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HOLDING OUR OWN: Selected Poems

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Burgeoning orchards, bougainvillea, pomegranate, jasmine—the California-born and -educated Stanford (1916–1987) drew heavily on her native flora for her tough-minded meditations, written for "beauty, harmony, joy, utopia" and championed by the likes of May Swenson. After her death, Stanford's work fell almost entirely out of print (the posthumous *Dreaming the Garden* is still available), which situation this collection attempts to rectify. Edited by two of Stanford's former students, David Trinidad (*Plasticville; Powerless; etc.*) and Maxine Scates, this labor-of-love is rightly heavy on the four later volumes of lyric poems for which Stanford was best known. Stanford was "discovered" by Yvor Winters as a Stanford undergrad and pulled into his anti-modernist circle; her early poems bear that imprint most strongly in their stentorian air and rhymes. But in her impressive final two volumes (*In Mediterranean Air* and *Dreaming the Garden*), the increasingly self-conscious poet overlays her beloved California landscape with that of the Mediterranean, melding modern memory with Renaissance epic and classical myth, meditating on the troubled space of the lyric (her ever-threatened garden), whose isolation is violated again and again. The power of these later poems—with their pained contemplations, scarred remembrances and unanswered questions—lies in the power of the maker to imagine worlds, however idealized: "Say/ the flowers on that hillside/ are stars/ or waves/ or tents or ribbons/ or bursts of sun// say they're light/ or courage/ or remembrance." (*June*)