an erotic relationship with the natural world.

But Swenson goes beyond the Romantics, and her poetry is far more than erotic. As a woman born in still wild Logan, Utah, in 1913 and who died in Ocean View, Delaware, in 1989, her eye is tempered by both the American West and her life on the East coast, a rewarding confluence that makes her a poet with as distinct a sensibility as Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder, the two finest contemporary poets who write of the interaction of human beings with the land.

In "April Light" she writes:

Light teaches the tree
to beget leaves,
to embroider itself all over
with green reality,
until summer becomes
its steady portrait,
and birds bring their lifetime
to the boughs.

In "Each like a Leaf," she says:

We are a sea its waves
cannot name
only be

In poem after poem, Swenson gives us a real portrait, a brilliant portrait of the land any of us might see, if only we had the ability to look with as focused and as intelligent an eye.

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A Certain Light.
Debra Kaufman.
The Emrys Foundation, 2001.
58 pages. $14.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by Robert West

A Certain Light is Debra Kaufman's first full-length poetry collection. Although she is originally from the midwest, Kaufman now lives in North Carolina, and her poems are in some ways typical of much contemporary southern poetry. For instance, she is essentially a narrative poet: her best poems are typically stories or character sketches. Also, many poems are about members of her family; she writes especially about the women, including her mother, aunts, and grandmothers. Unlike many southerners, however, she seems to have little interest in the auditory aspects of versification: her poems subscribe to no system of prosody, and only rarely adopt such techniques as alliteration and rhyme.

Yet if these poems usually sound like prose, one should note that they sound like deft prose. Kaufman knows just how to pace her sentences as she tells a tale or limns a character; furthermore, she knows how to employ a line break to dramatic (and humorous) effect. "Aunt Fran" shows her at her best. Consider these lines:

Sometimes she'd bring chocolates or a painting

she'd just finished and talk about Paris and New York
like she'd been there.
She'd say things like The eye is over Ohio,

and everyone would look into their coffee cups
or whiskey glasses to see
if any wisdom had settled there.

The postponement of "like she'd been there" is exquisite, as is the double space following Aunt Fran's dumbfounding announcement — not to mention the placement of "settled there" at both sentence's and tercet's end.

At times Kaufman demonstrates a kind of inventiveness that recalls the poetry of Lisel Mueller. One example is the conceit of "At Aunt Emma's Table," where a set of silverware takes on the characteristics of a family; another is "After Reading 'Rumpelstiltskin' to My Son," Kaufman's deconstruction of that troubling fairy tale.

A Certain Light is imaginative, humane, and often compelling — a distinguished first book.

* * *

Ghostholders Know.
Ford Swetnam.
Blue Scarab Press, 1999.
104 pages. No price (paperback).

Reviewed by Kevin Bezner

Ford Swetnam's *Ghostholders Know* captures the dusty world of an Idaho only the true inhabitants know, the loneliness of mountain towns hours out of big cities, railroad towns where the trains pass through carrying the waste of others and goods going elsewhere. Swetnam's poems of moose, mountains, lightning, fighting fires, and making a life out of the dust are told in a language that could only emerge out of a relationship with the landscape of the American West.

Included in this collection is a small masterpiece called "301," a poem about a dart game, written as if Ben Jonson might have been the poet. The opening lines explode: "'Motherfucker, / Double in / Double fuckin' out' // Said trouble, two old / Snipers pitching darts / As if the board // Could still shoot back, / Vietnam a long way aft / But getting closer // With each shot and a draft . . ." The narrator is academic Ford, reader of Jonson,

who can drink and dart with men like him who have out of necessity made the choices that suit them best: "Well maybe / Like the sniper said it's Hemingway / Or Bukowski or nothing, 'These are // My guys,' he said, 'these are / My guys,' claiming cock of the dunghill / Rights for the twentieth century . . ." The sniper's claim, and the assertions of this poem, go far beyond ordinary poetry.

