, 1978 (Mueller, "Incident Report"), but the Divorce Petition was received and filed on June 1, 1978; it notes that the couple had separated around May 5th (Divorce Petition).

⁵⁶ **a .22 caliber revolver**— The firearm with which Stanford committed suicide has been a source of confusion and misprint; it was a Hi-Standard "Double-Nine" (nine-shot, double action) .22 caliber revolver with four-inch barrel and imitation pearl grips (Mueller, "Investigator's Notes"; "Receipt"). The gun belonged to Don Kemp, Stanford's employer; Kemp kept it loaded, in the drawer of a desk in the office (Brooks), and Stanford picked it up there on the afternoon of his death (Mueller, "Incident Report").

⁵⁷ **ended his life**— Ginny Stanford writes, "Some say he couldn't have shot himself three times in the heart. Some tell me to my face, others say it when I'm out of range. Some say I did it, some say she did it. Some say we plotted our revenge together" (G. Stanford, "Requiem" 151), and Launius notes that Dorothy Stanford, herself, had harbored doubts that Stanford had committed suicide (Launius 302-303). The police report quashes any such speculative notions. A trace metal detection test was conducted on Frank Stanford's right hand at 9:00 PM on June 3, 1978. "The results of the test were positive," the report notes, which continues in detail to describe the matching fluorescences between Stanford's hand and parts of the revolver, including, "There were two definite areas which fluoresced on the victim's right index finger. . . . These results are conclusive that the victim had gripped and fired the revolver found at the scene" (Mueller, "Trace Metal"). Elsewhere in the police report, Mueller wrote of the test, "On

the right index finger there were two clear-cut areas indicating that he had pressed the trigger of the firearm” (Mueller, “Incident Report”).

⁵⁸ **“Death in the Cool Evening”**— “Death in the Cool Evening” appears in *Ladies from Hell*, but notably, it had previously appeared in *The New York Quarterly* in summer 1973 with a composition date of “1964” appended, along with a note indicating that the poem was from *The Pre-Raphaelites Little Brother* (“Death” 127).

⁵⁹ **poem of Stanford’s reads**— A poem housed at Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, apparently titled “Their Smell,” begins, “I love two women. / And they love me.” and continues that if the women are not in love with each other, “Then the man falls in love with his death” (“Their Smell”). Inv. Mary Mueller notes that Wright told the investigators that they were “looking at all three corners of a triangle” (Mueller, “Memorandum”). While a mirror of his fatal triangle, the text of “Their Smell” nonetheless bears likeness to Stanford’s prior failures with Mencin and Campbell; Willett notes that Stanford “lost [Linda] due at least partially to his involvement with Cheryl” and that “[h]e wrote that he had betrayed both Linda and Cheryl and there was only one ultimate price, death” (Willett, “Correspondence” 408, 414).

⁶⁰ **arguably before . . . know[ing] the man well**— R. S. Gwynn notes, “I don’t think Frank was ever really very close to his adopted father but clearly admired him” (Gwynn, 2.26.2008 email).

⁶¹ **destroyed some manuscripts . . . lost others**— In his June 1, 1972 letter to Stanford (completed on June 5th), following Stanford’s mid-May separation from Mencin, Dugan begins by mentioning that he had put off opening and reading some of Stanford’s recent letters because he “thought, correctly, that they would be very painful for [him] to experience,” then continues, “Read this carefully: I think that you are a genius and a beautiful poet. It pisses the shit out of me that you have destroyed some of your own work. I’ll keep all of the poems of yours that I have in order to transmit them to others when the time comes” (Dugan, Letter to Stanford).

In a letter to Willett, postmarked September 16, 1972—the day after he left Cheryl Campbell in Staten Island—Stanford writes of having just lost a manuscript in New York by leaving it in a theater (where he’d just seen Bo Widerberg’s 1967 film, *Elvira Madigan*, and Christopher Miles’s 1970 film, *The Virgin and the Gypsy*), explaining that all three manuscripts that he’d written since Fayetteville had been lost: “1) the one I did in the hospital, lost by the P.O., 2) the other on the trip, blew out of Eberhart’s yacht, 3) this last one left in a picture show” (Willett, “Correspondence” 411).

