

Wake Grad Wins National Poetry Award Sentinel 1-5-82

By The Associated Press

A North Carolina native's 16th volume of poems won the National Book Critics Circle Award yesterday for the most distinguished work of poetry published in 1981.

"A Coast Of Trees" by A. R. Ammons was described by the group's 22-member board of directors as an "uncommonly eloquent, lyrical meditation on American life today and a reaffirmation of the poetic tradition of Wordsworth and Whitman."

The 54-year-old Ammons, who was born in Whiteville and graduated from Wake Forest University, is the Goldwin Smith professor of poetry at Cornell University.

He served as principal of Hatteras Elementary School on North Carolina's Outer Banks and worked as vice president of Friedrich and Dimmock Inc., a



A. R. AMMONS

... N. C. native ...

biological glass firm in Milville, N. J., before going to Cornell in 1964.



JOHN UPDIKE

... best novel ...

In 1970, Ammons received the National Book Award for poetry and in 1973 was elected

a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He currently lives in Ithaca, N. Y.

The critics' award for the best novel published in 1981 went to John Updike for "Rabbit Is Rich," the latest chapter in the saga of Rabbit Angstrom.

Updike's novel was called a "perceptive, funny, wrenching story" that brings readers up to date on the life of Rabbit Angstrom, first met 20 years ago in Updike's "Rabbit, Run."

Another winner yesterday was Stephen Jay Gould's "The Mismeasure of Man," which took the prize for general non-fiction. "The Virgil Thomson Reader," by Virgil Thomson, American composer and music critic, won in the criticism category.

"The Mismeasure of Man" was cited as a "penetrating study that explores the history of the concept of intelligence

and exposes the roots of its measurement in cultural and racial prejudice."

Thomson's book was described as "a lifetime of musical achievement, knowledge and sharp felicitous critical writing ... presented in a rich volume that is music to both ears and mind."

The winners in the four categories were selected by the board from a nominating list of five books in each category. The awards ceremony will be held at the New York Public Library on Jan. 28.

The National Book Critics Circle, founded in 1974, is an organization of 300 professional book critics and book-review editors across the country.

Eligible books were those written in English by American authors and published for the first time in the United States during 1981.

Subject: A.R. Ammons Service

Date: Wed, 18 Apr 2001 09:47:52 -0400

From: Wake Forest News Service <wfunews@wfu.edu>

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A memorial service will be held at 3:30 p.m. April 19 for poet and Wake Forest alumnus A. R. (Archie) Ammons. The service will be in Davis Chapel. It is open to the public.

Ammons, who died last February, was a former Visiting Professor of English at Wake Forest, a frequent visitor to the University, and one of most eminent poets in the United States.

Wake Forest News Service

Memorial Service

ARCHIE AMMONS
(1926-2001)

Prelude	Nick Bragg
Reflections	Ed Wilson
Poem: "Still"	Jim Hans
Song: "Precious Memories"	Shelby Stephenson Nin Stephenson
Poem: "For Harold Bloom"	Louise Gossett
Song: "Amazing Grace"	Shelby Stephenson Nin Stephenson
Poem: "Easter Morning"	Tom Hearn
Song: "You'll Never Walk Alone"	Teresa Radomski
Lines from <u>Tape for the Turn of the Year</u>	Ed Wilson
Postlude	Nick Bragg

Davis Chapel, Wake Forest University

3:30 p.m., 19 April 2001

A poet comes home

This state and its people still have a place in A.R. Ammons' heart

By SUSAN LADD

Staff Writer

A.R. Ammons has been compared to Walt Whitman, Robert Frost and Ralph Waldo Emerson. So it's a little surprising that when the poet talks about his own beginnings, he draws an analogy to hockey player Wayne Gretzky.

"Gretzky says at the age of 2, when most kids were doing other things, he was trying to get on the ice. By the time he was 10, he offered himself as player to a hockey team. Kids aren't stupid," Ammons says. "They recognize things that are going on within them."

"I don't think any parent would say to a child, 'Go, my son, and be a poet.' Poetry isn't a career you can select. One doesn't do it in order to be successful. One does it because one has to do it."

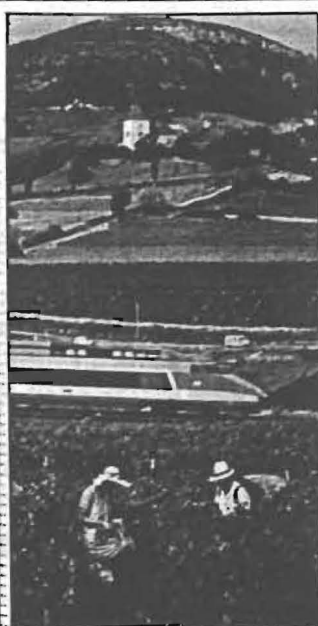
Ammons recognized the poet in himself long before anyone else took notice. He wrote poetry for nearly 20 years before publishers recognized his work. Eighteen books later, he is known as one of the most important contemporary American poets.

Among his honors and awards are a Guggenheim Fellowship, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Traveling Fellowship, the Levinson Prize, an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and a MacArthur Prize Fellowship.

On his 60th birthday, he will be honored by his home state when the North Carolina Humanities Committee presents a tribute, "The Home Country of A.R. Ammons," on Saturday at Salem College.

Home country for Archie Randolph Ammons is Whiteville, a small town in Columbus County in the southeastern part of the state, where he was born in 1926.

Though he hasn't lived in the state for 35 years, the land and people live on in his heart and his writing. Ammons was a farm boy who wrote his first poem as a 10th-grade English assignment. It was about Pocahontas. He hated it.



French National Railways

The TGV, a high-speed French train, goes through the Burgundy countryside

Railroads get European trip on right track

By ABE D. JONES JR.

Arts Editor

Because the English use trains every day, not just for vacations, you can step off a plane at either of London's airports and onto a train.

For my wife and me, it was an early morning commuter train at Gatwick Airport. The newspapers of the passengers — London-bound office workers — gave the



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— A.R. Ammons, shown at left as he is today, and, above, as a boy growing up in a small town in southeastern North Carolina.

and who was off to work in a shop.

All a BritRail pass holder needs to do is show the pass to the conductor. Good for periods ranging upward from seven days, the pass lets you travel on nearly every train. On the continent, there is Eurail pass. It lets you wander western Europe and ride as many trains as you can manage.

That will be a lot.

Britain and Europe use trains as America used to. They go nearly everywhere, and frequently. If you miss one in a major city, it's not likely to be more than a couple of hours before the next. At the airport, it may be a matter of minutes.

Even Inverness in the Highlands of Scotland, which Englishmen still look upon as being back of beyond, has 10 times as many trains as Greensboro with its single daily run of the Amtrak Crescent.

Trains run on time

Experience on British and French trains shows they seem to run on time, or close to it. Some of the world's fastest trains are in France and Britain, too. The TGV in France makes over 130 miles an hour on its scheduled runs.

Even on a big spring holiday, delays are not excessive, and extra trains are added to avoid overcrowding. The trains almost always have some food service, and they are kept neat, with onboard equipment in working order.

Even a little branchline train in Scotland will have food and drink available. If the train's too tiny to have a food counter, it will stop at some little cluster of houses with a station where there is a place to buy refresh-

"I was 19, in the Navy, and discovered a poetry anthology on board. I read it and began to imitate it. I haven't stopped writing poetry since."

In 1946, Ammons returned to the state to attend Wake Forest College as a pre-med major. He met and married Phyllis Plumbo and graduated with a general sciences degree in 1949. "He was a good student, but very shy," says longtime friend Emily Wilson of Salem College. "He wrote poems, but nobody knew."

After serving for one year as principal of a small elementary school in Hatteras, he returned to school himself. He studied for a year at the University of California at Berkeley, where he knew the poet Josephine Miles.

"I continued to write, but I recognized the need to make a living another way," Ammons says. He and his wife moved to southern New Jersey where Ammons became vice president of a glass manufacturing firm. He would remain there for 12 years.

In 1956, Ammons published his own book of poetry, "Ommatium." In five years, 16 copies were sold. It wasn't until 1964 that he was invited to read at Cornell University and subsequently became a member of the English faculty.

Only 100 copies of "Ommatium" were ever bound; an edition is now worth \$1,300.

"I wish I'd kept them all," Ammons says with a chuckle.

Ammons finally found fame in abundance. But it was only after years of obscurity.

"I spent almost 20 years working with-

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

THE PUT-DOWN COME ON

half-ready; where what has always happened and what has never happened before seem for an instant reconciled: that takes up most of 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.

out much encouragement," he says. "It was a long, long, difficult trail of waiting for the mailman every day and getting nothing but rejections. You get tired of it, you get depressed, and you obviously question yourself every day. But I kept going."

The years of obscurity have given Ammons a keen perspective on his years of fame — the awards, the lofty comparisons to Whitman and Frost.

"I feel very calm and quiet about it all now. When I was being rejected, I don't think in many cases that all that much attention was being paid to my work. Now that I'm mostly accepted, I'm not sure much attention is being paid to my work. It's natural, with all the names we know, that people hesitate to let a newcomer in. It's also natural to feel warm toward a

name you already know.

"We never really know if our poetry is any good. It may look good now, and later appear old and rusty. On the other hand, some work that isn't considered good now might come to be appreciated later. Only recently has Blake become known as a gifted poet. You have to take a chance. That makes it lively and exciting."

As Goldwin Smith professor of poetry at Cornell, Ammons tells his students they should regard poetry as a hobby, an avocation, until it turns into a vocation. He calls himself an encourager. You can teach people about poetry, he says, but you can't teach them to be poets. It's as inborn as Gretzky's love of the ice.

"I think they educate themselves," Ammons says. "I stand by and make suggestions when possible."

Ammons' writing is complex and metaphorical. Emily Wilson describes it as combining abstract statement with concrete image.

"It's not confessional poetry," Wilson says. "You don't find out about Archie's life, but you find out an awful lot about his mind and imagination."

Ammons doesn't take comparisons with literary greats too seriously, but there is one evaluation of his work that he finds truly pleasing. "Someone said I was an assimilator of voices, but I still sounded like myself. I like that."

How his poems affect any reader — not just the scholar — is important to Ammons. He doesn't write for himself or for

(See Poet, G8)

Poet From G1

he academics. He hopes to speak to everyone.

"I want them to understand every syllable," Ammons says. "And I'd rather they understand one poem completely than half-understand a million. The poem becomes the way you get from one person to another. It's absolutely essential to our lives."

Ammons' poetry finds union in the natural and spiritual worlds. That it reveals most about him is a sense of his roots.

"I'm a Southerner. My poetry comes out of the hymn books we used to sing from. That feeling of home does not go away; it remains a part of you. I feel it most when I sit the piano and play those hymns.

It makes me feel at home wherever I am."

The years he's been away cannot compare to the influence of the first 17, which began with his birth in a Whiteville farmhouse. Ammons says he longs to have the feeling that comes from once again seeing those places and things that are comfortable and familiar from childhood.

"I fear that having been away for 30 years, I may not be able to visit that home country except in my mind," Ammons says. "People are gone, things have changed. It really is good to live in the same place all your life and take trips. It enables you to live more in the present than the past; you accept the changes

around you because you see them daily. When you've been gone for a long time and come back, the changes are so radical that you feel resentment and sadness."

All that remains of the home in which Ammons was born are two pecan trees and a pear tree.

"I look at those trees with wonder, because everything else has changed. That pear tree looked dead when I was 5, and it's still sprouting."

The love of nature apparent in Ammons' description of a flowing stream or a falling leaf also dates to his childhood. "Growing up on a farm, where you're largely dependent on things like rain and temperature, gives you a very intimate re-

lationship with nature and the world around you," Ammons says.

He is saddened at times that people don't seem to appreciate the natural world anymore. But he says it's part of the continuum of life.

"In a way, we're preparing to give nature up. We've designed residences in space, and we're preparing people to live there. I think it's what we should do — it's part of the nature of the species to inquire, seek, discover. We are learning a great deal about how life has emerged on this planet. It's very exciting. Also scary."

It isn't too hard to image Ammons on that first space station; writing about the texture of stars and remembering the pear tree.

Want to go?

The N.C. Humanities Committee Conference will be held Saturday at the Fine Arts Center of Salem College in Winston-Salem. Events begin with an 11 a.m. registration, include discussions, and conclude with a reading by Ammons at 8 p.m.

Deadline for luncheon reservations was Thursday. Registration fee is \$3 per person for those attending only the afternoon sessions. No registration is required for the evening program. For more information, call 379-5325.

A block of rooms will be held until 6 p.m. Saturday at the Old Salem Holiday Inn for those needing overnight accommodations; (919) 725-8561.

A Carolina Poet Comes Home To Discuss and Share His Art

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 a 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.

— from "Easter Morning" by A.R. Ammons

By Linda Brinson

JOURNAL BOOK PAGE EDITOR

HIS "HOME COUNTRY." That's what A.R. Ammons, one of the most distinguished living American Poets, wrote about in "Easter Morning," a poem in his 16th book, *A Coast of Trees*, published in 1981.

Next Saturday, the N.C. Humanities Committee will use that phrase as the theme of its first state conference.

"The Home Country of A.R. Ammons— a Tribute." The conference, honoring this poet who has published 18 volumes of poetry and received a string of impressive awards, including the National Book Award, the Bollingen Prize and a MacArthur Prize Fellowship award, will be held at the Salem College Fine Arts Center.

The conference also celebrates Ammons' 60th year — he was born Feb. 18, 1926.

Ammons' home country is the eastern North Carolina farmland near New Hope, in Columbus County. Those piney woods and swamps and sandy fields are very much a part of his poetry, he said in a telephone interview recently from his home in Ithaca, N.Y.

His roots are not often as obvious in his poetry as in "Easter Morning," however. The influence is more "out of my own psychological and emotional resources," he said.

Despite Ammons' years in the North, his heritage lingers in his slow, soft, courteous speech. He is obviously thinking constantly as he speaks, considering each word and phrase with a poet's care, his alert mind weighing possibilities and intricacies.

"I've spent a great deal of time away from North Carolina, so that on the surface of the poems there is often a representation of wherever

His memories are of walking to New Hope Elementary School, a small wooden building, until he reached the sixth grade, when he began riding a bus to a new brick schoolhouse. For high school, he went to Whiteville.

Aside from the school, New Hope then had nothing but a Baptist Church and a cemetery, "the one I write about so much."

Ammons recalled spending idle hours at Soul Swamp on the back side of his family's farm. "From time to time there would be ponds to fish in, and I used to go there a lot to fish, down in the woods. We kids used to call the small bass and perch 'flowers,' because they were small and colorful."

Streams, too, and other parts of the natural world, often figure in Ammons' poetry.

Then there is the inevitable Southern religious influence. "My father was a Baptist, and my mother was a Methodist, but the nearest church was Pentecostal Holiness. They had a hymnbook called *Gems of Devotion*. I still have a copy of it, and I still play those hymns at the piano."

When Ammons was a teen-ager, he sometimes played piano for tent revival meetings at nearby Chadbourn. "This is the kind of thing that relates Southerner to Southerner," he said. "It's amazing how deeply it touches you."

Yet, Ammons has steadfastly rejected the label of "Southern" poet through the years, telling interviewers that thoughts of regionalism leave his mind when he turns to matters literary.

Ammons' journey away from his home country began after he graduated from high school in 1943 and set off to make his fortune at the shipyards in Wilmington. When he turned 18, at the height of World War II, he joined the Navy.

During 19 months on a destroyer escort in the South Pacific, Ammons read poetry in an anthology and began trying to write some of his own.

After the war, he used the G.I. Bill to enroll at Wake Forest, then still a college and still in the eastern

North Carolina village of Wake Forest. He was the first of his family to go to any college.

He was a quiet, unobtrusive student. He pursued pre-medical studies at first, but switched to general science when he realized that he was not going to be able to afford medical school.

Ammons' understanding of science has been another important factor in his poetry. Critics praise his ability to assimilate modern science into literature, and they call him a pioneer in the use of scientific diction in poetry.

To Ammons, it's all part of the world, part of his search for a unified view of the world.



A. R. Ammons as a farm boy

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"I've spent a great deal of time away from North Carolina, so that on the surface of the poems there is often a representation of wherever I was living. I lived for a long time in southern New Jersey. The beaches in southern New Jersey are very much like North Carolina beaches. They are very beautiful, with scrub oaks and pines and sand. I always loved it there when I lived there.

"I've lived here now in Ithaca for 22 years. Obviously, I write about things around me. But I'm still writing largely out of the experience of 17 years on that farm — the first 17 years of my life, where one's mother and father and sisters and brothers were," he said.

During those first 17 years, Ammons likes to recall, he ventured out of Columbus County only once — for a picnic when he was 12.



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"I don't find science, by the way, to be that much different from anything else," he said.

"There are certain facts and generalizations and possibilities and hypotheses and conclusions. We make the same kind of observations and hypotheses about our behavior — emotional, spiritual or whatever.

"I wasn't pioneering anything deliberately. I was just talking my poems. I never thought it was remarkable that I wrote about science. That was what I had studied."

Ammons recalled having Edwin G. Wilson as his freshman English teacher. That was before Wilson had gone on to graduate studies at Harvard and, eventually, to become the provost of

See Ammons, Page C10

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Ammons

Continued From Page C1

Wake Forest. "He was very good," Ammons said.

There was another Wake Forest teacher Ammons particularly liked: Phyllis Plumbo, who taught Spanish there for one semester in 1947. The two kept in touch after Miss Plumbo left for graduate study in California. As soon as Ammons graduated in 1949, they were married.

He has returned to Wake Forest several times through the years, including a trip to receive an honorary doctor of letters degree in 1972. He spent a year as a visiting professor in 1974-75.

Ammons' first job after college was as the principal of a three-teacher elementary school at Cape Hatteras. That is another "home country" he would like to revisit. "It was a wonderful experience," he said. "I remember all those young children — they are in their 50s now. I'll have to go back and find them. I am going to."

