Archie Randolph Ammons
- poems -

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Archie Randolph Ammons (18 February 1926 – 25 February 2001)

Archie Randolph Ammons was an American poet. He wrote about humanity's relationship to nature in alternately comic and solemn tones.

<b>Life</b>

Ammons grew up on a tobacco farm near Whiteville, North Carolina, in the southeastern part of the state. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, stationed on board the U.S.S. Gunason, a battleship escort. After the war, Ammons attended Wake Forest University, majoring in ating in 1949, he served as a principal and teacher at Hattaras Elementary School later that year and also married Phyllis Plumbo. He received an M.A. in English from the University of California, Berkeley.

In 1964, Ammons joined the faculty of Cornell University, eventually becoming Goldwin Smith Professor of English and Poet in Residence. He retired from Cornell in 1998.

Ammons had been a longtime resident of Northfield, New Jersey, and Millville, New Jersey, when he wrote Corsons Inlet in 1962.

<b>Awards</b>

During the five decades of his poetic career, Ammons was the recipient of many awards and citations. Among his major honors are two National Book Awards (in 1973, for Collected Poems 1951-1971, and 1993, for Garbage); the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets (1998); and a MacArthur Fellowship in 1981, the year the award was established. Ammons also had a school in Miami, Florida, named after him.

Ammons's other awards include a 1981 National Book Critics Circle Award for A Coast of Trees; a 1993 Library of Congress Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry for Garbage; the 1971 Bollingen Prize for Sphere; the Poetry Society of America's Robert Frost Medal; the Ruth Lilly Prize; and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1978.

<b>Poetic Style</b>
Ammons often writes in two- or three-line stanzas. Poet <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/david-lehman/">David Lehman</a> notes a resemblance between Ammons's terza libre (unrhymed three-line stanzas) and the terza rima of <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/percy-bysshe-shelley/">Shelley's</a> "Ode to the West Wind." Lines are strongly enjambled. Some of Ammons's poems are very short, one or two lines only, while others (for example, the book-length poems Sphere and Tape for the Turn of the Year) are hundreds of lines long, and sometimes composed on adding machine tape or other continuous strips of paper. His National Book Award-winning volume Garbage is a long poem consisting of "a single extended sentence, divided into eighteen sections, arranged in couplets".

Many readers and critics have noted Ammons's idiosyncratic approach to punctuation. Lehman has written that Ammons "bears out <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/t-s-eliot/">T.S. Eliot's</a> observation that poetry is a 'system of punctuation'." Instead of periods, some poems end with an ellipsis; others have no terminal punctuation at all. The colon is an Ammons "signature"; he uses it "as an all-purpose punctuation mark."

The colon permits him to stress the linkage between clauses and to postpone closure indefinitely. When I asked Archie about his use of colons, he said that when he started writing poetry, he couldn't write if he thought "it was going to be important," so he wrote "on the back of used mimeographed paper my wife brought home, and I used small [lowercase] letters and colons, which were democratic, and meant that there would be something before and after [every phrase] and the writing would be a kind of continuous stream."

According to critic Stephen Burt, in many poems Ammons combines three types of diction:

A "normal" range of language for poetry, including the standard English of educated conversation and the slightly rarer words we expect to see in literature ("vast," "summon," "universal").

A demotic register, including the folk-speech of eastern North Carolina, where he grew up ("dibbles"), and broader American chatter unexpected in serious poems ("blip").

The Greek- and Latin-derived phraseology of the natural sciences ("millimeter," "information of actions / summarized"), especially geology, physics, and cybernetics.
Such a mixture is nearly unique, Burt says; these three modes are "almost never found together outside his poems".


After Yesterday

afternoon's blue
clouds and white rain
the mockingbird
in the backyard
untied the drops from
leaves and twigs
with a long singing.

Archie Randolph Ammons
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, phoneline,
definite, fixed,
the self, too, then
cought 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

Archie Randolph Ammons
Autonomy

I am living without you because
    of a terror, a farfetched
notion that I
can't live without you

which I must narrow down & quell,
    for how can I live
worthy of you, in the
freedom of you limber engagements,

in the casual uptakes of your
    sweetest compliances
if stricken in your presence
by what your absence stills:

to have you, I school myself
    to let you go; how terrible
to buy that absence
before the fragrance of any presence comes:

but though I am living without
    you, surely
I can't live
without you: the thought of

you hauls my heavy
    body up,
floats me around,
gives my motions point, just the thought.

