

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.

\*\*\*

*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,