Ammons was always writing, and in 1950 he went to the University of California at Berkeley to study English. He left, without earning a degree, after three semesters. He took a job in New Jersey, working in sales with a company that makes medical and biological glassware.

Ammons was doing what he now tells his creative writing students at Cornell that they must do: surviving as a poet in a practical world.

"I tell them that writing poetry is an irresistibly wonderful thing to do, but that you have to accommodate it to a very difficult world where you have to make a living and so on," he said.

His poetry first made it into print when the *Hudson Review* accepted two poems in 1953 — nine years after he had started writing seriously.

His first book was published by what is sometimes called a "vanity press". In other words, Ammons himself paid for the publication.

That book, called *Ommateum* (the Latin for compound eye, as of an insect), was not a rousing success. It received one review. Five years after publication, 16 of the 100 copies printed had been sold to people other than relatives and close friends.

Ammons continued earning a living, quietly writing poetry and staying pretty much apart from literary circles until 1964.

That year, his second book was published by Ohio State University Press and received considerable favorable attention. Also that year, a poetry reading at Cornell led to an

invitation to join the faculty there.

After that slow beginning, Ammons' reputation as a poet has grown astronomically. He is a success as a poet by almost any standard, including the elusive one of actually making money at it. One of his many awards, the MacArthur prize in 1981, included a no-strings-attached grant of \$264,000.

He does not, however, deceive himself or his students about how poetry is valued in contemporary America.

"The state of poetry has never been healthier, broader or deeper," he said. "There are literally thousands of very good poets in this country now. But it is a time of writing, not reading. As far as I know the basic audience for poetry now as far as purchasers are concerned are poets and students in colleges and universities. Surely some people do read poems, but I don't think there's very much in the way of purchasing of poetry by the 'general public.'"

"That is a very great shame and comes about as the result of a misunderstanding about the nature of poetry and the general public. It seems to me that if the nature of poetry were more truly and broadly understood, that people would spend a good deal of time with it, both reading and writing it."

And what is poetry?

"Poetry," Ammons said, carefully and deliberately, "is the central verbal way of expressing human behavior, and human behavior is the central thing of interest to us all."

"Poetry is the verbal representation of the dynamics of human behavior. You could go on from there for hours. For example, I see the same dynamics for poetry represented in a great many other activities — football, basketball, ice skating, waitressing — in anything where a human body moves in space and does something, there's always the possibility of definition and beauty. And if this happens verbally, it's a poem. If it happens because a waitress does something beautifully, it's a poem in a different language — in the language of gesture and movement. And of course, poems are very deeply involved in gesture and movement, too."

"All of these areas of life are very intimately related, and poetry is the verbal way of talking about them. It isn't something funny and different."

Poetry also is something that A.R. Ammons is continuing to write. He has 29 new poems in a special issue of *Pembroke Magazine*, published by Pembroke State University. That issue, which also includes essays on Ammons' work, is expected to be available at the Humanities Committee conference.

An enlarged edition of his *Selected Poems* also is due out soon.

Fresh Energy

A.R. Ammons, the Poet, Speaks in Watercolors, Too

By GENIE CARR
Sentinel Staff Reporter



Archie Ammons, tall and loose-jointed, ambled down the tree-lined road toward Reynolda Village. "I've been waking up early," he said to his fellow ambler. "I got up at 5:30 this morning and took a walk. It was still dripping wet out."

He glanced around at the trees, very green in the afternoon sunshine. "I like getting up early," he said. "It's as if nobody else has used up the morning."

The Reynolda estate is home to Ammons the first two weeks of this month as he conducts a poetry workshop at Reynolda House. Ammons' poetry has been collected in more than 13 volumes over the 35 years he has been writing, and he received the National Book Award for Poetry in 1973 and the 1975 Bollingen Prize in Poetry.

The reason for his walk from the house to the village at Reynolda, though, had nothing to do with his poetry and all to do with another artistic venture: his watercolor paintings. For four years, "until about this time last year," he applied brush to paper about as often as pen to paper, producing 2,000 watercolors.

He has brought some of those paintings with him, and after preparation in the Village Frame Shop this week they will be shown in the Reynolda Guest House beginning with a reception at 3 p.m. Sunday.

Ammons' painting may surprise devotees of Ammons' poetry, which presents specificity of image: "wider than sky-wide/discs of lit-shale clouds"; "Rings of birch bark/stand in the woods...." On the other hand, his 18-by-24-inch sheets of expensive French watercolor paper burst with deep colors (leaning toward greens, blues, browns) and play abstractly with shape and shade. Serpentine curves flow over multicolored grids or delineate a blue field from a broad expanse of white.

"Look at this one," Ammons said, pulling a painting off the pile at the framer's. "This is the day I discovered how to make tan." He touched the light-brown portion of the painting. "It looks like a paper bag, doesn't it?" he said happily.

"As far as I can tell, I do the paintings in a different way from the way I do the poems," he said. "It feels like a kind of energy I don't use ordinarily."

Yet, in the system of judgment, the two come together. A pause. "There are contraries in both the paintings and the poems that are similar. I suppose that's so in all forms of art." Another pause, and a smile. "I don't know if all that is pure mysticism."

Ammons began trying out watercolor in 1968. After he and his family returned to the U.S. from a stay in Rome, they lived for a bit in Ocean City, N. J., where "the local cultural arts center offered watercolor." He took half a dozen classes, then did nothing with the medium until 1975, when, on Christmas Eve, he got out the brushes again.

"I started out on three-by-five index cards," he said. Writing "one of my little poems" on the cards, he would add some painted color. "I moved up to four-by-six cards" and then to watercolor paper.

"At first, I would use shapes around the house. I'd use pans and bowls, and there was one of those oval broilers you use in the oven. I would also pick up things I would find along the road and simply trace them, so I would get a sense of balance and shape."

Eventually, he made his own shapes, sometimes painting all day. "I was up to eight per day for a while, but that seemed to me a bit obsessive, so I cut back some."

"I loved it," he said. "It takes your attention from self-consciousness. It places it outside you, and all that time you rest inside. It's like a drink of fresh water." Unlike the process of a poem, he said, the process of a painting can simply begin. "I can start any time, anywhere, on a painting. That's the great thing about it. No matter how I felt, I could go in my room and start painting."

"I could never go in my room and just start writing."

As he finished the paintings, he stashed them in a closet at home in Ithaca, N. Y., where he has taught at Cornell University for 17 years. The university's museum exhibited his paintings, as did an Ithaca gallery; and people buy them.

"I won't give them away," he said. "If I give you a painting, you have to go get it framed, and that's \$35 right there. Then you have to make sure it's on the wall when I come to visit. So anyone who wants one has to pay for it. That way, it's theirs, and they

can give away if they want to."

He charges \$300 for a painting, "the same as when I started." The price, apparently, is arbitrary. "I wonder if it's arrogant," he said.

After painting for four years, he stopped when the closet filled up, about the same time three writing projects began closing in on him. He was finishing "A Coast of Trees," which was published last month, and was working on "Worldly Hopes," now at the printer's, and on "Nobody's Way," which is still in process. ("I've been pretty occupied with poetry lately," he said.)

Although the beginnings and ends of the paintings and poems differ, the same impulses live in both: to pass beyond old ideas and to move directly to the end; the end being a fully formed question. ("Keats said, 'Poems end in speculation,'" Ammons said. "I think that's the greatest statement I've heard about poetry.")

"I try to catch the accuracy of things as they happen," he said. "I'm not much for coming back to things. I try to get the symmetry of the whole action at first, then I come back and true it up, if I can, when I've misstated the action. My best poems seem to have just been born whole. The second level of poems I revise endlessly."

His best paintings, like the best poems, move quickly from start to finish, with minor "trueing up" (watercolors stand for little revision, anyway). The ones he ruins are flipped over, and he starts again on the other side of the paper.

The challenge of the artist — painter or writer — is to avoid the old perceptions. Sometimes, Ammons said, he will begin a painting by placing the paper on the floor and pouring paint on it, exposing it "to incidents and accidents." But as the painting forms, judgments take more and more control. Elements that were accidents in the beginning, all look deliberate and inevitable in the end.

"One of the hardest things for an artist," he said, "is to break up perceptions of form and judgments in his mind that already represent the society, and to expose himself to open-

ness to possible new forms."

But when those new forms appear, they must be subjected to the same rigor of judgment and value that is attached to the old forms. Maybe that's what the artist is for — to keep us from being congealed in the conventional forms."

As for whether he takes up painting again, he probably will; but his medium might change. "I don't know if I have anything more to say in watercolor," he said.

Ammons recently was named a recipient of the McArthur Prize, which will provide him the astonishing sum of \$4,400 a month for five years to spend as he pleases (his wife told him Monday the first check had arrived in Ithaca). "Now that I'm rich," he said with a bemused smile, "maybe I can get to oils, or something... although, I tend to resist anything you have to stand around and wait for while it dries."

Longest Reign

The longest reign of a monarch, on record, is that of Pepi II, of Egypt, who according to all evidence, ruled for 90 years. He would have to have been an infant when he succeeded to the throne. Within two years of his death, Egypt fell apart.

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By Tom Gossett

Special to the Journal and Sentinel

A. R. AMMONS, the poet honored with a doctor of letters degree by Wake Forest last week, has been publishing poetry for years — eight volumes in all — but only in the past two or three years has he been attracting major attention from critics across the nation.

Now almost nothing seems too good for them to say about him. John Hallander says that he "has begun to fashion a major American poetry." Peter Davison says that Ammons has "that rare combination of modesty and confidence that makes poetry possible, and as a result his language is fully exercised and brings every muscle into play as it moves around in space and time." Harold Bloom, an author of books on Blake, Shelley, and Yeats — is the most enthusiastic of all. Ammons, says Bloom, is "now much the best poet we have, though so little read and known."

What is he like, this man from rural eastern North Carolina, who has made so pronounced an impression? He is in his 46th year, a native of Whiteville, a 1949 graduate of Wake Forest, a teacher of creative writing at Cornell University.

He has been trained as a biologist. At Wake Forest in the '40s he was planning to go into medicine and in his last year he took six courses in biology. Later he was for 12 years a salesman and during part of that time an official of a small biological supply house.

Even when he was in college, however, he was writing poetry — though he showed it to almost nobody. Probably he was the kind of person then that he is now, shy without being at all taciturn. He tells us himself that he was practically "invisible" as a Wake Forest student.

When I drove to the Wake Forest guest house last weekend to take him out to dinner, I found him—minus his shoes — watching the Humphrey-McGovern television debate. He is tall and thin, sandy-haired and with eyes that are somewhere between brown and green.



McNabb

A. R. Ammons

"He is just folks," I thought. He reaches out to shake your hand. He has no obvious role to play; he seems mainly interested in seeing you and finding out what you are like. One cannot imagine his playing the part of celebrity except to parody it.

And his poetry? He is the first poet fully to assimilate the views of modern science with those of the literary imagination.

The poets have had to unlearn the habit of anthropomorphizing animals and birds as if they were disguised human beings. The scientific study of nature has disclosed too much about flora and fauna for a poet to be comfortable now, as Walt Whitman once was, in describing the "bleeding throat" of the hermit thrush in singing a funeral dirge for his missing mate.

Ammons' birds and animals remain birds and animals,

and he has had to invest them with a different kind of imaginative aura. He talks to them, and sometimes they answer back, but they remain what they are. And whatever they are, he accepts:

*Honor the maggot,
supreme catalyst:
he spurs the rate of change
(all scavengers are honor-
able: I love them all,
will scribble as hard as I
can for them)*

Ammons is shy and self-effacing on almost any subject except that of poetry. He knows that the kind of concentration required to write a poem makes extreme demands of a person. To write a poem, to say what you would like to say, he confesses, takes it out of you. "On the first meeting of my class in creative writing, I try to talk them out of becoming writers. I read to them selections from Rainer Maria Rilke's 'Letters

to a Young Poet.' I tell them about the difficulties. I tell them that in the past 600 years, we have produced only five or six great writers. I ask them to assess their chances. I say to them that if there is any way they can talk themselves into being sensible and getting out now, please to do so." He paused, then added, "They never take my advice."

Far from finding his students way out in their approach to writing poetry, he finds most of them too cautious, too content to be merely competent. He quotes Blake's proverb to them, "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom."

When asked if he himself had been much helped by critics, he replied, "Oh yes, certainly by some of them. I had all these thoughts — just thoughts of my own, just alienated thoughts or so I believed. But when I began to

Critics Wake

Acclaim Grad's Poetry

write them down critics began to point out parallels and contrasts and it helped me partly to know where I was and to believe that what I was saying was worth saying."

"Some of the critics are pretty bad," he went on to say. The solemn kind amuse him the most. One sent him a questionnaire with the impressive lead-off query, "What are the most important influences on your work?" His reply was, "Gee, I wish I knew."

Now that he is becoming well known, he receives a good many requests for speaking engagements at universities, but rarely is he asked to read his poetry. Recently he was offered \$2,500 to come to a major university to give two lectures on the future of American poetry. "And what do I know," he asked with a grin, "about the future of American poetry? I just write poems."

One person asked about the general absence of political and social themes in his poetry. "No, I don't write on social and political themes," he said. "The reason is not that such topics do not interest me. The reason is that I have not yet found a way to bring them into poetry." He explains the matter in one of his poems:

*I have no program for
saving this world or scut-
tling
the next: I know no politi-
cal,
sexual, racial cures: I make
analogies, my bucketful of
flowers: I give flowers to
people
of all policies, sexes, and
races
including the vicious, the
uncertain, and the white.*

This lack of socially conscious poetry may worry him a little. Cornell is heavily "politicized," and his col-

leagues sometimes call him "Redneck." It could be a term of affection because of his sandy-red hair.

On one social issue, that of the environment, he does occasionally write poems. He won't use pesticides which kill the worms on his lawn because they would keep the robins away, and he likes the robins. He has read that the level of nitrous oxides and lead in the rain has dangerously risen in recent years. He remembers a time in eastern North Carolina when a tree with a four-foot diameter was not uncommon, and he is intensely aware of the destruction which has been going on. In a poem called "North Jersey," he describes the ugliness of highway cloverleaves in an industrial landscape:

*Ninth-circle concrete
bending in
high suasions like
formal reductions of
perfect fears: refineries
oiling the air:
burnt reeds, a chemical
scald: gouged land &
shoved mounds:
and man
burning fast motions along
the steely wreaths,
the steely wreaths.*

Someone asked him if there was much of North Carolina in his poetry, and he replied — as he nearly always does to questions — by making a distinction: "I don't know whether there is much of North Carolina in my poetry," he said, "but I know there is a great deal of it in me." It is often difficult to tell what areas are being described in his poetry — he has lived in California, New Jersey, and New York as well as in North Carolina — but some of the poems suggest the barren, sandy lands of southeastern North Carolina. He associates the state frequently with memories of his childhood:

*when I was a boy
or a bit more:
used to get the
Christmas tree: lived
way out in the country
down in Carolina
in a time
& place
that seem so long ago,
everything different
now & sort of loused up.*

At one point in a conversation he said wistfully and he wished his five-year-

old son, John, could have the advantage of growing up in North Carolina.

In some poems one can sense the boy who grew up on a farm and who was early introduced to hunting and fishing:

*I got one good look
in the raccoon's eyes
when he fell from the
tree
came to his feet
and perfectly still
seized the baying
hounds
in his dull fierce stare*

His shyness posed a problem of awarding him an honorary degree at the commencement ceremony. At his request, we took him aside away from the mall on campus and down behind Wait Chapel with the idea that he would appear on the platform just moments before the degree was to be awarded. While we were waiting, a very old woman with a cane got out of a car and prepared to climb up the stairs to the mall. She explained to us that she had come from Yadkinville to see her nephew graduate. People had thought she couldn't make it, she said, but she was determined to come. As she climbed the stairs, Ammons said "I hope I'll be like that when I grow up." (His shyness is in no sense that of the withdrawn intellectual. It is more that of a person who doesn't want any fuss made.)

After the investiture, someone said to him, "It wasn't so bad, was it?" And he reacted like the poet he is. "No," he said, "I am transfixed, transfixed, and translated."

Ammons is now receiving the kind of attention from critics of American poetry which is given only to major figures. Many people, even those who read widely in poetry, know little about him as yet. It is safe to predict, however, that this situation will soon change.

Dr. Gossett is a professor of English at Wake Forest University.

Ammons' most recent book of poetry is *BRIEFINGS: Poems Small and Easy* (Norton). Cloth \$6; paper \$1.95).



("Otter"), Heaney implies that his own devotion to the countryside links up with his attachment to people. This is how he carries off a tribute to his wife, in a poem recalling a skunk he had seen in California:

*It all came back to me last night,
stirred
By the sootfall of your things at
bedtime,
Your head-down, tail-up hunt in a
bottom drawer
For the black plunge-line night-
dress.*

("The Skunk," from *Field Work*)

The yearning toward a racial past takes powerful forms. It is characteristic of Heaney that when he wished to find symbols adequate to the ordeal of his countrymen, he should have turned to an ancient mystery which reaches toward the hidden aspects of human nature. This is the problem of the so-called "bog people," or bodies found in Danish bogs, where they were placed from the time of the early Iron Age. Heaney accepts the view that at least some are the remains of a fertility ritual. But he uses them in his poems to suggest that modern terrorism, rather than meaning a breaking with the past, belongs to an archetypal pattern. In a forceful passage, he indicates the strain

out being suffocated by him.

*Our guttural muse
was bulled long ago
by the alliterative tradition,
her uvula grows*

*vestigial, forgotten
like the coccyx
or a Brigid's Cross
yellowing in some outhouse*

*while custom, that 'most'
sovereign mistress',
beds us down into
the British isles.*

("Traditions")

Like Heaney, A. R. Ammons grew up on his father's farm; and like Heaney, he can remember the early death of a younger brother (another was stillborn). Fear and death are common themes of both men's poetry and keep appearing in Ammons's new book—one of his most impressive collections—*A Coast of Trees*.

But Ammons had a lonely, impoverished boyhood, and attached himself less to people than to the things around him. Landscape is what enthralls him; he seldom attends to personalities and hardly notices history. Often, Heaney writes in conventional forms. Ammons does not.