⁶² **intentionally obfuscated . . . his . . . bibliography**— The front matter sections of the five 1974-1976 Mill Mountain Press books list several titles as “Books by Frank Stanford” which are phantom publications, though the manuscripts may be extant—the bibliography that C. D. Wright published lists the titles as unpublished manuscripts (C. D. Wright, “Bibliography” 12-13). *Ladies from Hell* and *Field Talk* list *St. Francis and the Wolf: Some Poems 1957-1964* as having been published in 1972 and *Let Him Lay There: Some Early Poems* as having been published in 1974. *Shade* follows suit re: the former manuscript, but omits the latter. *Arkansas*

Bench Stone and *Constant Stranger* list both manuscripts, and *Constant Stranger* lists, as well, *Approacheth the Ship and Wonder* as having been published in 1976. Furthermore, all five books list *Shade* as having originally been published in 1973, not 1975, and *Shade*, itself, is denoted as “SECOND EDITION” (*Shade* copyright page), though it is, in fact, the first edition (G. Stanford, 3.4.2008 email 1).

Additionally, the acknowledgements sections of Stanford’s books and a number of his contributor’s notes claim that his work appeared in the following publications, but I have not managed to locate any such appearances: *Boston After Dark* (*Ladies from Hell* copyright page; *Field Talk* copyright page), *Esquire* (*Crib Death* 55; *Road Apple Review* contributor’s note), *Evergreen* (*Aldebaran Review* contributor’s note; *Chicago Review* contributor’s note), *Poetry* (*Chicago Review* contributor’s note), *The Far Point* (*The Singing Knives* copyright page), and *The New Yorker* (*Road Apple Review* contributor’s note). Acknowledgements sections of Stanford’s books also claim that his work appeared in the following publications which appear to be phantoms: *Ask the Poet* (*Constant Stranger* copyright page), *De Quincey* (England) (*Constant Stranger* copyright page), *Ghost Ship* (Ireland) (*Shade* copyright page), *La Belle et la Bête* (France) (*Ladies from Hell* copyright page), *La Notte* (Italy) (*Field Talk* copyright page), *The Circular Ruins* (Scotland) (*Ladies from Hell* copyright page), *The Hunchback in the Park* (Wales) (*Shade* copyright page), and *Village* (*Constant Stranger* copyright page). May these lists serve as an open call: I encourage Stanford researchers to locate any such appearances or, in the latter list’s case, the very existence of such publications.

⁶³ **a mule, pony, stallion, etc**— Line 321 of *The Battlefield* reads, “the white horse the black stallion the red steed the pea green pony,” and Francis later explains, “well I’m riding the mule to nowhere / then after awhile it is a pony and then it is a horse / don’t ask me how it happened though” (4605-4607). This ambiguity appears elsewhere in Stanford’s poetry, as in the 460-line poem, “The Books” (“The Books” 381-392)—a *St. Francis and the Wolf* extract—also narrated by Francis Gildart, whose “horse called Blue” is also a pony and a mule (1, 140, 160, 246, 297, 356, 365).

⁶⁴ **the narrative takes place c. 1960**— Most of *The Battlefield* is set c. 1960 (5263), when Francis is 12 years old (2197, 4451, 6326, 7386-7387, 9801-9802, etc), but the narrative’s setting isn’t confined in time. There are reflections to 1954 (e.g., alluding to the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka decision [8912], or Francis referring to his great-grandmother, who “was born in / 1860” [4862-4863], by saying that she “is a hundred years old in six years” [6995]) and 1955 (e.g., “you as wrong as that / calendar there hanging on the wall you can’t make a 54 calendar work in a 55 year” [3379-3380]). The narrative also flashes forward some years into the future, into Francis’s teen or early adult years (e.g., “one of his girl friends is pregnant for he knows not what / he does” [14588-14589]).

⁶⁵ **“[Chaplin] was / Miss Pavlova’s best friend”**— Francis is referring to Anna Pavlova (1881-1931) (Allman 8, 57), the Russian prima ballerina frequently paired with Nijinsky (Allman 7, 32, 39). Pavlova was well-known for her role in *The Dying Swan* and was indeed close with Chaplin (Allman 35-36, 54). Lines 14994-14996 of *The Battlefield* read, “Nietzsche

has said I mean Vico did when you understand you stop / action like when Charlie Chaplin can walk funny because he learned / to die like a swan from a ballerina.”

