

TOC Ammons enough for two classes

in view of the fact  
touching down  
play

Cascadilla Falls  
Corsons Inlet (two pages)  
Motion which disestablishes organizes everything

Close up  
then one  
still  
mission

project  
epiphany  
the put-down come on  
called into play

poetics  
positions  
reading

A R 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

[stanza break]

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. . . .

from [www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org)

reprinted from Bosh and Flapdoodle. New York City:  
W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005.

A R Ammons

Touching Down

Body keeps talking under the mind  
keeps bringing up lesser views  
keeps insisting  
but coaxingly in pale tones

that the mind come on back, try  
to get some rest,  
allow itself to  
be consoled

by slighter rather than slackened  
thirst: body keeps with light touch  
though darkening  
lines sketching

images of its mortality but not  
to startle the mind further off  
hums  
all right all right

from <https://religiousnaturalism.org>

A R Ammons

Play

Nothing's going to become of anyone  
except death:

    therefore: it's okay  
to yearn  
too high:  
the grave accommodates  
swell rambunctiousness &

ruin's not  
compromised by magnificence:

the cut-off point  
liberates us to the  
common disaster: so  
    pick a perch –  
apple bough for example in bloom –  
tune up  
and if you like

drill imagination right through necessity:  
it's all right:  
it's been taken care of:

is allowed, considering

from Poetry. October 1970

A R Ammons

Cascadilla Falls

I went down by Cascadilla  
Falls this  
evening, the  
stream below the falls,  
and picked up a  
handsized stone  
kidney shaped, testicular, and

thought all its motions into it,  
the 800 mph earth spin,  
the 190-million-mile yearly  
displacement around the sun,  
the overriding  
grand  
haul

of the galaxy with the 30,000  
mph of where  
the sun's going:  
thought all the interweaving  
motions  
into myself: dropped

the stone to dead rest:  
the stream from other motions  
broke  
rushing over it:  
shelterless,  
I turned

to the sky and stood still:  
Oh  
I do  
not know where I am going  
that I can live my life  
by this single creek.

Corsons Inlet

beyond the account: A R Ammons

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

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:

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

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

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:

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:

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

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:

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 [no stanza break]

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, [no stanza break]

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

[no stanza break]

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.

A R. Atmmons

Motion Which Disestablishes Organizes Everything

William James (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 84) is to be commended for penning out of our finest recommendations for the bright outlook:

he was so miserable himself he knew how to put a fine point on the exact prescription: he knew that anybody who knows anything about human

existence knows it can be heavy: in fact, it can be so heavy it can undo its own heaviness, the knees can crumple, the breath and heart beat,

not to mention the bowels, can become irregular, etc.: but the world, William knew, sardonic and skeptical, can characterize sufferers of such

symptoms malingering wimps, a heaviness not to be welcomed by a person who like me feels like one of those: weight begets weight and nature works as well

(and mindlessly) down as up: you have to put English of your own into the act misleading the way into lightnings: brightness, however

desirable, is a losing battle, though, and James knew it can be depended on more often than not that folks won't have spare brightnesses on them every

morning that they want your heaviness to cost them: so, in general, if someone asks how you are, no matter how you are, say something nice: say,

"fine," or "marvelous morning," and, this way, hell gradually notches up toward paradise, a misconstruction many conspire to forward because

nearly all, maybe all, prefer one to the other: oppositions make things costly: crooked teeth encourage the symmetry of braces but as soon as everybody's

teeth are perfect, crooked teeth misalign: something is always working the other way: if you let the other way go, you get more in Dutch for

[stanza break]

while the other way at first may constitute an alternative mainstream, pretty soon it breaks up into dispersive tributaries and splinters a

rondure of fine points into branches and brooklets till it becomes impossible to get a hold on it, a river system running backwards:

be bright: that is a wish that can be stable: you can always think of happiness because it's wished right out of any rubbings with reality, so

you can keep the picture pure and steady: I always imagine a hillock, about as much as I can get up these days, with a lovely shade tree and under

the tree this beautiful girl, unnervingly young, who projects golden worlds: this scene attracts me so much that even though I'm a little

scared by it it feels enlivening, a rosy, sweet enlivening: poets can always prevent our hubris, reminding us how the coffin slats peel

cloth and crack in, how the onset of time strikes at birth, how love falters, how past the past is, how the eyes of hungry children feed the flies.

originally from *The Hudson Review* (Summer 1987)  
from *The Best American Poetry 1988*, John Ashbery, ed.,  
David Lehman, series ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company,  
1988. p 3-5.