I think the difference between the two men exposes a difference between the literary culture of Irish or British writers and that of Americans. Poets in our country feel remote from their audience (such as it is); and outside a few great centers they are remote from one another. The American tends to con-

"The commission's findings are little short of sensational."

—Anthony Sampson, *New York Times*

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front the universe directly. As an artist, he gets little support from liturgical forms or from the songs and hymns that often provide patterns for Irish and British verse.

Robert Lowell, who influenced Heaney, was exceptional in his ties with the large community of the nation. He was exceptional for placing his family and friends in a historical frame even while he constantly employed landscape and animals to set humanity against the rest of nature. It may be significant that Lowell was at one time drawn to the Roman Catholic Church, for which mediation is far more important than it is for Protestantism.

Ammons deals with his world immediately. The macrocosm and microcosm of nature occupy his imagination, and he defines himself by his way of facing these ultimate challenges. In his engaging new collection he has some exquisite love poems and a couple of tender descriptions of old men trying to look after their frail wives. He also has an elegy on his own boyhood.

But as usual, nine-tenths of the poems invite us to stand with the speaker isolated in a landscape, sharply observing some particulars of the scene while responding with quasi-didactic reflections. The most densely populated of the poems is centered on a graveyard.

As if to make up for the lack of human agents, Ammons regularly personifies the features of landscape that hold his attention. Sometimes this habit can give sharpness to an image, as when a thawing brook "steps" down a ledge; and the effect is improved here because the lines themselves run over until the ledge, in a row of three slow beats, impedes the movement:

*the brook, the sky bright
for days, steps lightly
down ledge steps....*

But when the poet exchanges opinions with a mountain (as in "Continuing"), I balk.

Selfhood, for Ammons, means the establishment of healing continuities in the face of unpredictable, often withering disruptions. So it is restorative for him to notice how the elements of landscape survive and establish a new balance after destructive assaults. On such images of change, loss, and restoration he concentrates an attention sharpened by scientific training.

Ammons's handling of free verse evokes the process he celebrates. One characteristic of the normally short lines is what might be called radical enjambement, or the ending of lines after words that demand an object or complement—adjectives, prepositions, transitive verbs, conjunctions. Another peculiarity is the repetition of a few key words, often three times or more. In spite of the apparent freedom of form of the whole poem, Ammons generally returns at the end to an image prominent at the start, to which he then gives new depth; and the poem often turns formally on the movement from observation to reflection. The effect of the enjambments, the repetitions, and the circular form is to suggest the disruptions, continuities, and resolutions of the flow of our emotions. The short poems of Ammons have more power than the long, because he tends to neglect shape and point when he becomes discursive.

An invitation to misread the poetry is the surface of calm in Ammons's work. Strangers may suspect him of complacency. But like Stevens and Bishop—two

their poets obsessed with landscape—
 summons has only a slight hold on his
 hard-won moments of tranquillity. The
 leakiness of human life breaks out in
 phrases like "the many thoughts and /
 lights unmanageable, the deaths of so
 many, hungry or mad" ("Swells"). The
 same bleakness is elaborated in "Sunday
 at McDonald's," which opens with an
 outcry against the American addiction
 to living in a detached present:

*In the bleak land of foreverness no
 one lives but only, crushed and buf-
 feted,
 now: now, now, now every star
 glints
 perishing while now slides under
 and
 away, slippery as light, time-
 vapor....*

The underlying sadness rises to an-
 quish in "Easter Morning," the longest
 poem of the book. Here the lonely poet
 expresses his bitterness over the defor-
 mations produced in a child like himself
 by the imperviousness of adults who die
 before they can recognize and redeem
 their errors. Mourning for the person he
 might have been, the poet faces the
 graveyard in which are buried those
 people—teachers, relations, parents—
 who could have saved him from becom-
 ing a man more at ease with brooks and
 hills than with human society. The
 power of the poem springs from the
 central conceit of the isolated individual
 standing before the sociable dead.

But he does not see his crucifixion as
 unique:

*we all buy the bitter
 incompleteness, pick up the knots of
 horror, silently raving, and go on
 crashing into empty ends not
 completions, not rondures....*

In the last third of the poem, the
 theme of resurrection emerges, in the
 shape of two large birds seen flying
 together. When one veers from the
 straight way, the other notices and joins
 him. Then both return to the original
 route. The watcher admires their posses-
 sion of free patterns which they may
 companionably leave and return to, un-
 like the rigidity of his own development;
 and he admires the beauty of the
 "picture-book, letter-perfect" morning.

The theme of Mark Strand's seductive
 poetry—amply represented in his
Selected Poems—is the elusiveness of the
 self. We all assume by instinct that there
 exists in each of us a quintessential per-
 son separate from the physical appear-
 ance, separate from the clothes and ac-
 tions, the thoughts and feelings, separ-
 ate from one's history and expectations.

But how can we represent or even
 know this self when language can only
 render the visible, the tangible, the con-
 ceivable? Either we can try to strip away
 the externals or bring them into con-
 sciousness and so get beyond them. But
 the effort is defeated because the self we
 are defining changes during the process,
 and a new person displaces the old even
 while the old persists:

*I empty myself of the names of
 others. I empty my pockets.
 I empty my shoes and leave them
 beside the road.
 At night I turn back the clocks;
 I open the family album and look
 at myself as a boy.
 What good does it do? The hours
 have done their job.*

*Time tells me what I am. I change
 and I am the same.
 I empty myself of my life and my
 life remains.*

("The Remains")

Besides, the forces that change the
 self are not in one's control. They act
 mysteriously and capriciously. Espe-
 cially is this true of other people. We
 are one person when alone but some-
 body else in the company of a friend.
 The force extends to the conception a
 friend or wife has of oneself. We
 change according to what others think
 we are, and our knowledge of them as
 quintessential persons is qualified by
 their view of us. We resent the process of
 decomposition, yearn for the old person,
 are deluded by the conviction that the in-
 ner self has not altered, will not change.

*These wrinkles are nothing.
 These gray hairs are nothing.
 This stomach which sags
 with old food, these bruised
 and swollen ankles,
 my darkening brain,
 they are nothing.
 I am the same boy
 my mother used to kiss.*

("Not Dying")

The poet is the man who does not
 merely submit to these operations. He
 studies them, and his imagination delib-
 erately employs them to produce aesthetic
 forms of relationship, symmetrical ana-
 logues to the evolution of self from self,
 choreographies that will endure when
 the elusive performers are gone. In
 Strand's work what seem to be people are
 sometimes characters waiting for a poet
 to invent them. Or his people may create
 themselves by writing the story in which
 they will appear.

A self is the creation of one's memo-
 ries. But since these cannot be verified,
 a poet may imagine a past and challenge
 recollection to oppose it. Indeed, since
 all memory is partly invention, we are
 constantly remaking ourselves. Let spec-
 ulation move a step further, and we
 may say that to make up a story is to
 create a memory. Such paradoxes excite
 Strand's imagination in poems like
 "The Story of Our Lives" and "The
 Untelling" (both too long). He seems
 drawn to write parables of the act of
 literary composition.

In Strand's somewhat Proustian view
 of the human condition we are doomed
 to cling to evanescence. The world
 which the self loves decays as the self
 changes. The person yearns for an inti-
 macy which is unattainable because each
 lover alters in the presence of the other.
 To understand and describe another
 human being, we must not render him
 as an independent figure but as con-
 ceived by a friend or son or wife, and
 preferably as himself facing the process
 of decay. In a fine poem about his
 mother, Strand places her in a carefully
 imagined landscape at sunset and at-
 tributes to her the thoughts that make
 one human:

*And my mother will stare into the
 starlanes,
 the endless tunnels of nothing,
 and as she gazes,
 under the hour's spell,
 she will think how we yield each
 night
 to the soundless storms of decay
 that tear at the folding flesh,
 and she will not know
 why she is here
 or what she is prisoner of*

Poet Tries to Convince Us to Believe in Ourselves

SPHERE: THE FORM OF A MOTION. By A. R. Ammons. Norton. 79 pages. Cloth \$6.95, paper \$1.95.

From his place in the still center of poetry, A. R. Ammons sees everything. He waits for the evening star and the high swags of the blue spruce swaying. He watches as the "old mother, thin-white, thick-jawed, feels her way, but barefooted, out to the mailbox."

He reaches out to touch "the stragglers, the cheated, maimed, afflicted, the weak, disoriented, the sick, hurt, the castaways, the needful needless." He accepts the total diminishment of man down to the "last nervous atom."

Still, he experiences "joy's surviving radiance." Radiance is Ammons' touchstone for survival, the joy of recognition, the last hurrah for the nobility of the human being. He is alive to the "brief bloom in the eternal presence."

In "Sphere," Ammons tries to convince us to believe in ourselves: our own magnificent diversity. The poem is his vehicle for stating the relationship of the one to the many as the basic organizing principle in the world.

The strength of unity, he argues, and its only excuse for being, is in diversity.

"Sphere" is Ammons' 10th book and the first since "Collected Poems" won a National Book Award in 1973. In this major test of his

powers to sustain the imagination in a long poem, Ammons has asserted a mastery of a three-line form peculiarly his own. He explains himself:

*... this poem is an elongated cylinder
designed to probe feeling, recognition,
and realization,
to plunder the whoozies of the world
sensationally and cause
to come to bear what is and what may be:
and:
I angle for the self in you that can be
held, had in a thorough understanding:
not to persuade you,
enlighten you, not necessarily to delight
you, but to hold
you:*

Although the 155 sections of the poem represent a coherent progress always at work, Ammons does not rush things ("a waiting amusement is my study"); he is willing to stop along the way to play or to dream, and he never looks for the perfect or the final answer ("let it all mosey").

But though the form can be shown, other elements of the poem challenge description. There are its motions — journeys far out and in deep, downward and upward. There is the constant tension between general and particular, between spirit and matter. There is its inventiveness and wit. "Sphere" is complex and will have to be lived with before all its clarities are obvious.

What provides energy for the motions within

Ammons' sphere? The individual radically asserting his freedom and his differences within the miracle of unity. The poet makes us believe in this great diversity: "the abundance, the intricacy and dispersion, is glorious."

The SST, world alliances, hordes of unknown people and the universe itself argue that there are strength and value in bigness and in numbers. Ammons sees life differently:

*... but until
I get right enough to appreciate the lesser celan-
dine by the woodsroad, I have not achieved the
calm necessary to the joys of small riches, the
briar bud bending out into the path:*

"What could be more just," Ammons asks, "than that a united world take its power from and bring its power to the person?"

Not a religious traditionalist, Ammons is a believer. Can we, he asks, if we are small, "be great by going away from the Most High into our own/makings, thus despising what He has given: or can we, accepting/our smallness, bend to cherish the greatness that rolls through/our sharp days." And, he says, "to be saved is here, local and mortal: everything else is a glassworks of flight; a crystal/hankering after the unlikely."

"Sphere" is a kaleidoscope of ideas as Ammons frees his agile and interesting mind to wander over many subjects: the "plastic

rightness" too quickly found in life today; New York City writers; conventional religion; heroes; the dullness of weekends; and poetry itself. His range is inclusive, from the razor edge of his intellect to the hosannahs of exuberance and wit.

When we read Ammons it's like having a guide speak an altogether new but understandable language in an altogether new but familiar place.

"Sphere" is filled with pleasures, line by line. And there's even a bonus in the dedicatory poem to critic Harold Bloom, surely one of the loveliest and most touching poems in American literature.

In the last 25 years, Ammons has created a body of poetry which not only does not have any rivals today but which may permanently change the history of American poetry. Perhaps his voice will be among the few in our time which understood that we were in danger of losing our humanity and sought to halt the erosion of faith in ourselves.

At a time when political leadership has left us disillusioned, we might contemplate Shelley's words: "The most unfailing herald, companion and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution is poetry."

Ammons should be read in every household, pulpit and legislative gathering in the land.

—EMILY WILSON

'...In the Front Door'

By Russell Brantley

WFO News Bureau

"I waited, worked. Now, by heavens, I've come in the front door. That's what it's all about, maybe."

A. R. Ammons' parents, who had more pride than money, probably would have approved of their son's stiff-necked attitude toward recognition. "I'm very proud. Caught it from them."

Ammons is 48 and it is only in recent years that he has been recognized as a major voice in American poetry. Some critics say he is the most important poet in the country today. He won the National Book Award in 1973 for "Collected Poems: 1951-1971" and his new work "Sphere: The Form of a Motion" is attracting about as much attention as America accords a new book of poetry. The first poem he remembers writing was when he was a 10th grader in Eastern North Carolina. "It was about Pocahontas. I don't remember it well."

Ammons is taking a year off from an endowed professorship at Cornell University and is working with young poets at Wake Forest University, an institution he graduated from in 1949 when it was a college in the town of Wake Forest and he was a general science major wondering what to do with his life.

One of his own estimates is that "it seems to me I've spent much of my life trying to renounce the role of poet." On the surface at least. He went to Wake Forest with the idea of becoming a doctor. His first job after graduating was principal of the public school at Hatteras. There was an interlude in California when he did graduate work and began to work more seriously at his poetry. Then, almost as if to disclaim such pretensions, he went to work for a New Jersey company that manufactured biological and medical glassware. He was in charge of sales at the beginning and wound up executive vice president. Hardly the sort of background one expects for a man who writes:

"I do the ones I love no good: I hold their pain in my hands and toss it in moonlight."

Ammons was born on a 50-acre, half-wooded farm four miles from Whiteville. He first went to school at the New Hope Elementary School which was two miles from home and close by the New Hope Baptist Church. "By 10 or 11 I was ploughing the fields. We had tobacco, a strawberry patch, potatoes, things like that."

He also had the background for some of his early poems, including one titled "Silver" that was about a black mule "but I named her that because of 'Hi Yo, Silver.'"

When he was 18 he went in the Navy. On V-J Day he was on a destroyer escort in Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. "Everybody broke out the searchlights. The night air was needled and riddled with searchlights." Ammons said a paperback anthology of poetry he read while in the Pacific prompted him to begin writing. When he came back the GI Bill helped send him to Wake Forest.

"I was a sort of cipher. I worked in a grocery store 16 hours a week. No one in my family had been to college before."

He met a teacher at Wake Forest, Phyllis Plumbo. He took her Spanish course one semester. They were married in November, 1949, after he graduated.

"While I was at Wake Forest I stayed on the periphery of things, not close enough to get trapped by it." Not getting trapped, meaning not being put in the position of having to compromise his poetry, is a thing with Ammons.

"I never dreamed of being a poet. I think I always wanted to be an amateur poet. When you have something else to do to earn money, you can do just what the hell you want to with your poems. A poem should be autonomous, not an instrument to success."

In 1953—nine years after he started writing poetry—Ammons had two poems accepted by the Hudson Review. In 1955 he took \$480 of his own money and went to a vanity publisher who printed 100 copies. The book is titled "Om-

mateum," which is the Latin name for the compound eye of an insect. In five years 16 copies were sold. Ammons' father-in-law bought 50 copies and sent them to customers in South America and Ammons finally bought 30 copies from the publisher for \$9. He kept two and gave the rest to friends. The book is a collector's item now and probably would bring \$500 or more for a single copy.

The Ohio State University Press published "Expressions of Sea Level" in 1964. "It got a strong response. It was time. I had been sitting down in South Jersey all those years." That fall he went to Cornell as an instructor. Six years later he was an endowed professor but he is a peripheral member of the Establishment. He won't give public readings of his poetry. The idea unnerves him, although he could command fancy sums making public appearances. He doesn't wear ties and his clothing is nondescript except for a new Dobbs hat. He has been known to call Wordsworth "Mortimer Snerd" but he is exceptionally kind to the young poets who clamor for his time at Wake Forest.

His new book is a major work, "something I had been unconsciously working on for years. It's terribly ambitious and pretentious. You know how it is when there is a great deal of material at a committee meeting and somebody asks 'can you put that in the form of a motion?' That's what the second part of the title is about. You try to justify your pretensions." Did he think he did well with the new book?

"Yep, I think I did."

Scholars to Honor Poet

Two programs of lectures and readings "in celebration of the poetry of A. R. Ammons" will be held at Wake Forest University Tuesday.

The speakers will be Josephine Jacobsen, poet and honorary consultant to the Library of Congress, and Harold Bloom, literary critic and professor of the humanities at Yale University. The readings will be from Ammons' poetry.

Miss Jacobsen will speak at 4

p.m. and Bloom at 8:15 p.m., both in deTamble Auditorium. The programs are open to the public.

Ammons, whose "Collected Poems" won the 1973 National Book Award, is visiting professor of English at Wake Forest this year. He is Goldwin Smith professor of poetry at Cornell University.

Bloom is the author of eight books of literary criticism including "A Map of Misreading," which will be published next January, and

commentaries on Shelley, Blake, Yeats and other poets. He is William Clyde DeVane professor of the humanities at Yale.

Miss Jacobsen has published five books of poetry, the most recent (1974) "The Shade-Seller: New and Selected Poems," and is co-author of two books of criticism. She served two terms as poetry consultant to the Library of Congress and is currently serving as honorary consultant in American letters.

Ammons: A New Intimacy



Poet A.R. Ammons

A COAST OF TREES by A. R. Ammons, Norton. 52 pages. \$4.95/paperback. \$12.95/cloth.

A Coast of Trees is a deeply satisfying book. Nothing is more reassuring to me than to find again A. R. Ammons humming "the constant, universal assimilation." In it we rest from "the ragged and rapid pulse" of our own lives and the world's. This is Ammons' 16th book, after what must have seemed to him a slow start in 1955 when he published his first, *Ommateum*. But his rise to power is like that of the brook he celebrates in "Getting Through," which has "worked/out the prominences of/a bend so as to find/curvature's sliding/speed."

In this collection Ammons seems to have made his peace with the need to assert himself, to feel the full confidence of his calling, and to measure his slow time by the time of the brook, the stars, and the galaxies. It is a confidence that gives confidence and makes it easier to live our lives.