- ⁶⁶ **a collection of translational adaptations**— C. D. Wright notes that *Automatic Co-Pilot's* poems are, “in loose measure, translations, meaning he worked off a transliteration or he crafted his version from someone else’s published translations” (C. D. Wright, “A Wayfaring Stranger” 100).
- ⁶⁷ **approximately 12 years old**— In his essay, “‘Confounding One Another with Signs’: Frank Stanford’s American Epic,” William Carpenter observes: “In syntax and vocabulary [*The Battlefield*] is closer to *The Singing Knives* . . . than to *Crib Death* or *You*, published in 1978 and 1979” (Carpenter 5).
- ⁶⁸ **a poem after . . . Bernardo Bertolucci**— The journal *Stinktree*, issue 4 (Spring 1975), published a number of translations by Frank Stanford from the Italian and French which Stanford relabeled as “after” poems across several of his books; these translations in *Stinktree 4* include “Blue Yodel of the Desperado” and “Blue Yodel of the Wayfaring Stranger” by Pier Paolo Pasolini, “In These Rooms” and “Eyelids Noticed Only in the Seventh Minute of Twilight” by Bernardo Bertolucci, “No Sign of Life: A Tragic Gag of Raymond Radiguet” by Jean Cocteau, and “The Forgotten Madmen of Ménéilmontant” by Jacques Prévert (*Stinktree* 2-21).
- ⁶⁹ **“...The Feet Of Many Children”**— “Tramp Tramp Tramp Hear The Feet Of Many Children” is a grade school song often sung in American schools in the mid-20th century (Booth).
- ⁷⁰ **“Kindertotenlieder”**— *Kindertotenlieder (Songs on the Death of Children)* is a cycle of five songs composed by Gustav Mahler between 1901 and 1904, with lyrics from poems about the deaths of children by Friedrich Rückert (Fischer 126, 129, 170). Shortly thereafter, in 1907, Mahler’s daughter Maria died from diphtheria, an illness similar to scarlet fever, from which Rückert’s own children, Ernst and Luise, had died (Fischer 129, 550).
- ⁷¹ **“...Orphans of the Storm”**— *Think Fast, Mr. Moto* is a 1937 detective mystery film directed by Norman Foster. *Orphans of the Storm* is a 1921 drama film directed by D. W. Griffith.
- ⁷² **“...headlines about the Supreme Court”**— Francis is alluding to the landmark U. S. Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954 in case 347 U. S. 483, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, which declared segregation in schools between white and black children to be unconstitutional (“*Brown v. Board*”).
- ⁷³ **“The Burial Ship”**— “The Wolves” and “The Burial Ship” are allegedly early poems. C. D. Wright notes, “There are poems in his published collections dating from 1957 when Frank was preposterously nine years old. The work is that continuous. See *You*: ‘The Wolves’ and ‘The Burial Ship’ ” (C. D. Wright, “The Mulberry Family” 302). However, in a letter to Mike Cuddihy, dated December 30, 1974, Stanford includes a tidbit that appears to suggest that the poem might not have been such an early composition, as, after discussing a thought of poems traveling through time, he notes, “the poem, ‘the burial ship,’ I wrote when thinking the same think [sic] I’m thinking now” (Letter to Cuddihy, 12.30.1974, 123). The two poems first appeared in *Ironwood 6* in 1975 (“The Burial Ship” et al, 76-77).