A R Ammons

Close-Up

Are all these stones  
    yours

I said  
and the mountain  
pleased

but reluctant to  
admit my praise could move it much

shook a little  
and rained a windrow ring of stones  
to show  
that it was so

Stonefelled I got  
up addled with dust

and shook  
    myself  
without much consequence

Obviously I said it doesn't pay  
to get too  
close up to  
    greatness

and the mountain friendless wept  
    and said  
it couldn't help  
itself

from Expressions of Sea Level. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1963. p 43.

A R Ammons

Then One

When the circumstance takes  
on a salience, as a

crushing pressure, then one,  
addled by the possible closures,

the tangles that might  
snap taut in a loop

or other unfigurable construct,  
then one

dreams of drift-logs far at sea  
where room can wear drifts out

winds change  
and few places show one can't

embark  
from and then one thinks finally

with tight appreciation  
of nothingness

or if not that far of  
things that loosen or come apart.

from Poetry. October 1970

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

[stanza break]

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!

from [www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org)  
From The Selected Poems: 1951-1977, Expanded Edition.  
New York City: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1986.

A R Ammons

Mission

The wind went over  
me  
saying  
    Why are you so distressed

Oh I said I  
can't seem to make  
anything  
    round enough to last

But why  
the wind  
said  
    should you be so distressed

as if anything here belonged to you  
as if anything here were your concern

from <https://readalittlepoetry.com>

A R Ammons

Project

My subject's  
still the wind still  
difficult to  
present  
being invisible:  
nevertheless should I  
presume it not  
I'd be compelled  
to say  
how the honeysuckle bushlimbs  
wave themselves:  
difficult  
beyond presumption

from Poetry October 1970

A R Ammons

Epiphany

Like a single drop of rain,  
the wasp strikes  
the windowpane; buzzes rapidly  
away, disguising

error in urgent business:  
such is the  
invisible, hard as glass,  
unrenderable by the senses,

not known until stricken by:  
some talk that  
there is safety in the visible,  
the definite, the heard and felt,

pre-stressing the rational and  
calling out with  
joy, like people far from death:  
how puzzled they will be when

going headlong secure in "things"  
they strike the  
intangible and break, lost,  
unaccustomed to transparency, to

being without body, energy  
without image:  
how they will be dealt  
hard realizations, opaque as death.

from Poetry. November 1960

A R Ammons

The Put-Down Come On

You would think I'd be a specialist in contemporary  
literature: novels, short stories, books of poetry,  
my friends write many of them: I don't read much  
and some drinks are too strong for me: my empty-headed

contemplation is still where the ideas of permanence  
and transience fuse in a single body, ice, for example,  
or a leaf: green pushes white up the slope: a maple  
leaf gets the wobbles in a light wind and comes loose

half-ready: where what has always happened and what  
has never happened before seem for an instant reconciled:  
that takes up most of my time and keeps me uninformed:  
but the slope, after maybe a thousand years, may spill

and the ice have a very different look withdrawing into  
the lofts of cold: only a little of that kind of  
thinking flashes through: but turning the permanent also  
into the transient takes up all the time that's left.

from Collected Poems 1951 – 1971. New York: w. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972.

Called Into Play

A R Ammons

Fall fell: so that's it for the leaf poetry:  
some flurrries 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. . . .

from [www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org) Reprinted by permission from The Hudson Review, Vol. L, No. 3 (Autumn 1997).

A R Ammons

Poetics

I look for the way  
things will turn  
out spiraling 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.

from Collected Poems 1951 – 1971. New York: w. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972.

A R Ammons

Positions

I can tell you what I need is for  
somebody to asseverate I'm a poet  
and in an embroilment and warfare of onrushing words  
    heightened by opposing views  
to maintain I lie down to no man in  
the character and thrust of my speech  
and that everybody who is neglecting me far  
    though it be, indeed, from his mind  
is incurring a guilt complex  
he'll have to reckon with later on  
and suffer over (I am likely to be  
recalcitrant with leniency):  
what I need I mean is a champion or even  
    a host of champions,  
a phalanx of enthusiasts, driving a spearhead  
or one or two of those big amphibian trucks  
through the peopled ocean of my neglect:  
I mean I don't want to sound fancy but  
what I could use at the moment is  
a little destruction perpetrated in my favor.

from Collected Poems 1951 – 1971. New York: w. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972.

A R Ammons

Reading

It's nice  
after dinner  
to walk down to  
the beach  
and find  
the biggest  
thing on earth  
relatively calm.

from <https://briefpoems.wordpress.com>