A Coast of Trees is as new and as old as the sunrise. There are familiar echoes of his earliest Ezra poems, written more than 30 years ago, but with a new resolve. In his 1950s poem, "So I Said I Am Ezra," the poet loses himself and his speech to the wind and the unremembered seas. In "Mountain Wind," from the most recent collection, the poet goes into the cancellations of the wind again, but there he discovers his "consequence."

*This celebration of
water and lust is not
my celebration but a speech*

the deep says and sends the wind through.

Ammons has learned to say to his muse, which is often the wind, not my will, but thine. He has long been a companion, in his mind ("which is, after all, where these things negotiably are"), of the summits and seas — so long that their instincts and his have merged into a security of belief.

All of the Ammonsian themes and images are in these new-old poems — time, reality, love, nature and human nature seen in the wind and the leaves and the light. And among these 37 poems, at least a half-dozen are incomparable. The single poem I find I'm always returning to is "Easter Morning," a place to begin. It is the place the poet himself begins again:

*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*

Ammons' home country is eastern North Carolina and his birthplace is Whiteville in Columbus County, but he has lived away from the South for more than 25 years. His career as a distinguished professor of poetry at Cornell University and his prestigious awards do not seem to have

BOOKS

From an Old Indifference

detached him from his roots. In "In Memoriam — Mae Noblitt" he writes:

*Our home which defines
us is elsewhere but not*

*so far away we have
forgotten it:*

Perhaps he is thinking not only of the finiteness of this life but of North Carolina as well.

The poem that I so much admire was inspired on a "picture-book, letter-perfect Easter morning." As usual, he has been for a walk ("Poverty" celebrates the simplicity of his life as he begins, "I'm walking home from what, a thousandth walk this year"). Perhaps on this Easter morning he woke early, troubled by the image that begins the poem.

*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 or 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*

The incompleteness of the life is a bitter fact for the poet to absorb, this poet who celebrates completions, rondsures, and fullness, but the bitterness is reconciled in nature, an abundance that asks nothing of him. During his morning walk he had seen two great birds, maybe eagles, veering and turning and circling back again. Their flight represented the exploration of his life, sacred, permanent, and fresh: "the having/patterns and routes, breaking/from them to explore other patterns or/better ways to routes, and then the/return."

"Easter Morning" is a return to the poet's beginnings, just as *A Coast of Trees* is another flight that explores and returns, "a sight of bountiful majesty and integrity."

A Coast of Trees is a continuation of the earlier Ammons collections, and to single out individual poems from it does no justice to the beauty so carefully at work in the whole. Still, readers might enjoy glimpses that will lead them into this new book.

The title poem is another expression of the poet's unwillingness to erect boundaries and willingness to avoid conclusions, an attitude present in many of his earlier poems, notably "Corsons Inlet" ("I allow myself eddies of meaning"). Recognizing that theories and denominations, like fences, shut out more than they take in, that names name only a portion, Ammons asks "how are we to find holiness."

(Ammons often plays with language for a time in

preparation for a straight-out statement of simple power, as he does so brilliantly in a long poem, "Pray Without Ceasing," in which, after long periods of inventions and diversion, he comes to the question: "can this day's/praising hold to the day it praises/down the slopes of total entropy:") The only answers that satisfy are those that abandon the absolute:

*having given up all mechanisms of
approach, having accepted a shambles of
non-enterprise, we know, a unity
approach divided, a composure past
sight: then, with nothing, we turn
to the cleared particular, not more
nor less than itself, and we realize
that whatever it is it is in the Way and
The Way in it, as in us, emptied full.*

As Ammons says in "Feel Like Traveling On," "by the empty take the full." In "Coast of Trees," that cleared particular, he asks us to sit down, be patient, and to discover, like Zen philosophers, the something that is nothing, the nothing that is something.

A lovely sequence of poems are about time, our nowness and the foreverness of stars and galaxies ("Continuing," "Rapids," and "Sunday at McDonald's"), and a sequence of poems about poetry and the poet's efforts to make a permanence. In "Traveling Shows," he concludes, "the real world/succeeds the made and./burnt out, shuts down." Still, there is reason to go on with the making, for "in debris we make a holding as/insubstantial and permanent as mirage," the conclusion of "Persistences."

Readers who already know and enjoy Ammons' poetry will not need me to convince them of the merits of *A Coast of Trees*; we love our favorite poets because they are ours. If I could interest any new readers or even non-readers in verse, I would take "Keepsake" from this new book by A. R. Ammons. In it, he acknowledges that betrayal of the brook, how it teases him with its shifts and spills. Ammons, this poet of human nature, knows that nature lacks the human element, love, greater than radiance. The poem begins with his recognition of nature's indifference and concludes

*but you, lover, prowled the world
to be found and, found, found me:*

*if you part your lips, the
shifts and spills in your
eyes will break me open: this
lost, I'm ualost and unbetrayed.*

The center of Ammons' poetry is our most sacred and determined humanity. In this recognition there is wisdom: in willows and wind he finds the grace to show us.

—EMILY WILSON

(An exhibit of watercolors by A.R. Ammons will open with a free public reception at 3 p.m. today at the guest house at Reynolda. Ammons is teaching a two-week poetry workshop at Reynolda.)

Ammons: Breathtaking Poet

New Volume Is Hymn to Perpetual Energy

Reprinted

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The National Observer

By LISEL MUELLER

...I don't know about you, but I'm sick of good poems, all those little roudures splendidly brought off, painted gourds on a shelf; give me the dumb, debilitated, nasty, and massive, if that's the alternative; touch the universe anywhere you touch it everywhere...

So writes A.R. Ammons in the course of his 69-page poem *Sphere, The Form of a Motion*, which is neither dumb, debilitated, nasty, nor massive. Ammons' impatience with the well-made poem and with collections that are miscellanies seems to be shared by quite a few poets, if we are to judge by the number of book-length poems or long sequences that have appeared in the past decade or so. While there have been a few narrative or epic poems sprinkled among them, current American poets tend to be most comfortable and successful with the sequence — with other words, with a series of poems built around a common theme. The sequence can accommodate narration and reflection, the personal and the general, description and sentiment — even, in some instances, interspersions of prose.

Two of the books reviewed here are sequences. Ammons', however, is not. His poem, like his subject, is continuous, unbroken, seamless. Its numbered sections and three-line stanzas are merely means of location; they overlap and run into each other like waterfall sections. The poem is a hymn to continuity and perpetual energy, to "motion as summary of time and place." It is also a discourse of the relationship between the supreme motion and the multiple lesser ones that reside within it, between the visible and the invisible, the one and the many, structure and flux, consciousness and absorption, timelessness and the moment.

(Ammons just completed a school year at Wake Forest University as a visiting professor of English.)

Ammons touches the universe anywhere and everywhere, finding the resolution of these seeming opposites in birds and plants, in scientific concepts, in his daily activities, in the human body, in the metamorphoses of poetry, even (at least potentially) in the relations between cultures. Whitman would have cheered this glorious vision of order, and he is in fact the poet Ammons acknowledges as his model. But if Ammons' vision of universal harmony is Whitmanesque, his manner is sometimes reminiscent of Pound. Like Pound, Ammons will suddenly puncture a stretch of prosy discursiveness with a burst of lyric bloom; like Pound, too, he mixes the philosophical and the personal and "interjects colloquialisms" into a fairly neutral diction. Significantly, as his poems progress, and Whitmanesque aspect gathers head, and the poem culminates in exuberant praise of "our Ferris Wheel, what a wheel: our roller-coaster, what mathematics of stoop and climb..."



A. R. AMMONS

... author of 69-page poem ...

Ammons' poem is breathless and breathtaking. There are no full-stops, only commas and colons. Technically it is one long, remarkable sentence — evolving, folding back on itself. It is *The Form of a Motion*.

☆☆☆

Robert Penn Warren's *Or Else, Poem/Poems 1964-1974* also deals with questions of time, but it is a more intimate book than Ammons'. Warren's concerns are less galactic and his affirmation is, as always, laced with the

knowledge of cruelty and tragedy. *Or Else* may well be his most beautiful and direct book of poems so far. The force of his personality and his technical control make for a heavenly marriage; he has cleared away the last obstacles between himself and the reader; he manages to be human and grand.

The unifying theme of these 100 pages of poetry involves questions on the nature of time, which in turn lead to the problem of how one's life is to be lived. Some of the strongest poems have to do with memory as a means of perception: "I am dreaming of a White Christmas," "Reading Late at Night, Thermometer Falling," and "There's a Grandfather Clock in the Hall" and involve remembrances of his parents and of himself in relation to them. Two long poems on Flaubert and Dreiser present the reader with the curious disparity between the outward life and the life of the imagination. Warren is a magician at switching gears — at ranging from a laconic, documentary tone all the way to an unashamedly impassioned one, from grudging to gorgeous language.

☆☆☆

William Meredith's *Hazard the Painter* is a small book, a sequence of 16 short poems about a fictional painter who, for two years, has been painting a suspended parachutist. He himself poses for the painting: jumping, harnessed and zipped, he is "...the human figure dangling safe, guyed to something silky, hanging here, full of half-remembered instruction/but falling, and safe." Hazard, then, is both model and artist. Just as in the poem he is both speaker and protagonist. The use of the persona creates distance; Hazard is not Meredith though their attitudes coincide.

Hazard the Painter is a series of reflections on the state of Man, and one man, in the year 1972, seen by way of Hazard's relations with family and friends, observations on walks and visits to museums, his work, his involvement in politics. Hazard is troubled about the decline of civilization in our time and place, the ever-hazier sense of purpose, the erosion of the kind of ceremony that implies care for other human beings. He is also witty: about McGovern stickers on VWs, about Yale girls who don't know the difference between lie and lay, about loud rock music. ("Will the decibels do structural harm/to the child's lovely ears, to the brick house, to the frail culture of Jefferson and Adams/Hazard and Franz Kline? They will do no good.") Meredith's language is open, simple, relaxed, lucid. The poem engages one's sympathies completely; it is, like its character, humane, patient, plucky, and essentially optimistic.

Sphere: The Form of a Motion. By A.R. Ammons. Norton. 79 pages. \$6.95 hardbound, \$1.95 paperback.

Or Else. By Robert Penn Warren. Random House. 102 pages. \$6.95.

Hazard the Painter. By William Meredith. Knopf. 31 pages. \$3.

W-3 Sentinel July 1973

Poem of Opposites Makes Book Work

It is a relatively easy thing to take a poem and read it as you would a piece of prose, without the line breaks. If the poet is putting you (and maybe himself) on, the poem won't be any worse for being read as a paragraph: The poet has merely chopped up some very good sentences and instantly made them about ten times harder to understand.

BUT, if the poem is good, and the poet knows what he's doing, that first trick won't really work. The lines end where they do because the poet had a distinct reason and logic for ending them the way he did.

By such a rude yardstick, A. R. Ammons' new book doesn't really measure up. In fact, reading it, one gets the idea about halfway through that everything is just a little too comfortable, just a bit past unassuming. I don't think Ammons should be accused of not caring about his poems — although he does tend to let a few of them stray out into the adverse winds of criticism just a bit underdressed for the weather. Rather, I think his principal problem is that he can't find his way through the intricacies of small poems the way he can so well with longer ones; he is writing chopped sentences and half-thoughts disguised as poems.

It's ironic, where it isn't just inappropriate, that Ammons can't write good short poems the way he can create a long work better than almost anyone writing in English. But there it is, and crying about it won't make it go away.

Most all of the poems in this book are short ones. One is only one line long. Some of them work as sort of off-the-wall thoughts grabbed while they are hot and stuck fresh to the page. Others are either too long or too short on meaning to make sense. Ammons is the only poet I can think of that habitually writes about plain things such as rocks and trees and birds but makes the reader end up feeling as if he had fallen into a metaphysical swamp.

Like a visiting relative who has taken up magic as a hobby, Ammons bores us with his little parlor tricks. We see the strings on the floating lady; something is done so quickly, or clumsily, that we cannot understand it. But then the magician pulls out the trick that he has been saving up for last, the one he's been down

in the basement practicing for weeks and not even showing to his wife. And we're amazed, struck dumb. How did he do that?

The last poem in Ammons' book, "Pray Without Ceasing," is the rabbit-out-of-the-hat, saw-the-lady-in-half and the Hindu rope trick all in one.

It floats effortlessly, not carelessly, from subject to subject, one thing reminding the poet of another through 18 pages of digressions that all come 'round to the same thing in the end:

*to those busy making themselves
great, with grave music and
solemn looks, a thorough using up and
setting forth of language's materials,
I send
empty statement, slip-shoddiness,
incredible breeziness and such:
the wind we go to
understands everything:
I sing, though, in a way, the best I can,
for I may be understood
where I do not understand.*

Later, near the end, he makes his purpose as plain as it will allow:

*The motions
by which
I move
manifest
merely a deeper congruence
where the structures are.*

This is a poem of opposites, where instructions from a coin-operated washing machine can be turned on the poet's lathe until they become a slightly hilarious sex manual. Ammons, when he aims high enough, can truly write the cosmos into his poems, paradoxically, by never failing to make room for the small details. Intimations of immortality coexist amicably with pleas to "Mixmaster, mixmaster, mast me a mix, ur . . ."

It is a poetic world of clashing forces, of mysteries unresolved and paradoxes celebrated, where, "if change is certain, as say so many, / certainty is where there isn't any," where "spirit, though / it encompasseth mightiness, etc., however, / cannot, like a motor, / raise and lower / toast."

(Ammons, winner of the National Book Award for poetry in 1973, was writer-in-residence at Wake Forest University last year.)

1-12-76
W-S Sentinel MALCOLM JONES

'Poetry...Covers Everything'

To. 9/4/77

The Snow Poems. By A.R. Ammons. Norton. 292 pages. \$12.50.

In *THE SNOW POEMS*, A.R. Ammons marvels at "the Paramount poet/ how nature narrowed/ through him without/ loss of breadth." Science has expanded the scope of nature light-years since the time of Wordsworth.

The nature of which Ammons writes incorporates not only lakes and trees and clouds but whole galaxies, "a crazy universe here/ here, here for thousands, even millions/ of years, going on with purposes, if/ any, not ours." Ammons' nature has also moved inward:

finds revelation even "on



A.R. AMMONS

the stool./ door and butt cracked," considering the

workings of his own body.

One of the chief delights of Ammons' poetry is his capacity to leap from micro to macro, from molecular to stellar. He pushes our vision, in an instant, to reaches farther than we thought possible.

Ammons does not "care for plain simple things/ with straightforward fences round them." He is a poet dealing with "muddlement," with "a single speaking of multiple clarities."

The Snow Poems are immanently muddled.

The collection resembles a poetic journal. References to

time and current events place the poems, apparently in chronological order, between October, 1975, and May, 1976, making this a remarkably lengthy collection for such a short time. The poems have an extemporaneous feel. They are among the most loosely structured and informal of Ammons' poems.

In *The Snow Poems*, We find the poet not only "on the stool" but rooting cactus plants, celebrating holidays, getting indigestion, and writing poetry. We know when the writing does not come easy, we sense the poet's self-conscious moments, and we feel his changing moods. We see ideas flow from one poem to another and we watch their development.

There are recurring characters: the pheasants in the yard, the elm outside the window, a nearby brook, and, predominantly, the weather. Ammons uses descriptions of the day's weather to set the tone for some poems. In others a change in the weather anticipates the direction a poem will take. Precipitation, cloud coverage, and temperature serve as symbol and metaphor.

Weather is surely an incomparable device for Ammons concerns here. Weather moves easily from micro to macro: it involves the intricacies of a single snowflake and the movements of a planet through space. "happy variabilities day to day/ winding around deep variabilities of season."

Weather is flux, and flux is the center of Ammons' universe and his poetry:

most anything stopped, falls
is the world's glue
holding together
but time eventually undercuts
the whole thing

it is so lovely, the world,
so full of change and death.

Ammons shows us many worlds as we move with him through time and change. We believe him when he tells us that he knows

only one
thing to talk
about (poetry)
and that
covers everything.

—RICK MASHBURN

Journal Book 2



A. R. Ammons: Probing the unknowable

To 'Stir Reality a Touch Away'

WORLDLY HOPES. By A. R. Ammons. Norton. 51 pages. \$5.95/paper.

If this volume is a bit disappointing that is only because it does not come up to the lyricism and humanity of *A Coast of Trees* (1981), the light-handed profundity of *The Snow Poems* (1977), the unfailing power to astonish of *The Selected Poems 1951-1971* (1977), or the rambunctious philosophizing of *Sphere: The Form of a Motion* (1974).

Ammons has long been able to draw down a glittering, intricate web out of what seemed (before he got started) to be thin air, nothing or next to it: the unspeakable, unknowable that he is always nudging the limits of, probing, investigating. Often his talk is at the edges of saying. He respects the recalcitrant core of reality that will not give up its secrets.

He does not try to capture truth but to liberate it, let it wing its bright complexities round and through his words. He detests reduction of any kind: definition, boundary, termination. He celebrates freedom — of mind, possibility, nothingness ("the shining image of nothingness within which/ schools of images can swim contained and askelter" — *Sphere*).

Reading Ammons gives the brain an extra shot of oxygen. Not that we can always penetrate his meanings; he leaves perplexity enough to make us work through to the "deep clear" ("Scribbles," *Worldly Hopes*). The poem, after all, is not there to describe but to "stir reality a touch away." (*Snow Poems*).

His favorite metaphor for poem and poetic imagination is the brook: sinuous, beautiful, and with "sparkles plenty" (*Coast of Trees*). The main thing is its winding, meeting every rock and bend in thought with the right pause and glide. Motion is at the center of his thinking; he knows if we stop flow to get something straight,

pinned down, truth has already fled. He calls his writing "very/ like the water here/ uncapturable and vanishing" ("Classic" in *The Selected Poems*).

Some poems we may have to read many times to catch onto the saliences, because we are so caught up in the flow. Perhaps our primary delight with Ammons is his ability to sustain the winding and to ride us along on the back of this looped-out energy.