* * *

Ancestors.
Kamau Brathwaite.
New Directions, 2001.
544 pages. $35.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by Keith Mitchell

With the advent of postcolonial studies, the work of Caribbean authors has begun to impact the world of *belles lettres*. One of the most exciting works is Ancestors, a sweeping historical epic in the vein of Dante or Milton, by the Barbadian poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite.

Brathwaite divides the poem into three sections, "Mother Poem," "Sun Poem," and "X/Self," and then smaller sections containing individual poems. This structure confirms the universality of the poem while creating an engaging intimacy. The relationships between three "voices," the mother, the narrator/son, and the father in relation to the Motherland (Barbados) overarch the theme of familial integration and separation.

"Alpha," the first poem in the collection, connects the narrator's mother to Barbados's majesty — a place where "my mother rains upon the island / w/her loud voices / w/her grey hairs / w/her green love." Brathwaite equates Barbados' landscape with his mother's indomitable spirit and endurance in the wake of colonial and postcolonial oppression. The first section ends with "Driftwood," culminating in the mother's death, as she becomes the pools of his "island / lime conch lobster flying / fish scales / closing her eyes." The mother "returns" to Barbados's natural setting, which "birthed" her; becoming a metaphor for the physical and spiritual aliment sustaining the narrator / poet.

"Sun Poem," begins with "Red Rising," a mythical evocation to the sun, the giver of life and death. The speaking sun is also metaphor for Barbadian fathers whose only hope for their children is "but that you may live / my fond retreating future." That is, that they may survive and live even as they inevitably move towards death. But in the poem "Son" the narrator believes in the resolute spirit of the Barbadian people when "they say / cerise and orange / and rise- / ing to gold- / en day- / light / they say / rising to blue . . . / and the sun / new." Just as surely as the sun/son rises, so will they.

The final section is titled "X/S" (excess) — subtitled "X/Self." The first poem, "Letter from Roma," is about a son, one of the narrator's ancestors, who has managed, despite racist attitudes, to be elected "the governor of the thirteen provinces." Ancestors then moves to the present day in which the narrator of "X/Self xth letter from the thirteen provinces," muses about the miracles of technology, and more importantly, his knowledge of how to use words as weapons, like Caliban, to curse Prospero: "Dear mumma / uh writin yu dis letter / wha? guess what! pun a computer O / kay?. . ." It is the Word which speaks for all of his ancestors, his people who in The Beginning, "from this cramped hand / cripple by candlelight / a crab scuttles / its mail'd dragonish swords / . . . and the grass flesh / and the flesh memory / and the memory nodding / . . . coming in with the birds and the wind and the steep stars" ("Carab").

Brathwaite pays homage to people of the African Diaspora who have struggled and continue to struggle against forces that would see them perish. For Brathwaite, as long as people remember those blacks — the seemingly insignificant, the Historically unaccounted for — who struggle(d), then people of African descent will continue to rise like the stars.

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Re-Sounding: Selected Later Poems.
Theodore Enslin.
Talisman House, 1999.
129 pages. $14.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Robert West

Theodore Enslin was born in 1925, and thus belongs to what is surely (to borrow a phrase from Tom Brokaw) the greatest generation of American poets: his peers include the likes of Richard Wilbur, James Merrill, Amy Clampitt, A.R. Ammons, John Ashbery, Adrienne Rich, W.S. Merwin, and Robert Creeley . . . one could easily name another equally celebrated ten or so. Yet Enslin has enjoyed little of the spotlight those poets have basked in for most of their lives. To be sure, he has his readers, and he has attracted a modicum of academic criticism: a search of the online MLA bibliography turns up a dozen critical essays on his work. Reading his late poems, it's easy to see why these things would be so.

Re-Sounding contains 126 poems, though it takes some doing to figure that out: the table of contents is formatted eccentrically and lacks page numbers. Enslin is at least as concerned with sound as with discursive content, and a number of poems amount to dazzling orchestrations of echoes; consider "Trade Off," which begins, "Winds   trade winds   and how they trade / the trading of the heat for water   always trading / one tern