

Classic Poetry Series

A.R. Ammons

- poems -

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An Improvisation For Angular Momentum

Walking is like
imagination, a
single step
dissolves the circle
into motion; the eye here
and there rests
on a leaf,
gap, or ledge,
everything flowing
except where
sight touches seen:
stop, though, and
reality snaps back
in, locked hard,
forms sharply
themselves, bushbank,
dentree, phonline,
definite, fixed,
the self, too, then
caught real, clouds
and wind melting
into their directions,
breaking around and
over, down and out,
motions profound,
alive, musical!

Perhaps the death mother like the birth mother
does not desert us but comes to tend
and produce us, to make room for us
and bear us tenderly, considerately,
through the gates, to see us through,
to ease our pains, quell our cries,
to hover over and nestle us, to deliver
us into the greatest, most enduring
peace, all the way past the bother of
recollection,
beyond the finework of frailty,
the mishmash house of the coming & going,
creation's fringes,
the eddies and curlicues

A.R. Ammons

Called Into Play

Fall fell: so that's it for the leaf poetry:
some flurries have whitened the edges of roads

and lawns: time for that, the snow stuff: &
turkeys and old St. Nick: where am I going to

find something to write about I haven't already
written away: I will have to stop short, look

down, look up, look close, think, think, think:
but in what range should I think: should I

figure colors and outlines, given forms, say
mailboxes, or should I try to plumb what is

behind what and what behind that, deep down
where the surface has lost its semblance: or

should I think personally, such as, this week
seems to have been crafted in hell: what: is

something going on: something besides this
diddledeediddle everyday matter-of-fact: I

could draw up an ancient memory which would
wipe this whole presence away: or I could fill

out my dreams with high syntheses turned into
concrete visionary forms: Lucre could lust

for Luster: bad angels could roar out of perdition
and kill the AIDS vaccine not quite

perfected yet: the gods could get down on
each other; the big gods could fly in from

nebulae unknown: but I'm only me: I have 4
interests--money, poetry, sex, death: I guess

I can jostle those. . . .

A.R. Ammons

Design

The drop seeps whole
from boulder-lichen
or ledge moss and drops,

joining, to trickle,
run, fall, dash,
sprawl in held deeps,

to rush shallows, spill
thin through heights,
but then, edging,

to eddy aside, nothing
of all but nothing's
curl of motion spent.

A.R. Ammons

Eyesight

It was May before my
attention came
to spring and

my word I said
to the southern slopes
I've

missed it, it
came and went before
I got right to see:

don't worry, said the mountain,
try the later northern slopes
or if

you can climb, climb
into spring: but
said the mountain

it's not that way
with all things, some
that go are gone

A.R. Ammons

Gravelly Run

I don't know somehow it seems sufficient
to see and hear whatever coming and going is,
losing the self to the victory
 of stones and trees,
of bending sandpit lakes, crescent
round groves of dwarf pine:

for it is not so much to know the self
as to know it as it is known
 by galaxy and cedar cone,
as if birth had never found it
and death could never end it:

the swamp's slow water comes
down Gravelly Run fanning the long
 stone-held algal
hair and narrowing roils between
the shoulders of the highway bridge:

holly grows on the banks in the woods there,
and the cedars' gothic-clustered
 spires could make
green religion in winter bones:

so I look and reflect, but the air's glass
jail seals each thing in its entity:

no use to make any philosophies here:
 I see no
god in the holly, hear no song from
the snowbroken weeds: Hegel is not the winter
yellow in the pines: the sunlight has never
heard of trees: surrendered self among
 unwelcoming forms: stranger,
hoist your burdens, get on down the road.

A.R. Ammons

Hymn

I know if I find you I will have to leave the earth
and go on out
 over the sea marshes and the brant in bays
and over the hills of tall hickory
and over the crater lakes and canyons
and on up through the spheres of diminishing air
past the blackset noctilucent clouds
 where one wants to stop and look
way past all the light diffusions and bombardments
up farther than the loss of sight
 into the unseasonal undifferentiated empty stark

And I know if I find you I will have to stay with the earth
inspecting with thin tools and ground eyes
trusting the microvilli sporangia and simplest
 coelenterates
and praying for a nerve cell
with all the soul of my chemical reactions
and going right on down where the eye sees only traces

You are everywhere partial and entire
You are on the inside of everything and on the outside

I walk down the path down the hill where the sweetgum
has begun to ooze spring sap at the cut
and I see how the bark cracks and winds like no other bark
chasmal to my ant-soul running up and down
and if I find you I must go out deep into your
 far resolutions
and if I find you I must stay here with the separate leaves

A.R. Ammons

In Memoriam Mae Noblitt

This is just a place:
we go around, distanced,
yearly in a star's

atmosphere, turning
daily into and out of
direct light and

slanting through the
quadrant seasons: deep
space begins at our

heels, nearly rousing
us loose: we look up
or out so high, sight's

silk almost draws us away:
this is just a place:
currents worry themselves

coiled and free in airs
and oceans: water picks
up mineral shadow and

plasm into billions of
designs, frames: trees,
grains, bacteria: but

is love a reality we
made here ourselves--
and grief--did we design

that--or do these,
like currents, whine
in and out among us merely

as we arrive and go:
this is just a place:
the reality we agree with,

that agrees with us,
outbounding this, arrives
to touch, joining with

us from far away:
our home which defines
us is elsewhere but not

so far away we have
forgotten it:
this is just a place.