Most of the poems in the new volume are small in scope, purpose, motion; they have few lines, single windings. (In "Progress Report" he tells us: "Now I'm/ into things/ so small/ when I/ say boo/ I disappear.") Look at "Spruce Woods":

*It's so still
today that a
dipping bough means
a squirrel
has gone through.*

And "Immoderation":

*If something is too
big, enlarging it
may correct:*

*a skinny thing
acquires great force
pushed next to nothing.*

And "Snow Roost":

Last night the fluffiest inhabitant

*filled the
cedars deep, but this clear
morning windy,
flurries blizzard-thick
explode flight into local blindings*

And "Vines":

*In late August scarlet
fire breaks
out in the spruce top,
a flame flamelike
in disposition but
coal-still
to glow but then,
the spruce holding green, October comes
and frost flakes fire
off the skinny
highwires of arising.*

The brook has thinned to a trickle. We just get started, are set for his windings and unbelievable manipulations of sound, motion, sight, insight; and before we know it, he's done, content with the single turn.

I like many of these poems; language is superbly wrought, observations of nature are precise and compelling; the unexpected, unseen, and unnameable are still at work.

Yet compared with his other recent poems, these seem one-dimensional, fairly easy to capture; motion and energy are cut short. Is it that the brook is in a dry season? Or is it being niggardly with its spill, saving back flow so next time it can dazzle us again with white-water radiance?

Or has the poet given up the notion

of holding "the unnamed nameless back" (*Snow Poems*) and this time, instead of talking his way through, letting the nameless speak back to poem, create white space around it, float it, show it for what it (and for that matter, any life) is — small, really only a tiny intrusion in the universe?

Or is it all merely experiment, the need to see how much can be got into a small space (or how little and still be poem)?

I'm not sure what he is up to. I do know that as splendid as some of these poems are ("The Role of Society in the Artist" and "Scribbles" are among his finest), I still can't shake the feeling that as a whole the collection has too many flicks of the wrist, easy gleamings for a poet of Ammons' stature.

Yet perhaps he would answer that the slight has its uses too — white pebble in a brook, drop of rain on a holly leaf, ice-cased twig. Each has its own radiance (can make the difference, so much is slight when taken each by each). And he may remind us that the best things do not have to be the most difficult; they may just come, and there's no stopping them or trying to draw them out. He knows he can still tease more beauty out of the language in an hour than most poets can in a week. Or he may tell us he's just getting things into balance. He had to make some little things to go alongside his big ones.

— BECKY GIBSON
Journal Book Reviewer

WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

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BOOKS

Wide, Wide World of Books

'Ammons' poem is breathless and breath-taking—one long, remarkable sentence, evolving, folding back on itself.'

Our Poets Deal With One Thing At a Time

By Lisel Mueller

... I don't know about you, but I'm sick of good poems, all those little rondures splendidly brought off, pointed gourds on a shelf; give me the dumb, debilitated, nasty, and massive, if that's the alternative; touch the universe anywhere you touch it everywhere . . .

SO WRITES A. R. AMMONS in the course of his 60-page poem *Sphere, The Form of a Motion*, which is neither dumb, debilitated, nasty, nor massive. Ammons' impatience with the well-made poem and with collections that are miscellanies seems to be shared by quite a few poets, if we are to judge by the number of book-length poems or long sequences that have appeared in the past decade or so. While there have been a few narrative or epic poems sprinkled among them, current American poets tend to be most comfortable and successful with the sequence—in other words, with a series of poems built around a common theme. The sequence can accommodate narration and reflection, the personal and the general, description and sentiment—even, in some instances, interspersions of prose.

Two of the books reviewed here are sequences. Ammons', however, is not. His poem, like his subject, is continuous, unbroken, seamless. Its numbered sections and three-line stanzas are merely means of location; they overlap and run into each other like waterfall sections. The poem is a hymn to continuity and perpetual energy, to "motion as summary of time and place." It is also a discourse on the relationship between the supreme motion and the multiple lesser ones that reside within it, between the visible and the invisible, the one and the many, structure and flux, consciousness and absorption, timelessness and the moment.

Ammons touches the universe anywhere and everywhere, finding the resolution of these seeming opposites in birds and plants, in scientific concepts, in his daily activities, in the human body, in the metamorphoses of poetry, even (at least potentially) in the relations between cultures. Whitman would have cheered this glorious vision of order, and he is in fact the poet Ammons acknowledges as his model. But if Ammons' vision of universal harmony is Whitmanesque, his manner is sometimes reminiscent of Pound. Like Pound, Ammons will suddenly puncture his stretched prose with a burst of lyric bloom; like Pound, too, he mixes the philosophical and the personal and interjects colloquialisms into a fairly neutral diction. Significantly, as his poem progresses, the Whitmanesque aspect gathers head, and the poem culminates in exuberant praise of "our Ferris wheel, what a wheel; our roller-coaster, what mathematics of stoop and climb . . ."

Ammons' poem is breathless and breath-taking. There are no full stops, only commas and colons. Technically it is one long, remarkable sentence—evolving, folding back on itself. It is *The Form of a Motion*.

Robert Penn Warren's *Or Else, Poems 1949-1974* also deals with

Time for Poetry

This page is devoted to reviews of some recent books of poetry. Regular book features, including the Point of Departure column, will resume next week.

questions of time, but it is a more intimate book than Ammons'. Warren's concerns are less galactic, and his affirmation is, as always, laced with the knowledge of cruelty and tragedy. *Or Else* may well be his most beautiful and direct book of poems so far. The force of his personality and his technical control make for a heavenly marriage; he has cleared away the last obstacles between himself and the reader; he manages to be human and grand.

The unifying theme of these 100 pages of poetry involves questions on the nature of time, which in turn lead to the problem of how one's life is to be lived. Some of the strongest poems have to do with memory as a means of perception: "I am Dreaming of a White Christmas," "Reading Late at Night, Thermometer Falling," and "There's a Grandfather Clock in the Hall" all involve remembrances of his parents and of himself in relation to them. Two long poems on Flaubert and Dreiser present the reader with the curious disparity between the outward life and the life of the imagination. Warren is a magician at switching gears—at ranging from a laconic, documentary tone all the way to an unashamedly impassioned one, from grudging to gorgeous language.

William Meredith's *Hazard the Painter* is a small book, a sequence of 16 short poems about a fictional painter who, for two years, has been painting a suspended parachutist. He himself poses for the painting; jumping, harnessed and sipped, he is "the human figure dangling safe, /guyed to something silky, hanging here, /full of half-remembered instruction /but falling, and safe." *Hazard*, then, is both model and artist, just as in the poem he is both speaker and protagonist. The use of the persona creates distance; *Hazard* is not Meredith, though their attitudes coincide.

Hazard the Painter is a series of reflections on the state of Man, and one man, in the year 1972, seen by way of Hazard's relations with family and friends, observations on walks and visits to museums, his work, his involvement in politics. Hazard is troubled about the decline of civilization in our time and place, the ever-hazier sense of purpose, the erosion of the kind of ceremony that implies care for other human beings. He is also witty: about McGovern stickers on VWs, about Yale girls who don't know the difference between *he* and *lay*, about loud rock music, ("Will the decibels do structural harm to the child's lovely ears, to the brick house, to the frail culture of Jefferson and Adams, / Hazard and Franz Kline? They will do no good.") Meredith's language is open, simple, relaxed, lucid. The poem engages one's sympathies completely; it is, like its character, humane, patient, plucky, and essentially optimistic.

[*Sphere: The Form of a Motion*, by A. R. Ammons. Norton, 70 pages. \$9.95 hardbound, \$1.95 paperbound.]

[*Or Else*, by Robert Penn Warren. Random House, 102 pages, \$6.95.]

[*Hazard the Painter*, by William Meredith. Knopf, 31 pages, \$5.]



Ammons

'Spend the Winter' With Ammons' Poems

W. S. Leut 1/16/78

"The Snow Poems" is a collection of 119 "passages" which chronicle the turn of the year 1976, Ammons' 50th. His half-century is celebrated with "birthday cake, promises of presents, a wheelbarrow (red, rained on) and stereo." But the best present is the one Ammons gives. The dedication of the book reads "for my country," and I know of no finer tribute to America in its bicentennial year than these good poems.

When a reviewer enjoys a book, the best she can do for everyone concerned, including the poet, is to say so. I have enjoyed the snow poems for the past three months, and the pleasure continues.

In these passages, each one titled by the first line, Ammons withdraws from the world into himself. Becoming 50 is an occasion for experiencing again his father's death years before ("when a father dies the sky comes unloped from the stars") and for looking at both sides of the moment, at life and at death. Ammons' reach stretches the reader's interest and constricted notions of what is properly "poetry." He is playful and somber, joyful and despairing — scientific, hip, country, philosophic, talkative and silent. He is not afraid that critics will accuse him of "infantile regressions" when he says "egad, gasso, glorybe." He is not even afraid that he will bore us and that we will turn on the television before he's through. He confesses all of his faults, sees them better than any critic. But he asks us to come along, to stay with him in the daily exercise of his mind and imagination, to experience the meaner, trashier side of life and of ourselves, to sit idle and useless ("so much sun I sat with the jade plant half an hour") and to be with him when the poem reveals itself. From the opening "words of comfort, a railing before the fray," to the last word, "we(I) come," Ammons writes with the assurance of one who believes in himself.

Ammons has earned the right to his confidence — not so much by publishing a dozen books and winning prestigious literary prizes as by 25 years of hard work. He is a poet, doing what he knows how to do. "I try," he tells us, "to give the word life." "I write for those who have no comfort now and will never have any." "I am writing of what has to be but did not become." "I bring you no harm but I bring you nothing." For Ammons, as for Wallace Stevens, it is the "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is."

There are many fine single passages in the collection ("One must Recall as One Recalls the Dead," "Light Falls Shadow and Beam through the Limbo" and "When One Is a Child One Lives") are some of my favorites. There are many truly realized moments when Ammons' mind is on the edge of discovery and he "gets the poetry just the way it happens." And there is the important promise of future work, Ammons limbering up for another decade of verse writing, carefully studying language for its new and radical uses.

Ammons describes his process: "I make things and abandon them for you." "Abandon" suggests Ammons' view of the modern world as a dump heap where he finds waste, trash, "beauty's unbelievable contrary"; in a recent long poem, "Pray Without Ceasing," he explores "the cool edges of junkyards" to find songlore and, not wishing to make "high-lying

THE SNOW POEMS. By A. R. Ammons. W. W. Norton and Co., Inc. 292 pages. \$12.50.

writing" which goes "unread wasted on ridges and peaks" ("Call me down from the high places," he asks in "Pray Without Ceasing"). becomes the gleaner, the scavenger. The modern poet still searches for beauty and truth. But they come in unlikely forms. Thus poetry for Ammons is "the smallest trickle trinket," which we must learn to trust.

In Ammons' total work, "The Snow Poems," I think, will come to occupy an important place. In his earlier nine books, he has written more singularly beautiful and memorable lyrics than a reader has the right to expect of a poet. Then, in his long abstract poem "Sphere," published in 1975 and honored with the prestigious Bollingen Prize, Ammons achieved his most ambitious statement of unity and community. The poet's need for obscurity was confused by the critics' need to interpret the "meaning" of "Sphere"; Ammons may have been annoyed by their trying to turn his poem into a plain, simple thing, or perhaps he felt society closing in on him (in 1973 he had described himself as "solitary").

At any rate, in the summer of 1975 he wrote a long, complaining poem about intrusions called "Summerplace," and recently published in "Hudson Review." All that behind him, he returned from his North Carolina homecoming in 1974-75 to immerse himself in the Ithaca winter and the solitude of writing his daily passages. "The Snow Poems" records the agile turnings of a lively mind. And it is filled with the hardest, brightest love.

Here is one of my favorite passages. Let it be your invitation to spend a winter with A. R. Ammons, deep in snow country, where he has at last found a comfortable home:

*I turn to the word and it brings me
anything:
I no longer go to look about in the world:
I have become so lonely
that only the word
is free enough and large enough to take
my
mind off
the world going day
by day over the brink
used up but unused:
how thankful I feel
bent gutless
over the vomited void
To have at least the word
going anywhere fetching anything
pretty soon it may have
brought so much
it will not need to go off again
and then the word will
draw me up about it*

— EMILY HERRING WILSON

(Emily Herring Wilson of Winston-Salem is a poet and founder of the Jackpine Press. Her review is reprinted from the Autumn, 1977, issue of the Wake Forest Magazine.)

Phyllis Ammons: Wizard in the Kitchen

By Beth Tartan

Journal Home Economist

People on the Wake Forest University campus who know a lot about an art form called poetry have felt fortunate at having Archie Ammons, a first rate poet, on campus this year.

People there who know a lot about another art form called cooking have been just as pleased to benefit from the culinary talents of his wife, Phyllis. This, mind you, is on a campus where the Wake Forest uncheon group performs quietly but spectacularly in the kitchen.

Mrs. Ammons is soft-spoken and modest about her achievements in the kitchen. In talking with her, you get the idea that she prepares food because she grew up in a home where it was a matter of routine. She said her mother was a wizard in the kitchen. Another reason is she and her

family like good food.

Mrs. Ammons prepares veal piccata, an old favorite, by pounding slices of veal cutlet to about $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in thickness. Coat in seasoned flour; brown on both sides in a mixture of butter and olive oil. Remove from pan. Deglaze pan with lemon juice or perhaps with a little water. Pour lemon juice mixture over meat and serve. With the veal piccata, she likes risotto and asparagus sprinkled with grated parmesan cheese.

Her cooking skills seem to cover all categories including baking. Her braided Swedish Egg Bread looks like a dough sculpture and almost has to be touched to determine if it is ceramic or bread.

The bread has a texture similar to that of brioche and a taste that brought raves. Begin the bread early in the day or up to four days before baking. This is the recipe.

SWEDISH EGG BREAD

- 1 cup milk, scalded
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) butter
- 1 teaspoon salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon cardamom, optional
- 1 package dry granular yeast
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup warm water
- 3 eggs, slightly beaten
- 5 cups unsifted all-purpose unbleached flour
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 tablespoon water

Pour hot milk over butter, sugar, salt and cardamom and cool until lukewarm. Dissolve yeast in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water — warm water for dry yeast, lukewarm for compressed yeast. Blend in lukewarm milk mixture and then beaten eggs.

Gradually stir in flour to make a medium-soft dough. Cover and let rise in a warm place until it begins to puff up, about 30 to 40 minutes. Punch down, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for two to three hours. Punch down again.

Turn out on lightly floured board and knead until smooth, about one minute. Wrap dough in plastic bag and refrigerate for at least four hours or longer. You may need to punch down dough every day if you refrigerate it for the full time.

When ready to shape dough, turn out on

slightly lightly floured board and divide into two pieces, one slightly larger than the other or in the proportion of about two-fifths and three-fifths.

Beginning with the larger piece, divide it into thirds and roll each piece of dough between hands to make strands about 14 inches long. Braid the three strands, pinch ends together and tuck under loaf on a buttered baking sheet.

Repeat with the other piece of dough, cutting into thirds, rolling and braiding. Place smaller braid on top of large braid and press down slightly. Cover and let rise until almost double in size, about 90 minutes.

Brush carefully with mixture of beaten egg yolk and water. Bake on the middle rack in a preheated 350 degree oven for about 45 minutes or until tester comes out clean. If desired, apply additional glaze. Cool on rack. Cardamom may be omitted and bread sprinkled with sesame seeds before baking if desired.

Other of her favorites are Tomato, Pepper and Onion Salad, a salad of oranges and onions and eggs, spinach pie, eggplant casserole, Forgotten Torte with Strawberries and a roll like a chocolate jelly roll, filled with whipped cream and apricot jam. She has shared all of these recipes, which I will be sharing with you.



Phyllis Ammons and son Archie, June 8, 1975

'I couldn't wait to say the word'

From time to time *The Book Review* has invited both new and established writers to comment on various aspects of their craft: their imaginative and autobiographical sources, their practices of composition, the origin of their sense of vocation. These essays are intended to provide a forum for writers to consider the rewards and perils of their craft.

By A. R. AMMONS

I WAS born and raised on a small farm four miles out in the country from Whiteville, N.C. I was born at home, the nearest hospitals being fairly long journeys away in those days. Three sisters, two surviving, had been born before me, and two brothers, one dying at 18 months and the other at birth, were born after me. The sister who died before I was born had lived for two weeks.

I was nearly 4 years old when the Crash came. I have memories of some bright times before the Crash, and later I found old manila envelopes containing records of money we had once had in the bank. But a strict change occurred that was deepened and made permanent by the death of my brother in May 1930. I have images of him lying in his cradle covered with a veil, and I saw his coffin being made, and I watched as he was taken away, his coffin astraddle the open rumble seat of a Model A. I see my mother leaning against the porch between the huge blue hydrangeas as she wept and prayed.

The surviving son, I must have felt guilty for living and also endangered, as the only one left to be next. Mourning the loss of life, in life and in death, has been the undercurrent of much of my verse and accounts for a tone of constraint that my attempts at wit, prolixity and transcendence merely underscore.

The Depression in the South was bleak. There was no money. There were no coins. We traded chickens and eggs in town for salt, sugar, baking powder, fatback. Cars were beached on wooden blocks, and the tires were transferred to mule- or horse-drawn carts called Hoover carts. The unpaved roads in my community bore the patterns of unsteady tire tracks. I can almost hear now the sizzle of the tires in sand.

In 1932 I took first grade with Miss Minnie Heaney at the New Hope Elementary School, a wooden structure that stood beside the old New Hope Baptist Church. There were seven grades, seven rooms, each with its wood stove. My sisters and I walked two miles each way to school, my oldest sister's last year in elementary school my first. One game first graders played was fishing for words. The children sat in a tight circle, word cards turned blank side up on the floor, and each student reached in and "caught" a word, which he had to pronounce

A. R. Ammons, the poet, has taught at Cornell University for 30 years. He won the National Book Award for poetry in 1973 and the Bollingen Prize in 1974-75; in 1981 he was named a MacArthur Foundation Prize Fellow. His most recent book, "A Coast of Trees," was given the 1981 National Book Critics Circle award.