Archie Randolph Ammons
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. . . .

Archie Randolph Ammons
Clarity

After the event the rockslide realized,
in a still diversity of completion,
grain and fissure,
declivity
&
force of upheaval,
whether rain slippage,
ice crawl, root
explosion or
stream erosive undercut:

well I said it is a pity:
one swath of sight will never
be the same: nonetheless,
this
shambles has
relived a bind, a taut of twist,
revealing streaks &
scores of knowledge
now obvious and quiet.

Archie Randolph Ammons
Continuity

I've pressed so far away from my desire that

if you asked me what I want I would,

accepting the harmonious completion of the drift, say annihilation,

probably.

Archie Randolph Ammons
Corsons Inlet

I went for a walk over the dunes again this morning

to the sea,

then turned right along

the surf

rounded a naked headland

and returned

along the inlet shore:

it was muggy sunny, the wind from the sea steady and high,

crisp in the running sand,

some breakthroughs of sun

but after a bit

continuous overcast:

the walk liberating, I was released from forms,

from the perpendiculars,

straight lines, blocks, boxes, binds

of thought

into the hues, shadings, rises, flowing bends and blends

of sight:

I allow myself eddies of meaning:

yield to a direction of significance

running

like a stream through the geography of my work:

you can find

in my sayings

swerves of action

like the inlet's cutting edge:

there are dunes of motion,

organizations of grass, white sandy paths of remembrance

in the overall wandering of mirroring mind:
but Overall is beyond me: is the sum of these events
I cannot draw, the ledger I cannot keep, the accounting
beyond the account:

in nature there are few sharp lines: there are areas of
primrose
    more or less dispersed;
disorderly orders of bayberry; between the rows
of dunes,
irregular swamps of reeds,
though not reeds alone, but grass, bayberry, yarrow, all ...
predominantly reeds:

I have reached no conclusions, have erected no boundaries,
shutting out and shutting in, separating inside
    from outside: I have
drawn no lines:
as

manifold events of sand
change the dune's shape that will not be the same shape
tomorrow,

so I am willing to go along, to accept
the becoming
thought, to stake off no beginnings or ends, establish
    no walls:

by transitions the land falls from grassy dunes to creek
to undercreek: but there are no lines, though
    change in that transition is clear
    as any sharpness: but "sharpness" spread out,
allowed to occur over a wider range
than mental lines can keep:

    the moon was full last night: today, low tide was low:
black shoals of mussels exposed to the risk
of air
and, earlier, of sun,
waved in and out with the waterline, waterline inexact,
caught always in the event of change:
a young mottled gull stood free on the shoals
and ate
to vomiting: another gull, squawking possession, cracked a crab,
picked out the entrails, swallowed the soft-shelled legs, a ruddy
turnstone running in to snatch leftover bits:

risk is full: every living thing in
siege: the demand is life, to keep life: the small
white blacklegged egret, how beautiful, quietly stalks and spears
the shallows, darts to shore
to stab—what? I couldn't
see against the black mudflats—a frightened
fiddler crab?

the news to my left over the dunes and
reeds and bayberry clumps was
fall: thousands of tree swallows
gathering for flight:
an order held
in constant change: a congregation
rich with entropy: nevertheless, separable, noticeable
as one event,
not chaos: preparations for
flight from winter,
cheet, cheet, cheet, cheet, wings rifling the green clumps,
beaks
at the bayberries
a perception full of wind, flight, curve,
sound:
the possibility of rule as the sum of rulelessness:
the "field" of action
with moving, incalculable center:

in the smaller view, order tight with shape:
blue tiny flowers on a leafless weed: carapace of crab:
snail shell:
  pulsations of order
  in the bellies of minnows: orders swallowed,
broken down, transferred through membranes
to strengthen larger orders: but in the large view, no
lines or changeless shapes: the working in and out, together
  and against, of millions of events: this,
  so that I make
  no form of
  formlessness:

orders as summaries, as outcomes of actions override
or in some way result, not predictably (seeing me gain
the top of a dune,
the swallows
could take flight—some other fields of bayberry
could enter fall
  berryless) and there is serenity:

  no arranged terror: no forcing of image, plan,
or thought:
  no propaganda, no humbling of reality to precept:

terror pervades but is not arranged, all possibilities
of escape open: no route shut, except in
the sudden loss of all routes:

  I see narrow orders, limited tightness, but will
not run to that easy victory:
  still around the looser, wider forces work:
  I will try
  to fasten into order enlarging grasps of disorder, widening
scope, but enjoying the freedom that
Scope eludes my grasp, that there is no finality of vision,
that I have perceived nothing completely,
that tomorrow a new walk is a new walk.
Crowride

When the crow
lands, the
tip of the sprung spruce

bough weighs
so low, the
system so friction-free,

the bobbing lasts
way past any
interest in the subject.

Archie Randolph Ammons
The wonderful workings of the world: wonderful, wonderful: I'm surprised half the time:
ground up fine, I puff if a pebble stirs:

I'm nervous: my moarality's intricate: if
a squash blossom dies, I feel withered as a stained
zucchini and blame my nature: and
when grassblades flop to the little red-ant
queens burring around trying to get aloft, I blame
my not keeping the grass short, stubble

firm: well, I learn a lot of useless stuff, meant
to be ignored: like when the sun sinking in the
west glares a plane invisible, I think how much

revelation concealment necessitates: and then I
think of the oecean, multiple to a blinding
oneness and realize that only total expression
expressed hiding: I'll have to say everything
to take on the roundness and withdrawal of the deep dark:
less than total is a bucketful of radiant toys.

Archie Randolph 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.

Archie Randolph Ammons
Easter Morning

I have a life that did not become,
that turned aside and stopped,
astonished:
I hold it in me like a pregnancy or
as on my lap a child
not to grow old but dwell on

it is to his grave I most
frequently return and return
to ask what is wrong, what was
wrong, to see it all by
the light of a different necessity
but the grave will not heal
and the child,
stirring, must share my grave
with me, an old man having
gotten by on what was left

when I go back to my home country in these
fresh far-away days, it's convenient to visit
everybody, aunts and uncles, those who used to say,
look how he's shooting up, and the
trinket aunts who always had a little
something in their pocketbooks, cinnamon bark
or a penny or nickel, and uncles who
were the rumored fathers of cousins
who whispered of them as of great, if
troubled, presences, and school

teachers, just about everybody older
(and some younger) collected in one place
waiting, particularly, but not for
me, mother and father there, too, and others
close, close as burrowing
under skin, all in the graveyard
assembled, done for, the world they
used to wield, have trouble and joy
in, gone
the child in me that could not become
was not ready for others to go,
to go on into change, blessings and
horrors, but stands there by the road
where the mishap occurred, crying out for
help, come and fix this or we
can't get by, but the great ones who
were to return, they could not or did
not hear and went on in a flurry and
now, I say in the graveyard, here
lies the flurry, now it can't come
back with help or helpful asides, now
we all buy the bitter
incompletions, pick up the knots of
horror, silently raving, and go on
crashing into empty ends not
completions, not rondures the fullness
has come into and spent itself from

I stand on the stump
of a child, whether myself
or my little brother who died, and
yell as far as I can, I cannot leave this place, for
for me it is the dearest and the worst,
it is life nearest to life which is
life lost: it is my place where
I must stand and fail,
calling attention with tears
to the branches not lofting
boughs into space, to the barren
air that holds the world that was my world

though the incompletions
(& completions) burn out
standing in the flash high-burn
momentary structure of ash, still it
is a picture-book, letter-perfect
Easter morning: I have been for a
walk: the wind is tranquil: the brook
works without flashing in an abundant
tranquility: the birds are lively with
voice: I saw something I had
never seen before: two great birds, maybe eagles, blackwinged, whitenecked and -headed, came from the south oaring the great wings steadily; they went directly over me, high up, and kept on due north: but then one bird, the one behind, veered a little to the left and the other bird kept on seeming not to notice for a minute: the first began to circle as if looking for something, coasting, resting its wings on the down side of some of the circles: the other bird came back and they both circled, looking perhaps for a draft; they turned a few more times, possibly rising—at least, clearly resting—then flew on falling into distance till they broke across the local bush and trees: it was a sight of bountiful majesty and integrity: the having patterns and routes, breaking from them to explore other patterns or better ways to routes, and then the return: a dance sacred as the sap in the trees, permanent in its descriptions as the ripples round the brook's ripplestone: fresh as this particular flood of burn breaking across us now from the sun.