- ⁷⁴ **may actually have been a puppy**— To be sure, Jimmy Lee clarifies that he never had a wolf. “We had everything else,” he said (Lee, 2.10.2014 conversation).
- ⁷⁵ **“Je est un autre”**— *I is another* or *I is someone else*: a common Rimbaudian idiom, written by Arthur Rimbaud to Georges Izambard in May 1871 (Rimbaud 28).
- ⁷⁶ **a guide on Norfolk Lake**— On the subject of employment, Stanford’s contributor’s note for “What About This” and “They Really Do,” in *The American Poetry Review* in March/April 1975, begins, “Frank Stanford lives in Arkansas, by the banks of a stream. He has been a fishing guide, carpenter, and land surveyor” (*APR* Contributor’s Note, 7).
- ⁷⁷ **“Qui suis-je ?”**— *Who am I?*, the introductory sentence to André Breton’s 1928 Surrealist novel, *Nadja* (Breton, *Nadja* 11).
- ⁷⁸ **David had at least 19 sons**— Many of King David’s children are listed in 1 Chronicles 3, verses 1-3 and 5-9—with some repetitions in 2 Samuel 5, verses 14-16.
- ⁷⁹ **adaptation poems after numerous Surrealists**— Many such poems appear in Stanford’s posthumous work *Automatic Co-Pilot* (*What About This* 439-467). Others include “Wishing My Wife Had One Leg” after Breton (*The Singing Knives*, 2008, 38); “No Sign of Life: A Tragic Gag of Raymond Radiguet” after Cocteau (*Constant Stranger* 39); “Liaison” and “The Forgotten Madmen of Ménilmontant” after Prévert (*Shade* 12-13; *Constant Stranger* 40-42), etc.
- ⁸⁰ **“Marquis de Lafayette”**— Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier de Lafayette, Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834) was a French aristocrat and friend of some of the U. S.’s founding fathers; he fought for the U. S. in the American Revolutionary War.
- ⁸¹ **“Jean Lafitte the pirate”**— Jean Lafitte (1780-1823) was a French-American pirate; born in either France or Saint-Domingue (now Haiti), he relocated along the Mississippi River and in New Orleans. His place of birth and place of death are unknown, which could explain Stanford’s identification with him (and his lost identity).
- ⁸² **Villon . . . was a notable influence**— In the February 1974 letter to David Walker, Stanford describes his adventure-filled experiences and travels between mid-May 1972 (upon separating from Linda Mencin) and early March 1973 (upon meeting Ginny Crouch) partially as, “If I was a pilgrim, I only had a raft and the river was low. If I was a poet, then who was Shelley and that one F. Villon. If I was trying to be somebody else, then why was I becoming myself. If a beautiful woman is death, my own, then how come I’m still alive. (Okra, wine, Keats, etc.) You fill in the blanks.” Of note is Stanford’s poem title, “I Would Have a Woman as Real as Death” (*Field Talk* 23). Stanford also infuses a mention of Villon as a kind of “hip pocket” paperback poet into “Homage to Jacques Prévert” in *Smoking Grapevine* (*What About This* 414-415; 17).
- ⁸³ **“I’d rather be Marlon Brando”**— In the interview with Broughton, Stanford utters a similar variation of the lines in “The Truth”: “I would rather have been Muhammad Ali than T. S. Eliot. Or I’d rather have been Brando than Eliot” (Broughton 305).

⁸⁴ **Merton's poem "The Fall"**— The words of the title of Stanford's poem "There Is No Where in You a Paradise That Is No Place and There You Do Not Enter Except Without a Story" (as first published in issue 24/25 of *Raccoon* in May 1987) match those in Merton's poem "The Fall" (Merton 354-355; "There Is No Where..."); the poem's title appears less the word "except" in *What About This: Collected Poems of Frank Stanford*.

⁸⁵ **Giambattista Vico (1668-1744)**— For an in-depth examination of Vico as modeled after Giambattista Vico and his most known work, *Scienza Nuova (New Science)*, see chapter 6, "Inventing History: Giambattista Vico's *New Science* & Frank Stanford's *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*" (Shugars 215-251), of Murray Shugars's doctoral dissertation, *What the Moon Says: Frank Stanford's Quest for Poetic Identity* (Purdue University, 2000).

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Though not all of the following individuals are cited in this study, I am indebted to each of them, many of whom knew and/or corresponded with Frank Stanford and whom have contributed in broad capacities, at various points in my research, to a greater and fuller understanding of the poet. The conversations occurred variably in person, via email, via phone, and/or via postal mail:

Ralph Adamo, James Babij, John Biguenet, Linda Mencin Bond, Irv Broughton, Jack Butler, Justin Caldwell, William Carpenter, Franklin Stanford Coleman, Mary Cuddihy, Father Nicholas Fuhrmann, Forrest Gander, R. S. Gwynn, Carole Hess, Jimmy Lee, Thomas Lux, John McKernan, Bill Monie, John S. Morris, Charles Plymell, David Reich, Ruth Rogers, R. M. Ryan, Ginny Stanford, Steve Stern, Pamela Stewart, Leon Stokesbury, John Stoss, Brian Sulkis, Leslie Ullman, the late David Walker, Kathy Walton, Michael Waters, Bill Willett, John Wood, and C. D. Wright.

In Sweden, I am especially indebted to Paul Tenngart, my thesis supervisor. I want to thank my colleagues for their camaraderie and especially acknowledge John Öwre and David Boothroyd for their friendship, repartees, and encouragement. Blodsbröderna.

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