A. R. Ammons.

when he turned the card over. I remember being slapped on the hand and scolded because I couldn't wait to say the word if anyone faltered.

In the second grade, I was the center one day of a good deal of energy and attention on the way home from school. A jealous cousin of mine questioned whether I had actually written the letters of the alphabet on my paper or whether an older person had done them for me. This imputation angered one of my sisters and caused a fury of mutual accusation. I have been impressed with controversy ever since and have avoided it whenever possible.

The only book we had at home was the Bible, and it was almost never touched because it held important documents of births, marriages, deaths — and mortgages and promissory notes. I heard plenty of words at Sunday school and preaching, and I heard the hymns whose words merely went with tunes, but now, as I look back, I see that I heard the meaning of the words, too, because they are the content of my own poems. "Oh, they tell me of a home far beyond the skies" — etc.

In the fifth grade one day, Miss Viola Smith offered an apple to the first pupil who could memorize "In Flander's Field". Ten minutes later, I stood before the class and recited the poem perfectly, and I still can recite it. That year the students drew names for Christmas gifts. I got Daisy Seller's name and knew I couldn't get her a present. But by Christmas, I had a nickel and bought her a candy bar, a "Powerhouse" I think. She cried. Humiliation can find a lot of definition in a single instance.

I was the valedictorian of the small class in seventh grade and delivered a speech in the auditorium. I had scored at the 10th-grade level on the test given at the end of that year. What had happened

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Continued from Page 13

was Miss Mabel White, later Mrs. Powell, a marvelous teacher. Eighth grade began high school, and we were bused to Whiteville for that. I wrote an essay on miniature cows farmers were trying to breed, and Miss Ruth Baldwin, another splendid teacher, told everyone about it, even seniors. I was elected editor of the school paper, but it — perhaps consequently — never came out.

In 10th grade, I wrote a poem on Pocahontas, and in the Navy at the age of 18, whisked away to the South Pacific, I began to write poems in a log I kept. After the war in 1946, I enrolled on the G.I. Bill at Wake Forest College, where the following year I met Phyllis Plumbo, whom I later married. Phyllis moved away for a couple of years but our correspondence included poems to each other, an exchange that deepened the life in words for me. I could I think show a retrospective track of incidents that might have produced me as an artist, preacher, singer, doctor, mycologist, etc., but the string of events I've listed brought me in 1955 to publish through a vanity press my first book of poems, "Ommateum," and led nine years later to the appearance of my first accepted book, "Expressions of Sea Level," which was published by Ohio State University Press. Nineteen years elapsed between the time I began to write continually in the South Pacific and the appearance of the Ohio book. They were years of working alone, while working at something else for a living, years in which I received little acceptance or encouragement. But I take no credit for the persistence. Writing poetry is what I did. I had no place else to turn. ■

Ammons's 'Sphere' Wins Bollingen Poetry Prize

Special to The New York Times

NEW HAVEN, Jan. 7—The Bollingen Prize in Poetry of the Yale University Library has been awarded to A. R. Ammons, a 48-year-old professor of English at Cornell University.

The biennial award to "the American poet whose work . . . represents the highest achievement in the field of American poetry during the preceding two-year period" was given to the poet for his most recent book, "Sphere: The Form of a Motion."

In its award to 'Sphere,' the citation reads, "the Bollingen Committee recognizes the plenitude of the poem, the universality of its theme, its joyful emersion in the world it celebrates: 'It is a matter of learning how to move with/balance among forces greater than your own.'"

Poets Among Judges

Mr. Ammons was chosen for the award, which carries a stipend of \$5,000, by a committee consisting of Peter Davison, director of the Atlantic Monthly Press, and Stanley Koehler and James Tate, both of the English department at the University of Massachusetts. Both Mr. Davison and Mr. Tate are previous winners of the Yale Younger Poets Award.

The Bollingen Prize, which is now endowed by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, has gone in the past to such poets as Wallace Stevens, Archibald MacLeish, W. H. Auden, E. E. Cummings, Robert Frost and Robert Penn Warren. Archie Randolph Ammons is the 25th recipient of the award.

The poet, who until 10 years ago was an executive with a New Jersey glass-equipment manufacturing company, is on leave of absence from Cornell and is

teaching at his alma mater, Wake Forest University.

Reached by telephone there this afternoon, he cited as the most important influences on his poetry "the Old Testament," "Browning's Monologues," Whitman, Dickinson, Emerson, and Coleridge. "That's where I think I come from," he commented. "All this other contemporary stuff doesn't mean anything to me. It's poetry that doesn't go anywhere, just up and down and round and round."

Respect for Rights

In "Sphere," Mr. Ammons said, he was trying to explicate a state in which the rights of both nations and individuals would be respected, "to come to a whole state of consciousness that will at once maintain its wholeness and not surrender the individual."

In what one reviewer called "perhaps the best passage in 'Sphere'" — and the poet said this afternoon that he "would not necessarily disagree" — Mr. Ammons wrote:

I want to be declared a natural disaster area . . . I want to be the aspect above which every hope rises, a freshening of courage to millions . . . I want to be the shambles, the dump, the hills of gook the bulldozer shoves, so gulls in carrion-gatherings can fan my smouldering, so in the laciest flake of rust I can witness my consequence and times, I want to be named the area where charlatan rationality comes to warp, where the smooth finishes bubble and perk, where aerosol deodorants lose their breath: where the freeze of this century retreats, leave me the slow boulders and smashed pebbles . . . where the wind and come among the grasses and weeds, robins nest in high wheels under the whole look of heaven

	ports. 853357	The Hard Truth (1994) ★★ Eric Roberts, Michael Rooker. Crime partners double-cross ex-policeman. 853357	Carnosaur (3:15) (1993) ★★ Diane Ladd, Raphael Sbarge. Hand Gun (4:40) (1994) ★★ Treat Williams, Seymour Cassel. Paul Schutze. 881785	The Mambo Kings (4:15) (1992) ★★ Armand Assante, Antonio Banderas, Cathy Moriarty. 18965286	The Big Sleep (5:05) (1946) ★★ Humphrey Bogart. 11228883
MAX SHOW	Warlock: The Armageddon (11:35) (1993) ★ 18664956	Secret Games 2: The Escort (1:15) (1993) ★ Martin Hewitt, Marie Perle, Ann Rochelle. 19072951	Firepower (2:40) (1993) ★ Chad McQueen, Gary Daniels, Joseph Ruskin. 11253203	Enemy Gold (1994) ★ Bruce Penhall, Mark Barere. Suspended federal agents seek long-lost loot. 9444086	

A.R. AMMONS: UNC-TV will present documentary on poet tonight

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Easter Morning: A.R. Ammons and His Poems, a black-and-white documentary, will be televised at 11 p.m. today on UNC-TV. The showing is part of the *North Carolina Visions* series.

The 11-minute video, made by Joanna Hudson of Asheboro, follows poet A.R. Ammons to the primal places in North Carolina that appear in his poems. The production of the film has several Winston-Salem connections.

Ammons, a poetry professor at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., is a native of North Carolina. His 22nd book, *The North Carolina Poems* (edited by Alex Albright, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press), was published in 1994.

Ammons was the poet-in-residence at Wake Forest University in 1974-75.

Last spring, he gave a poetry reading at Wake Forest during a symposium about his work, where Hudson filmed him.

Also in the film, she pictures family photographs and places where the poet spent his early years, mostly around Whiteville. Photographs of Ammons now and as a child, and photographs of family graves in New Hope churchyard also appear in the video.

The soundtrack presents music, sound effects from nature and Ammons reading his poem "Easter Morning." The music

features Clifton Matthews, a pianist and faculty member at the N.C. School of the Arts, playing works by Kenneth Frazelle, a

Winston-Salem composer, and Ammons playing hymns on the piano. Cleve Callison of WFDD donated his time to record Am-

mons in an interview, Hudson said, which includes Ammons' reading of the poem. Don Kirk of Target Television in Winston-Sa-

lem edited the film and created the soundtrack. The film won an award in the Silver State Documentary Festival in Las Vegas.

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A Media General Newspaper

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Have a Cackle With a Double Dactyl

THE OXFORD BOOK OF
AMERICAN LIGHT VERSE.
Chosen and edited by William
Harmon. Oxford University
Press. 540 pages. \$15.95.

Have you thought lately
about double dactyls?
Clerihews? Flytings?

You'll find them all here —
and a lot more besides.

If you look for some old
familiar lines — such as "Men
seldom make passes/At girls
who wear glasses" or "A rose
is a rose is a rose" — you won't
be disappointed. But did you
know that not only Dorothy
Parker and Gertrude Stein
played around with light verse,
but also Hemingway, Edwin
Arlington Robinson, John
Philip Sousa and Wallace
Stevens, to name a few?

Harmon's long, lively in-
troduction supplies a wealth of
interesting information as well
as his reasons for why the
world needed an anthology of
American light verse. His
complements four earlier im-
portant Oxford anthologies by
W. H. Auden, F. O.
Matthiessen, Richard Ellman
and Kingsley Amis. But these
contained almost nothing
American, says Harmon, who
forthwith furnishes us with this
handy volume to "remind the
reader of certain durable
features of the American
people."

In light verse the senses of
adventure and fun combine,



Auto Mobile

For the bumps bangs & scratches of
collusive encounters
madam

I through time's ruts and weeds
sought you, metallic, your
stainless steel flivver:

I have banged you, bumped
and scratched, side-swiped,
momocked & begommed you &
your little flivver still
works so well.

A. R. AMMONS

writes Harmon, "with a
practical turn of mind to
produce works that deflate the
hifalutin, debunk the
hypocritical, abridge the
sesquipedalian ... and even
make fun of the ... ideas of
the Republic itself."

Further, he believes that
comedy is culture and that
"the most ... powerful form
of comedy is symmetrical light
verse, which ... keep(s) the
culture-creature alive and
alert."

We seem to have possessed
from the beginning in America
"a rough vulgar humor ... and
a smooth aristocratic humor,

with a melancholy and
cockeyed surrealism
trafficking between them..."
And no matter what we do, or
think we are doing, "if our in-
vention should sing and appeal
to any number of people at all,
it must be because it resonates
with certain rhythmic pulses
already deep in our spirits
..." Light verse, according to
Harmon, will remain an im-
portant set of symbols in the
patterns of history.

Satires and parodies,

protests, song lyrics, nonsense
rhymes and word games are
included. Serious poets
unseriously represented here
include Emily Dickinson,
Robert Frost, Ralph Waldo
Emerson, John Crowe
Ransom, A. R. Ammons, John
Updike and many others.

Harmon is a professor of

English at the University of
North Carolina at Chapel Hill
and a prize-winning author of
several books of poetry and of
a critical work, *Time in Ezra
Pound's Work*.

Here are a few lines from
the unnerst Hemingway:

Sing a song of critics
pockets full of lye
four and twenty critics
hope that you will die ...

From there on, some of it
becomes unquotable.

A clerihew? It is simply two
couplets of irregular meter
taking off on a well-known
person whose name forms one
of the rhymes:

Sir Humphrey Davy
Abominated gravy.
He lived in the odium
Of having discovered
sodium.

Without any help from
Harmon, I dug that one out
from another source. As for
double dactyls and flytings,
you're on your own.

—BETTY LEIGHTON



ARCHIE AMMONS: "It was a complete surprise."

He's Grinning Over \$264,000

By GENIE CARR
Sentinel Staff Reporter

"Oh, I feel pretty good about it," Archie R. Ammons said about his award this morning.

The award is a five-year, no-strings-attached grant of \$264,000 from the MacArthur Foundation. Ammons, a poet, was one of 21 people who received awards of varying amounts yesterday from the foundation.

His award amounts to about \$4,400 a month for the next five years. Like the other winners, he can do whatever he wants to with the money. He told The Sentinel in a telephone interview today from his home in Ithaca, N. Y., that he has "mixed feelings" about the prize, but

See N.C. Poet, Page 3

Tennis Coach At WFU Resigns Post

Sylvia Gilley, women's tennis coach at Wake Forest University the past three years, resigned this morning, school officials said.

Mrs. Gilley, a Winston-Salem native, guided the Deacons to a 10-6 record this past season. The team was 3-4 in Atlantic Coast Conference play.

Wake Forest officials said the search for a new coach would begin immediately.

Amnesty for Mormons

In 1894, President Grover Cleveland proclaimed an amnesty for Mormons who had practiced polygamy.

N.C. Poet 'Feeling Good'

Continued from Page 1

"basically I feel very good about it."

"It was a complete surprise," he said. "They called me Friday. Actually, Mr. (Roderick) MacArthur called me himself and told me I was the very first person they contacted."

Roderick MacArthur is the son of Catherine and John D. MacArthur for whom the MacArthur Foundation, the third-largest in the nation, is named. The elder MacArthur, who died in 1978, made his fortune in insurance, real estate, banking and industry.

This is the first year the awards have been given. The foundation intends to name 29 more winners this year and has committed \$10 million to \$12 million for the five-year undertaking.

Both famous and obscure artists, writers, scientists, historians and mathematicians — from Ammons and poet Robert Penn Warren to a 21-year-old California physicist and a Soviet poet sent to an Arctic labor camp for "parasitism" — received the first awards.

The awards were made by an anonymous committee of 100 educators, scientists and artists. Ammons said the amounts were based on a formula according to the recipients' ages.

The minimum amount was \$24,000 a year, and the maximum \$60,000 a year, he said. Ammons is 55 years old.

The only obligation of the recipients is to pursue their dreams. "It's the ideal opportunity for artists and scientists," Ammons said. "I'll do what I have done all my life and make the best use I can of any opportunities that present themselves."

He said Wake Forest University, where he graduated in 1949, "has been very kind to me; they've given me what almost amounts to a standing offer (to teach)." He said he would like very much to return to his native state of North Carolina to live. "We've had it under consideration," he said.

Ammons will be at Reynolda House here for two weeks in June to conduct a poetry workshop. This morning he was as interested in talking about a show here of his watercolors; a recent artistic venture for him, as he was about the workshop or the award.

Ammons has taught at Cornell University in Ithaca since 1963. He has published 13 books of poetry, including one which won the National Book Award for poetry in 1973.

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Reader Participation Invited

THE SNOW POEMS

By A.R. Ammons
292 pp. New York
W. W. Norton & Co. \$12.50.

By HAYDEN CARRUTH

No matter how they deny it—and many do—what writers want is communion; not communication, communion. They want the reader right in there with them, soul to soul. It's a hunger. (And by no means, says the voice at my shoulder, limited to writers alone.)

Once writers could solve their problem by making a story, an allegory, some invented world, into which they invited or enticed the reader, so that both could live there together for a while, soul to soul, in the "willing suspension of disbelief." It worked; it worked for a couple of thousand years. But more

Hayden Carruth is a poet and anthologist.

and more in our century writers came to feel that the suspension of disbelief was failing, was downright fraudulent, and they turned to formalistic means. They thought, if you can just make the reader participate in the technique of writing, then you will have him caught, a willing (but nicely subservient) collaborator in the artistic process. Hence Modernism in all its aspects. Today some poets even publish random words or lines and ask the reader to make his own poem. Conceptualists, I believe, is what they're called.

A.R. Ammons has not gone that far. But he does lay his procedures open to view, often ingratiatingly, so that when he has second thoughts about a word, for instance, he does not cross out the original and substitute the new, he leaves them both there. The correction, amplification, set out in repetition, is not laziness but a real way to make us see how poetic language moves toward intensity



A. R. Ammons.

and precision. At other times, when he writes a longer piece that isn't quite satisfactory, he puts a paraphrase or counterthought in the margin. And it's true, afterthought adds to forethought, stylistically and substantially, a resonance that lets us see the poet's mind in process. It's like reading Emerson's journals, the gathering fragments that became the essays.

Which brings us to Ammons's topic. Emerson's mind was focused on something—many things, tough, resistant things. Ammons writes about anything, randomly. "The Snow Poems" is a long sequence in diary form, even though the

poems are undated. I have never read so much verse about the weather in my life; also about decay of consciousness, separation from nature, the sorrow of knowledge; in short, the trivia of a professorial mind in daily academic and domestic life. Often passages of simple word-play intervene, like infantile regressions ("egad, gasso, glorybe"), or invented or half-invented proverbs ("intercourse is better than no course at all"). Much of this incidentally is bright and attractive. But how it does go on!

Why? He says,
hello from one who knows
nothing
(and never lets you hear
the end of it)

But we all know nothing, and we all talk of it endlessly, and this is the human condition; there is value, indubitably, in establishing its presence in art, much value. The poet, ignorant and agonized, at least establishes his existence; he survives. But what of us, his readers? Do we survive, too, by

attending to this random scribbling? Ammons doesn't say.

As readers I think we can survive, sometimes. The key is passion, a transcendent passion that elevates writer and reader alike to a plane of subjective freedom, apart from the determined world. Millions have found survival in Wordsworth's passionate early poems, but not one (except W.W. himself) in his later maunderings. Ammons is famous now, celebrated, a prize-winner, with lots of good poetry behind him, real created poems. But he has begun to maunder. He thinks he is inventing himself in these new poems; but he is only reporting himself. And that is not enough.

In spite of a bright, attractive technique, which could be used perfectly well in real poems, and in spite of occasional lyric parts that remind us of earlier work, "The Snow Poems" is a dull, dull book. The best a reviewer can do for everyone concerned, including the poet, is to say so. ■

Ammons joins confessional school with breezy collection of poems Bio

2/17/77
The Snow Poems, by A. R. Ammons. New
York: W. W. Norton & Co. \$12.50.

By Victor Howes

A. R. Ammons's twelfth book of verse is a fat volume that could profit by judicious slimming. The winner of the 1973 National Book Award for his "Collected Poems," Ammons here joins the confessional school of Sexton and Lowell, not with their intensity, but with their urge to let it all hang out.

"Snow Poems" is a kind of snow country almanac, or a read-over-the-poet's-shoulder diary. While the poet goes about his daily rounds, rising at 6:30 a.m., making the family's breakfast, observing nature through frosted windows, taking his walks, teaching his classes, visiting his neighbors, he meditates, stores up impressions, writes his poems.