Archie Randolph Ammons
Elegy For A Jet Pilot

The blast skims
over the string
of takeoff lights
and
relinquishing
place and time
lofts to
separation:
the plume, rose
sliver, grows
across the
high-lit evening
sky: by this
Mays Landing creek
shot pinecones,
skinned huckleberry
bush, laurel
swaths define
an unbelievably
particular stop.

Archie Randolph 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

Archie Randolph 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.

Archie Randolph Ammons
Greeting Verses

What do I find right at the center of my interpersonal relationships: a slightly dispersed but indisputably tinctured core of brutality: go to the hospital

the question is not whether your life is at stake but whether you can pay the bill, guaranteeing it on admission (or no admission) and proving it (or not getting out) on release (if any): this bit of realism clutches our floating values underneath like a bracket under a bouquet: if someone pauses to

congratulate me on some slight nothing, I see the quiver of a curse undermine his lip: he tries to make a better world even while it crumbles in

on him and us (a brutality): when I give my body to another (or take another's) I sometimes fear more body being taken than was offered, an overextension

of contract: hearts and flowers, scented sentiment, garden varieties greet us, how lost we want to be in fictions and fabrications: a worm cores this world's doings, look out.

Archie Randolph 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

Archie Randolph Ammons
Identity

1) An individual spider web identifies a species:

an order of instinct prevails
through all accidents of circumstance,
though possibility is
high along the peripheries of
spider webs:
you can go all
around the fringing attachments

and find
disorder ripe,
entropy rich, high levels of random,
numerous occasions of accident:

2) the possible settings
of a web are infinite:

how does
the spider keep
identity
while creating the web
in a particular place?

how and to what extent
and by what modes of chemistry
and control?

it is
wonderful
how things work: I will tell you
about it
because

it is interesting
and because whatever is
moves in weeds
and stars and spider webs
and known
is loved:
in that love,
each of us knowing it,
I love you,

for it moves within and beyond us,
sizzles in
to winter grasses, darts and hangs with bumblebees
by summer windowsills:

I will show you
the underlying that takes no image to itself,
cannot be shown or said,
but weaves in and out of moons and bladderweeds,
is all and
beyond destruction
because created fully in no
particular form:

if the web were perfectly pre-set,
the spider could
never find
a perfect place to set it in: and

if the web were
perfectly adaptable,
if freedom and possibility were without limit,
the web would
lose its special identity:

the row-strung garden web
keeps order at the center
where space is freest (intersecting that the freest
'medium' should
accept the firmest order)

and that
order
diminishes toward the
periphery
allowing at the points of contact
entropy equal to entropy.

Archie Randolph 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.

Archie Randolph Ammons
In View of the Fact

The people of my time are passing away: my wife is baking for a funeral, a 60-year-old who
died suddenly, when the phone rings, and it's Ruth we care so much about in intensive care:

it was once weddings that came so thick and fast, and then, first babies, such a hullabaloo:

now, it's this that and the other and somebody else gone or on the brink: well, we never

thought we would live forever (although we did) and now it looks like we won't: some of us

are losing a leg to diabetes, some don't know what they went downstairs for, some know that

a hired watchful person is around, some like to touch the cane tip into something steady,

so nice: we have already lost so many, brushed the loss of ourselves ourselves: our

address books for so long a slow scramble now are palimpsests, scribbles and scratches: our

index cards for Christmases, birthdays, Halloweens drop clean away into sympathies:

at the same time we are getting used to so many leaving, we are hanging on with a grip
to the ones left: we are not giving up on the congestive heart failure or brain tumors, on

the nice old men left in empty houses or on the widows who decide to travel a lot: we
think the sun may shine someday when we'll
drink wine together and think of what used to
be: until we die we will remember every
single thing, recall every word, love every
loss: then we will, as we must, leave it to
others to love, love that can grow brighter
and deeper till the very end, gaining strength
and getting more precious all the way. . . .