A.R. Ammons

Poetics

I look for the way
things will turn
out spiralling from a center,
the shape
things will take to come forth in

so that the birch tree white
touched black at branches
will stand out
wind-glittering
totally its apparent self:

I look for the forms
things want to come as

from what black wells of possibility,
how a thing will
unfold:

not the shape on paper -- though
that, too -- but the
uninterfering means on paper:

not so much looking for the shape
as being available
to any shape that may be
summoning itself
through me
from the self not mine but ours.

A.R. Ammons

Rivulose

You think the ridge hills flowing, breaking
with ups and downs will, though,
building constancy into the black foreground

for each sunset, hold on to you, if dreams
wander, give reality recurrence enough to keep
an image clear, but then you realize, time

going on, that time's residual like the last
ice age's cool still in the rocks, averaged
maybe with the cool of the age before, that

not only are you not being held onto but where
else could time do so well without you,
what is your time where so much time is saved?

A.R. Ammons

Rogue Elephant

The reason to be autonomous is to stand there,
a cleared instrument, ready to act, to search

the moral realm and actual conditions for what
needs to be done and to do it: fine, the

best, if it works out, but if, like a gun, it
comes in handy to the wrong choice, why then

you see the danger in the effective: better
then an autonomy that stands and looks about,

negotiating nothing, the supreme indifferences:
is anything to be gained where as much is lost:

and if for every action there is an equal and
opposite reaction has the loss been researched

equally with the gain: you can see how the
milling actions of millions could come to a

buzzard-like glide as from a coincidental,
warm bottom of water stuck between chilled

peaks: it is not so easy to say, OK, go on
out and act: who, doing what, to what or

whom: just a minute: should the bunker be
bombed (if it stores gas): should all the

rattlers die just because they rattle: if I
hear the young gentleman vomiter roaring down

the hall in the men's room, should I go and
inquire of him, reducing him to my care: no

wonder the great sayers (who say nothing) sit
about in inaccessible states of mind: no

wonder still wisdom and catatonia appear to
exchange places occasionally: but if anything

were easy, our easy choices soon would carry
away our ignorance with the world-better

let the mixed-up mix and let the surface shine
with all the possibilities, each in itself.

A.R. Ammons

Small Song

The reeds give way to the wind
and give the wind away.

Submitted by Jim McCarthy

A.R. Ammons

Still

I said I will find what is lowly
and put the roots of my identity
down there:
each day I'll wake up
and find the lowly nearby,
a handy focus and reminder,
a ready measure of my significance,
the voice by which I would be heard,
the wills, the kinds of selfishness
I could
freely adopt as my own:

but though I have looked everywhere,
I can find nothing
to give myself to:
everything is

magnificent with existence, is in
surfeit of glory:
nothing is diminished,
nothing has been diminished for me:

I said what is more lowly than the grass:
ah, underneath,
a ground-crust of dry-burnt moss:
I looked at it closely
and said this can be my habitat: but
nestling in I
found
below the brown exterior
green mechanisms beyond the intellect
awaiting resurrection in rain: so I got up

and ran saying there is nothing lowly in the universe:
I found a beggar:
he had stumps for legs: nobody was paying
him any attention: everybody went on by:
I nestled in and found his life:
there, love shook his body like a devastation:
I said
though I have looked everywhere
I can find nothing lowly
in the universe:

I whirled through transfigurations up and down,
transfigurations of size and shape and place:

at one sudden point came still,
stood in wonder:
moss, beggar, weed, tick, pine, self, magnificent
with being!

A.R. Ammons

The City Limits

When you consider the radiance, that it does not withhold itself but pours its abundance without selection into every nook and cranny not overhung or hidden; when you consider

that birds' bones make no awful noise against the light but lie low in the light as in a high testimony; when you consider the radiance, that it will look into the guiltiest

swervings of the weaving heart and bear itself upon them, not flinching into disguise or darkening; when you consider the abundance of such resource as illuminates the glow-blue

bodies and gold-skeined wings of flies swarming the dumped guts of a natural slaughter or the coil of shit and in no way winces from its storms of generosity; when you consider

that air or vacuum, snow or shale, squid or wolf, rose or lichen, each is accepted into as much light as it will take, then the heart moves roomier, the man stands and looks about, the

leaf does not increase itself above the grass, and the dark work of the deepest cells is of a tune with May bushes and fear lit by the breadth of such calmly turns to praise.

A.R. Ammons