Phyllis and I had a
great lunch composed of
soup with turkey strippings
in it. I mean we added the
turkey, it was delicious, a
delicacy, and I didn't write
a word the whole time.

Why should anyone but the poet and his wife
care? There is, of course, a lot of verbal hi-
jinks along the way:

the forecaster for today
forecasts

enem thunderstormen may
blusterbufferoomen through

and there is some laconic wit and wisdom

those who
have nothing
have nothing
to lose.

but it comes along with the poet's recall of
friends and father, daily doings merged with
cosmic nature-walks, and much, much else.

What emerges is a full-length portrait of the
artist as a fifty-year-old man. In the course of
his talky, bluff and breezy book, we come to
know Ammons like another self. It's a gener-
ous impulse, I suppose, this desire to tell all,
but is there really all that much we want to
know? I for one would rather read some
lighter poems, along the lines of his early and
great "Corson's Inlet."

When congressmen filibuster, they some-
times read recipes for Aunt Sarah's black-eyed
peas into the Congressional Record, but, at
least they don't imagine anyone is listening. I
wish Ammons had stopped just once in a while
and asked himself, "Does anyone really care if
Phyllis and I had turkey strippings in the
soup?"

Victor Howes teaches English at North
eastern University.

WF Poet Wins High Honor



ARCHIE R. AMMONS
... visiting prof ...

Ammons, Archie R. Ammons, visiting professor of English at Wake Forest University, has been awarded the Bollingen prize in Poetry of the Yale University Library.

The prize is considered one of the nation's most distinguished poetry honors. Ammons' selection was announced yesterday.

Ammons is the 25th winner of the prize, awarded every two years, which carries a \$5,000 stipend. He is on leave this year from Cornell University where he is a full professor. He is an alumnus of Wake Forest.

His most recent book is "Sphere: the Form of a Motion." His "Collected Poems: 1951-1971" won the National Book Award in 1973.

The prize is given to an American poet for the best collection during a two-year period or for a body of work over several years. The selection is made by a committee of three.

Among the poets who have received the prize are Wallace Stevens, Archibald MacLeish, William Carlos Williams, Robert Frost, Robert Penn Warren and W. H. Auden.

Wed Sentinel Jan 3, 1974



A. R. AMMONS
... must write ...

Ammons' New Verses Diversionary

DIVERSIFICATIONS. Poems.
By A. R. Ammons. Norton. 98
pages. \$6.95

Sphere brought us the breadth and scope — and often incomprehensible complexity — of Archie Ammons' thought; and it won him the 1975 Bollingen Prize for Poetry.

Diversifications is likely to win no prizes, for it gives us the more casual thoughts and comments of the poet. Indeed, one is tempted to believe the title came from what Ammons considered his own "diverse diversions in verse."

Ammons is a man who must write; anything he sees or feels or experiences is a fit subject for verse, because it is part of life.

Most people, for example, curse the wind when caught outside in it. Ammons, instead, may be moved to write:

*In a high wind the
leaves don't
fall but fly
straight out of the
trees like birds.*

Or in a winter storm, he may observe the experience of trees and set it down:

*The hemlocks slumped
Already as if besailing
the branch-loading*

*shales of ice, the rain
changes and a snow
sifts as fog*

*begins to fall, brightening
the ice's bruise-glimmer
with white holdings:*

*the hemlocks, muffled,
deepen to the grim
taking of a further beauty on.*

This work, in short, is relatively light. There is some Ammons humor in it, and occasionally the reader may feel his leg being pulled.

Technically, the little book will suffer by comparison with Ammons' earlier works. But there is good reading here for the not-completely-serious reader of poetry.

And for those who do take their poems and poets seriously, there is a chance to better know Ammons the man and the feelings and sensations that flow through him wherever he might be.



A. R. AMMONS
... to join faculty ...

Poet to Get Year's Post At WFU

A. R. Ammons, whose "Collected Poems" won the 1973 National Book Award, will be visiting professor of English at Wake Forest University for the 1974-75 school year.

Ammons, a Wake Forest graduate who is a Goldsquin Smith Professor of Poetry at Cornell University, will teach a course on the theory and practice of verse writing. He will be on sabbatical leave from Cornell.

His appointment was announced by Dr. James Ralph Scales, president of Wake Forest.

A native of Whiteville, Ammons received the B.S. degree in 1949 from Wake Forest, where he majored in biology. He studied for a year at the University of California at Berkeley. He has been a school principal and executive vice president of a biological glass manufacturing firm. He joined the Cornell faculty in 1964.

He has held a Guggenheim fellowship and a travelling fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He was awarded an honorary degree from Wake Forest in 1972 and from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1973.

He has published nine books of poems. The first, "Ommateum," appeared in 1955. Others include "Expressions of Sea Level," "Corsons Inlet," "Tape for the Turn of the Year," "Northfield Poems," "Selected Poems," "Uplands" and "Briefings."

Ammons Interview To Be Broadcast

An interview with poet A. R. Ammons has been produced by WFDD-FM, the Wake Forest University radio station, and will be broadcast nationally at 9:30 p.m. today.

The interview will be a 7½ minute segment of National Public Radio's hour-long program "Voices in the Wind."

Ammons, who recently won the Bollingen Prize in Poetry, is visiting professor of English at Wake Forest. Steve Marlowe, sophomore of Thomasville, did the interview.

A 12-minute version has been broadcast locally. This will be the 21st time in eight months that material produced by WFDD has been broadcast by NPR, which has 176 member stations.

W-S J+S March 9, '75

A. R. Ammons

Biographical Note

A. R. Ammons was born in Whiteville, North Carolina, in 1926. He served as a sonar operator aboard the U.S.S. Gunason during World War II, traveling widely through the South Pacific. Returning to North Carolina, Ammons attended Wake Forest University, from which he received a B.S. degree in 1949. After a year as principal of Hatteras (North Carolina) Elementary School, Ammons and his wife Phyllis headed west, where Ammons did graduate work in English at the University of California at Berkeley until 1952.

Starting in 1952 and continuing into the early 1960s, Ammons worked for Freidrich & Dimmock, Inc., a New Jersey laboratory glassware manufacturing company. During this time, his poetry gained increasing acceptance. He left his manufacturing career in 1961 for a position on the English faculty at Cornell University. In 1971, he became a full professor, and, in 1973, Goldwin Smith professor of poetry.

Ammons has received many awards, among them the National Book Award for Poetry (1973), the Bollingen Prize in Poetry (1974), and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry (1981). Besides frequent publication in literary journals, Ammons has published many books, received numerous honorary degrees, and been the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Award.

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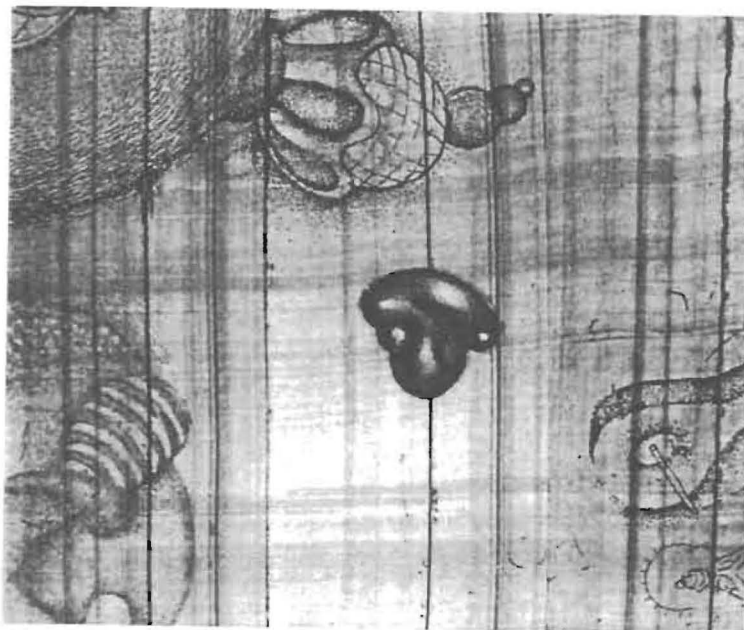


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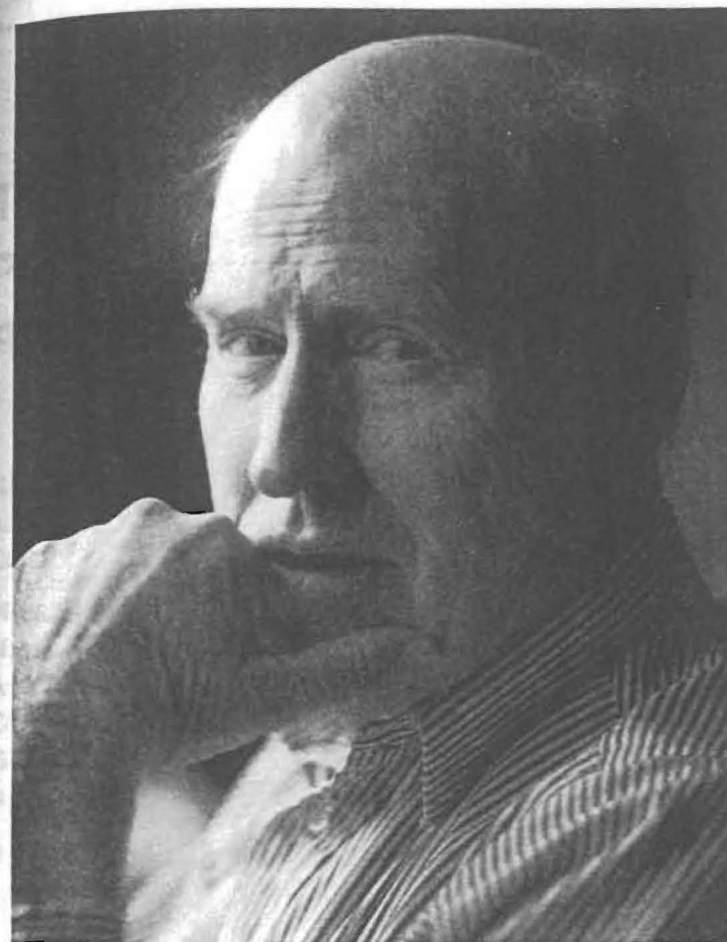
Sign Collection

double
double Frayed strings of geese
double over south this
double blue ~~cloud~~ afternoon
when nearly

it works every day/has left October:
~~not~~ long now
till the colors,
snuggled under, sum up white:
it works then ~~we'll walk into the~~ *find the*
whether ~~wind on~~ black *back up*
streaks to trunk and post,
downwind standings, *it's like a*

because among the turnings
is the winter we won't
find our way from or to;
~~the~~ cold just cold.
more *the*
the cold, miserable, just cold.

A manuscript page from the poem "Sign Collection" by A.R. Ammons.



© Dede Hatch

A.R. Ammons

The Art of Poetry LXXIII

One day in the winter of 1987 Archie Ammons was driving north on the I-95 in Florida when a gigantic hill of rubble

came into view. The sight sparked an epiphany: "I thought maybe that was the sacred image of our time," the poet said. Upon his return to Ithaca, New York, where he is the Goldwin Smith Professor of Poetry at Cornell University, Ammons tried to write a long poem entitled *Garbage*. Nothing came of the first attempt. Two years later, however, the image returned and wouldn't let him off so easily. He wrote the poem quickly, finished it in a season, then put it aside. A major medical predicament—a massive coronary in August 1989 and triple bypass surgery a year later—intervened. When Ammons returned to the poem, he was no longer sure of it, and when it was accepted by his publisher, he was surprised. Nobody else was when this extraordinary work went on to win the 1993 National Book Award in poetry, the second time Ammons has been so honored. Ammons received the Frost Medal from the Poetry Society of America in April 1994. Later that year, he and his wife, Phyllis, drove to Washington (the Ammonses do not believe in flying) to collect the Bobbitt Prize, which sounds like something a Court TV reporter made up but is actually an accolade bestowed by the Library of Congress.

Born in Whiteville, North Carolina, in 1926—"big, jaundiced and ugly," in his words—Archie Randolph Ammons grew up on a family tobacco farm during the meanest years of the Great Depression. He had two sisters; one brother died as an infant, a loss mourned in his powerful poem "Easter Morning." The hymns Archie heard every Sunday in church had their mostly unconscious influence on his poetry, which he began writing in the navy during World War II. Some of his first efforts were comic poems about shipmates aboard the destroyer escort on which he served in the South Pacific. Ammons recently wrote the poem "Ping Jockeys" when he found out that two pillars of the New York School of poets, James Schuyler and Frank O'Hara, had also been trained as sonar men on Key West, where Ammons learned "how to lay down depth-charge patterns on enemy hulks."

Ammons got out of the navy in 1946. He was able to attend college thanks to that piece of enlightened social legislation, the G.I. Bill, which paid his way at Wake Forest College,

where he began as a premed student. In a writing class taught by E.E. Folk, he learned his method of "the transforming idea"—how to organize materials gathered from disparate sources—which he has continued to use in his poems. Another course with a decisive impact on Ammons's life was intermediate Spanish, which was taught by Phyllis Plumbo, a recent graduate of Douglass College, then the women's division of Rutgers University. Archie walked her home one day, and the couple will soon celebrate their forty-seventh wedding anniversary.

Ammons did not enter the academic life until he was close to forty. In 1949, he became the principal of the tiny elementary school in the island village of Cape Hatteras. For most of the next decade he worked as a sales executive in his father-in-law's biological glass company on the southern New Jersey shore. Ammons published *Ommateum*, his first book of poems, with Dorrance, a vanity press, in 1955; a mere sixteen copies were sold in the next five years. (A copy today would fetch two thousand dollars.) He joined the Cornell University faculty in 1964 and has taught there ever since.

Expressions of Sea Level, Ammons's second collection, came out in 1964 from Ohio State University Press and triggered the most prolific period in his career. He went rapidly from total obscurity to wide acclaim. His prematurely entitled *Collected Poems 1951-1971* won the National Book Award in 1973. He won the coveted Bollingen Prize for his long poem *Sphere* (1974), in which the governing image was the earth as photographed from outer space. Ammons's method for writing a long poem is, in a nutshell, finding "a single image that can sustain multiplicity."

For a poet who believes in inspiration and spontaneity, Ammons is a creature of fixed habit. He begins his days having coffee in the Temple of Zeus, a coffee bar on the Cornell campus, with a handful of chums such as the Nobel Prize-winning chemist and poet Roald Hoffmann. (Hoffmann, who has written three books of poems, unabashedly calls Ammons his guru.) Archie professes to despise the poetry writing industry and has a skeptical attitude on the whole question of

whether poetry can be taught. Yet his own reputation among students past and present is high. A casual exchange of poems with Archie can turn into a memorable experience. "I have coffee sometimes in the morning for years with people," Ammons says. "And then it may be five or ten years afterwards they will show me something they've written and I will suddenly feel that I know them better in that minute than I have known them through all the conversations that had taken place before."

This interview was conducted by a variety of means. We began with two long sessions with a tape recorder in Ammons's house in Ithaca. Briefer exchanges in person, on the phone and by mail followed at regular intervals. It was as if we were continuing a conversation that had begun in 1976, when we met, and of which this interview is a sample and a distillation. We shelved it for a while while we worked together on The Best American Poetry 1994, for which Archie made the selections, and then we picked up where we had left off.

Ammons's twenty-third book of poems, Brink Road, was published by Norton in the spring of 1996. Set in Motion, a gathering of his prose, will appear in the Poets on Poetry Series of the University of Michigan Press.

A.R. AMMONS

Aren't you going to start with the typical *Paris Review* interview question, such as, "What do you write with or on?"

INTERVIEWER

All right. [Pause] What do you write with or on?

AMMONS

My poems begin on the typewriter. If I'm home—and I rarely write anything elsewhere—I write on an Underwood standard upright, manual, not electric, which I bought used in Berkeley in 1951 or 1952. It had been broken and was

rewelded. It's worked without almost any attention for forty-four years. When I was away a few times, for a year or a summer, I wrote on similar typewriters. It's hard now to find regular typewriter paper (as opposed to Xerox paper) and ribbons.

I sometimes scribble words or phrases or poems with a pen and pencil if I'm traveling or at work. But I like the typewriter because it allows me to set up the shapes and control the space. Though I don't care for much formality (in fact, I hate ceremony), I need to lend a formal cast, at least, to the motions I so much love.

INTERVIEWER

When you begin a poem, do you have a specific source of inspiration, or do you start with words and push them around the page until they begin to take shape?

AMMONS

John Ashbery says that he would never begin to write a poem under the force of inspiration or with an idea already given. He prefers to wait until he has absolutely nothing to say, and then begins to find words and to sort them out and to associate with them. He likes to have the poem occur on the occasion of its occurrence rather than to be the result of some inspiration or imposition from the outside. Now I think that's a brilliant point of view. That's not the way I work. I've always been highly energized and have written poems in spurts. From the god-given first line right through the poem. And I don't write two or three lines and then come back the next day and write two or three more; I write the whole poem at one sitting and then come back to it from time to time over the months or years and rework it.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write, say, "The City Limits" in one sitting?

AMMONS

Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER

The eighteen lines of that poem do seem to be a single outcry. Were there changes after you wrote it?

AMMONS

Hardly a one. I sent the poem to Harold Bloom, something I almost never had done, and he admired it and sent a note to me not to change a word.

INTERVIEWER

Bloom has been a longtime champion of your work. How long have you known him?

AMMONS

He was here for the year in 1968, and his children were the same age as my son John, and they became playmates. Harold and I became friends. I didn't regularly send him my poems, and he never suggested how they be written. But I wrote "The City Limits" and I wanted to share it with him. It was not literary business. It was friendship business. That was in 1971.

INTERVIEWER

Does inspiration originate in nature, in external reality, or in the self?