Archie Randolph Ammons
Mule Song

Silver will lie where she lies
sun-out, whatever turning the world does,
longeared in her ashen, earless,
floating world:
indifferent to sores and greengage colic,
where oats need not come to,
bleached by crystals of her trembling time:
beyond all brunt of seasons, blind
forever to all blinds,
inhabited by brooks still she may wraith over broken fields after winter
or roll in the rye-green fields:
old mule, no defense but a mule's against disease, large-ribbed,
flat-toothed, sold to a stranger, shot by a stranger's hand,
not my hand she nuzzled the seasoning-salt from.

Archie Randolph 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.

Archie Randolph Ammons
Rapids

Fall's leaves are redder than
spring's flowers, have no pollen,
and also sometimes fly, as the wind
schools them out or down in shoals
or droves: though I
have not been here long, I can
look up at the sky at night and tell
how things are likely to go for
the next hundred million years:
the universe will probably not find
a way to vanish nor I
in all that time reappear.

Archie Randolph Ammons
Recovery

All afternoon
the tree shadows, accelerating,
lengthened
till
sunset
shot them black into infinity:
next morning
darkness
returned from the other
infinity and the
shadows caught ground
and through the morning, slowing,
hardened into noon.

Archie Randolph 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?

Archie Randolph 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.

Archie Randolph Ammons
Small Song

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

Submitted by Jim McCarthy

Archie Randolph Ammons
So I said I am Ezra
and the wind whipped my throat
gaming for the sounds of my voice
I listened to the wind
go over my head and up into the night
Turning to the sea I said
I am Ezra
but there were no echoes from the waves
The words were swallowed up
in the voice of the surf
or leaping over the swells
lost themselves oceanward
Over the bleached and broken fields
I moved my feet and turning from the wind
that ripped sheets of sand
from the beach and threw them
like seamists across the dunes
swayed as if the wind were taking me away
and said
I am Ezra
As a word too much repeated
falls out of being
so I Ezra went out into the night
like a drift of sand
and splashed among the windy oats
that clutch the dunes
of unremembered seas

Archie Randolph Ammons
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 though 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!

Archie Randolph 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.

Archie Randolph Ammons
The Confirmers

The saints are gathering at the real places, trying tough skin on sharp conscience, endurance in the hot spots- searching out to define, come up against, mouth the bitterest bit: you can hear them yelping down in the dark greeny groves of condemnation: their lips slice back with jittery suctions, cold insweeps of conjured grief: if they, footloose, wham up the precise damnation, consolation may be more than us trudging down from paunchy dinners, swatting hallelujah arms at dusk bugs and telling them pure terror has obviously made them earnest of mind and of motion lithe.

Archie Randolph Ammons
Their Sex Life

One failure on
Top of another

Archie Randolph Ammons
Viable

Motion's the dead giveaway,
eye catcher, the revealing risk:
the caterpillar sulls on the hot macadam

but then, risking, ripples to the bush:
the cricket, startled, leaps the
quickest arc: the earthworm, casting,
nudges a grassblade, and the sharp robin
strikes: sound's the other
announcement: the redbird lands in

an elm branch and tests the air with
cheeps for an answering, reassuring
cheep, for a motion already cleared:

survival organizes these means down to
tension, to enwrapped, twisting suasions:
every act or non-act enceinte with risk or

prize: why must the revelations be
sound and motion, the point, too, moving and
saying through the scary opposites to death.

Archie Randolph Ammons
Weathering

A day without rain is like
a day without sunshine

Archie Randolph Ammons
When I Was Young The Silk

When I was young the silk
of my mind
hard as a peony head
unfurled
and wind bloomed the parachute:

The air-head tugged me
up,
tore my roots loose and drove
high, so high

I want to touch down now
and taste the ground
I want to take in
my silk
and ask where I am
before it is too late to know

Archie Randolph Ammons
Winter Scene

There is now not a single leaf on the cherry tree: except when the jay plummets in, lights, and, in pure clarity, squalls: then every branch quivers and breaks out in blue leaves.

Archie Randolph Ammons