AMMONS

I think it comes from anxiety. That is to say, either the mind or the body is already rather highly charged and in need of some kind of expression, some way to crystallize and relieve the pressure. And it seems to me that if you're in that condition and an idea, an insight, an association occurs to you, then that energy is released through the expression of that insight or idea, and after the poem is written, you feel a certain resolution and calmness. Well, I won't say a "momentary stay against confusion" (Robert Frost's phrase) but that's what I mean. I think it comes from that. You know, Bloom says somewhere that poetry *is* anxiety.

INTERVIEWER

Bloom talks about the anxiety of influence, but you talk about the influence of anxiety.

AMMONS

Absolutely. The invention of a poem frequently is how to find a way to resolve the complications that you've gotten yourself into. I have a little poem about this that says that the poem begins as life does, takes on complications as novels do, and at some point stops. Something has to be invented before you can work your way out of it, and that's what happens at the very center of a poem.

INTERVIEWER

What poem are you referring to?

AMMONS

It's called "The Swan Ritual." It's in the *Collected Poems*.

INTERVIEWER

I have this picture of you taking long walks along places mentioned in your poems, such as Cascadilla Falls here in Ithaca or Corsons Inlet on the New Jersey shore, and writing as you were walking, writing out something longhand.

AMMONS

Or memorizing it in your head.

INTERVIEWER

Did you do that?

AMMONS

Yes, oh yes. Not something as long as "Corsons Inlet," but shorter poems. I've done that here in Ithaca and down there many times.

INTERVIEWER

"Corsons Inlet" is 128 lines long. Did you write it at the end of the long walk described in the poem?

AMMONS

Yes, and at one sitting.

INTERVIEWER

A poet of inspiration, a poet who depends on inspiration, isn't likely to write on schedule, and I don't suppose you do.

AMMONS

No, I never sit down or stand up to try to write. It's like trying to go to the bathroom when you feel no urge. Unless I have something already moving through the mind, I don't go to the typewriter at all. The world has so many poems in it, it has never seemed to me very smart to force one more upon the world. If there isn't one there to write, you just leave it alone.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you write?

AMMONS

I write for love, respect, money, fame, honor, redemption. I write to be included in a world I feel rejected by. But I don't want to be included by surrendering myself to expectations. I want to buy my admission to others by engaging their interests and feelings, doing the least possible damage to my feelings and interests but changing theirs a bit. I think I was not aware early on of those things. I wrote early on because it was there to do and because if anything good happened in the poem I felt good. Poems are experiences as well as whatever else they are, and for me now, nothing, not respect, honor, money, seems as supportive as just having produced a body of work, which I hope is, all considered, good.

INTERVIEWER

It took you a long time to get respect, honor, money and fame for your work. You had the support of Josephine Miles when you were a graduate student at Berkeley, and you had poems accepted by *Poetry* magazine in the 1950s. But you had very few readers, and you weren't winning a lot of prizes and grants.

AMMONS

That's right. I spent twenty years writing on my own without any recognition. You know, I started writing in 1945. In 1955 I published a book of my own with a vanity publisher, my first book, *Ommateum*. It wasn't until 1964 that I had a book accepted by Ohio State University Press, *Expressions of Sea Level*.

INTERVIEWER

And the quality of that work, when looked at now?

AMMONS

Well, it's the best I have. It still sustains my reputation.

INTERVIEWER

So you found it possible to be a poet, and to thrive as a poet, without the material trappings of celebration and success.

AMMONS

I couldn't avoid being a poet. I was really having a pretty rough time of things, and I had a lot of energy, and poems were practically the only recourse I had to alleviate that energy and that anxiety. I take no credit for all the poems I've written. They were a way of releasing anxiety.

INTERVIEWER

When you say you were having a rough time, do you mean financially?

AMMONS

I had really no clear-cut direction to my life for those years. I was working in business, not necessarily getting anywhere. It was just a lack of definition and direction. Financially, I didn't have a great deal of money, but I wasn't impoverished at that time.

INTERVIEWER

You grew up impoverished in North Carolina.

AMMONS

We grew up rather poor, yes. But we didn't think of ourselves as poor. You've heard this said many times, I'm sure, about people in the depression. We had a farm. It had been created as a sustenance farm, that is, you grew as many things as you might possibly need. My two sisters and I—I had two brothers but they died young—were never hungry. We always had clothes to wear. There was no money, however, in the South. I mean, during the depression, there were actually no coins. People bartered. We had no money, so we were poor in that sense, but my family, in Southern terms, was fairly distinguished. My uncle was sheriff of the county for eight consecutive terms, longer than anyone had been. It was a highly prestigious job in those days, and he was a splendid working man who was always erect and never carried a gun. He had a reputation for going into the most dangerous places unarmed and telling murderers or suspected murderers to come with him, and they would do it. He was also a considerable landowner in the county and owned what later became a whole beach down at the ocean, which was about forty miles from us. So he was a wealthy man and a highly prestigious man. I honored him greatly as a child. He sometimes helped us in the winters when we were broke.

So I was caught in the contradiction of feeling that I came from a good line and yet being inhibited as far as resources went. Since I was the only surviving Ammons of an enormous family, I was frequently told I was going to inherit forests and

farms and things like that. But I didn't. By the time my uncle passed away I had left that region and never went back.

INTERVIEWER

Sometimes it seems that the economic circumstances of one's childhood do play a determining role in one's psychological makeup later on. You can never really transcend those early insecurities.

AMMONS

I agree. Though there were other insecurities in my youth: the death of the two brothers, for example.

INTERVIEWER

Were they younger brothers?

AMMONS

Yes. I was four when the brother eighteen months old died. I still carry images of that whole thing. And then the last member of our family was born dead. So I was the only son left.

INTERVIEWER

Did you like working on the farm?

AMMONS

I hated it. You had to work in all kinds of weather. In the winter, you were in the swamp cutting trees for the fuel you needed in the summer for curing the tobacco. I mean it was just a constant round of hard work without reward because we remained in debt year after year after year.

INTERVIEWER

Did you read books at home?

AMMONS

That came later. The only book I can remember having in the house apart from textbooks was the first eleven pages of

Robinson Crusoe. I read that so many times I practically had it by memory. I don't know where the eleven pages came from, but there they were. Otherwise we read the Bible in Sunday school and we sang hymns. That was my exposure to words. And, by the way, I think that hymns have had an enormous influence on what I've written because they're the words I first heard and memorized.

INTERVIEWER

When did you start writing?

AMMONS

When I went to high school (which in those times included the eighth grade) I wrote an essay, and the teacher praised it highly and told all our classes, even the senior classes, about it. So I began to get some encouragement pretty early on about writing.

INTERVIEWER

What was the essay about?

AMMONS

We were asked to read articles in *Reader's Digest* and then to write our own version of the substance. I wrote about a cow they were trying to breed that would be only about thirty inches high but would give vast amounts of milk. I must have done this in an excellent style because as you can see the subject matter is not all that thrilling.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned Sunday school hymns as an important influence. I can see that in your very first poems, your "I am Ezra" poems. Certainly the religious impulse—the resolve to render the sacred in terms of the secular, to wed the lowly and the divine—is in much of your work. In a poem as recent as "The Damned" a mountaineer surrounded by silent peaks looks down from the summit and supposes that "these damned

came of being / near the sanctified, wherever one finds / one one finds the other." Were you brought up to be serious about religion?

AMMONS

My mother was Methodist, but there was no Methodist church in our rural community, so I never went to a Methodist service. My father was Baptist. The New Hope Baptist Church was two miles away next to the elementary school. Nearer to us, less than a mile away, was the Spring Branch Fire-Baptized Pentecostal Church. I went to Sunday school there and the family sometimes attended preaching on Sundays, prayer meetings on Wednesday nights or occasional weekly revivals. Once a two-week course in reading music was offered there—the do-re-me-so method—and I attended that when I was about eleven or twelve. As for the Baptist church, I went there for the Christmas Eve celebrations. For some reason, a paper bag containing an orange and apple, raisins and a few English walnuts or pecans was always under the tree for me. The funerals in my family took place at the Baptist church. My little brothers, my grandmother, my aunts and uncles, and my father and mother were buried there. The Baptist Church represented a higher social and intellectual class than did the Pentecostal. I identify coldly with the family religion. I take my religious spirit, whatever that is, from the Fire-Baptized Pentecostal.

INTERVIEWER

Reading your poems I sometimes feel that they employ scientific means to reach a kind of religious end. I suppose I've always taken it for granted that you stopped going to church and that at some point—perhaps in your days as a sonar man in the navy during World War II—poetry became the means by which you expressed your religious convictions.

AMMONS

One day, when I was nineteen, I was sitting on the bow of the ship anchored in a bay in the South Pacific. As I looked

at the land, heard the roosters crowing, saw the thatched huts, et cetera, I thought down to the water level and then to the immediately changed and strange world below the waterline. But it was the line inscribed across the variable landmass, determining where people would or would not live, where palm trees would or could not grow, that hypnotized me. The whole world changed as a result of an interior illumination: the water level was not what it was because of a single command by a higher power but because of an average result of a host of actions—runoff, wind currents, melting glaciers. I began to apprehend things in the dynamics of themselves—motions and bodies—the full account of how we came to be a mystery with still plenty of room for religion, though, in my case, a religion of what we don't yet know rather than what we are certain of. I was de-denominated.

INTERVIEWER

When did you join the navy?

AMMONS

I think it was 1944. I came out in 1946. I was in for nineteen months, about twelve of them in the South Pacific on a destroyer escort. It was on board this ship that I found an anthology of poetry in paperback. And I began to imitate those poems then, and I wrote from then on.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write about home and America and North Carolina or about what was happening in the South Pacific?

AMMONS

Mostly about what was happening in the South Pacific, including some humorous poems about the other members of the crew.

INTERVIEWER

What has happened to these poems?

AMMONS

Oh, they're around.

INTERVIEWER

Did you continue writing poems in civilian life?

AMMONS

I had never stopped writing but after having gotten a degree, the B.S. in general science at Wake Forest, I borrowed the money to go back for a summer of education courses and then taught the first year as the principal of a three-teacher school in Cape Hatteras. That was 1949-1950. That same fall, 1949, I got married. My wife, Phyllis, had been to Berkeley and liked it. So after a year of teaching, we went to Berkeley for two years. And there I did a good many English courses, completing the undergraduate degree. I had minored in English at Wake Forest so I completed that degree and did almost all the work toward a master's. And then we left and came back to south Jersey. I lived there for twelve years before coming here to Ithaca.

INTERVIEWER

I know that you worked in your father-in-law's biological glass factory as a vice president in charge of sales. Were you interested in the work or was it dull?

AMMONS

It wasn't dull. I have a poem somewhere explaining how running a business is like writing a poem. In business, for example, you bring in the raw materials and then subject them to a certain kind of human change. You introduce the raw materials into a system of order, like the making of a poem, and once the matter is shaped it's ready to be shipped. I mean, the incoming and outgoing energies have achieved a kind of balance. Believe it or not, I felt completely confident in the work I was doing. And did it, I think, well.

INTERVIEWER

That raises an interesting question. Most American poets work in universities and many if not most were trained in creative writing programs. It's the rare exception who makes his or her living outside the academy, as you did. I'm not entirely convinced that this academic dependence is a healthy state of affairs.

AMMONS

Me neither. In my own case, working in industry wasn't exhausting—I mean poetically exhausting. I could write all the time. It's been true for me that, in the thirty years I've been teaching, my writing is done before the semester starts. The time I do any writing is Christmas vacation. That's when I wrote "Hibernaculum" and *Tape* and the "Essay on Poetics." Most of the things have been done between semesters or during the summers.

INTERVIEWER

When were you invited to teach at Cornell?

AMMONS

I received an invitation from David Ray to give a reading here. He'd seen poems of mine in *The Hudson Review*. Also, I had that same year relieved Denise Levertov for six months as poetry editor of *The Nation*. And I had, without knowing the man, accepted a poem by David Ray and published it. I suppose as a kind of return gesture, he invited me to come give a reading for \$50 at Cornell, and then he saw my poems in *The Hudson Review* and raised the fee to \$150. So I came in July of 1963 and gave the reading and afterwards James McConkey and Baxter Hathaway and others asked me if I would be interested in teaching. And though I was not a teacher and had not taught, I said yes, because my wife and I were ready to make a move, and so we came to Cornell.

INTERVIEWER

And you've been here ever since.

AMMONS

They were very good to me. At first I was the only non-Ph.D. in the English department, and they welcomed me and kept me. They gave me tenure. I thought it was quite remarkable.

INTERVIEWER

Your standing-room-only poetry reading in Ithaca last December was memorable. I never thought I'd see you in a tuxedo. Did the event change your feelings about poetry readings, or confirm them? Why do you suppose people go to readings anyway?

AMMONS

It's a great mystery. When you consider how boring and painful nearly all poetry readings are, it's a wonder anyone shows up. And, wisely, few people do. I think it's not a love of poetry readings that attracts those who do come but theater: to see what the beast, possibly already heard of, looks like in person; to make a poetry-business connection that could prove useful; to see who else comes to poetry readings; to endure pain and purgation; to pass one's books or pamphlets on to the reader; to see the reader mess up, suffer, lose control, and to enjoy the remarkable refreshment of finding him no less human, vulnerable or fallible, than oneself.

INTERVIEWER

It may be time for another official *Paris Review* interview question: what advice do you give to young writers?

AMMONS

First of all, I omit praising them too much if I think that will be the catalyst that causes them to move into a seizure with a poetic way of life. Because I know how difficult that can be, and I tend to agree with Rilke that if it's possible for you to live some other life, by all means do so. If it seems to me that the person can't live otherwise than as a writer of poetry, then I encourage them to go ahead and do it. However,

the advice splits, depending on how I feel about the person. If I think he's really a genuine poet, I'd like to encourage him to get out into the so-called real world. If he seems like a poet who's going to get by through a kind of pressure of having to turn in so many poems per week in order to get a good grade or having to publish a book of poems in order to get promoted, then I encourage him to go to an M.F.A. program somewhere and become a so-called professional poet. You get to know people who know how to publish books, you begin to advance your career. I don't think that has very much to do with *real* poetry. It sometimes happens that these professional M.F.A. people are also poets; but it *rarely* happens.

INTERVIEWER

You once said that trying to make a living from poetry is like putting chains on butterfly wings.

AMMONS

Right. I'd stand by that.

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about government support of the arts?

AMMONS

I detest it. I detest it on many grounds, but three first. And the first is that the government gouges money from people who may need it for other purposes. Second, the money forced from needy average citizens is then filtered through the sieve of a bureaucracy, which absorbs much of the money into itself and distributes the rest incompetently—since how could you expect the level of knowledge and judgment among such a cluster to be much in advance of the times? At the same time the government attaches strings to the money, not theirs in the first place, to those who gave it in the first place. And third, I detest the averaging down of expectation and dedication that occurs when thousands of poets are given money in what is really waste and welfare, not art at all. Artists should be left

alone to paint or not to paint, write or not to write. As it is, the world is full of trash. The genuine is lost, and the whole field wallops with political and social distortions.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel the same way about private support of the arts?

AMMONS

Not at all. Everybody who loves the arts should have the liberty to sustain the particular arts he loves, whenever, wherever. If the love and money go to the popular arts, that's the way it should be. If there is an outcry for symphonic performances of the great Bs, then that is what should be addressed. High arts that hang on almost vestigial in a culture should be addressed in their own scope, and I think they would not perish but that genius and energy would burst out whenever it's not already stifled by some blank, some holding grant, some template that just keeps blocking itself out.

INTERVIEWER

Working with you on *The Best American Poetry 1994*, I noticed that you're not exactly overjoyed at the sight of poems that have a political agenda.

AMMONS

It's not because I don't take political and large cultural matters very seriously. There are wrongs to be addressed. There are balances to be restored. The pragmatic merely supports my theoretical position. That is, what good does it do to write a poem about a matter of urgent interest that almost no one reads? In a thousand years, if it is a magnificent, not half-baked poem, enough people will have read the poem to make a difference, but by then, where are the people, what is the issue? A letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine could be read by twenty-five thousand or twenty-five million people. It would seem patently a waste of time not to try the letter.

A more general position has to do with autonomy. One

does not want a poem to *serve* anything; the liberating god of poetry does not endorse servitude. What we want to see a poem do is to become itself, to reach as nearly perfect a state of self-direction and self-responsibility as can be believably represented. We want that for people too.

INTERVIEWER

Your short poems are lyric outbursts, and you've said that they come forth all at once. I know that you write your long poems in increments or passages. These seem in some ways deliberately imperfect—casual, expansive, all-inclusive, loose—in contrast to the shorter lyrics, which are all intensity and compression. Do your long poems entail a different process of writing?

AMMONS

Very different. In the long poem, if there is a single governing image at the center, then anything can fit around it, meanwhile allowing for a lot of fragmentation and discontinuity on the periphery. Short poems, for me, are coherences, single instances on the periphery of a nonspecified center. I revise short poems sometimes for years, whereas, since there is no getting lost in the long poem, I engage whatever comes up in the moment and link it with its moment.

INTERVIEWER

What's your favorite among your long poems, if you have a favorite?

AMMONS

The poem that I like best, parts of it, is *The Snow Poems*. It seems to me in that poem I had a more ready availability to the names of things and to images of them than in any of the other long poems.

INTERVIEWER

Tape for the Turn of the Year has everything to do with the physical circumstances of its composition. You typed it

on an adding-machine tape, and this determined that you would have a poem of some length consisting of short lines and wide margins. I remember your telling me that the finished parts of the tape fell in coils in a wastepaper basket—kind of a forerunner of *Garbage*. Was this a way of reminding yourself not to take yourself too seriously?

AMMONS

Yes. That's great. That's a good connection.

INTERVIEWER

What started you going? How do you decide when to write a long poem like *Tape* or *Garbage*?

AMMONS

In 1963, when I did *Tape*, I had been thinking of having the primary motion of the poem down the page rather than across. The adding-machine tape, less than two inches wide, seemed just right for a kind of breaking and spilling. Variations of emphasis and meaning which make the long horizontal line beautifully jagged and jerky became on the tape the left and right margins. Soon after I started the tape, I noticed resemblances between it and a novel. The point, like and unlike a novel, was to get to the other end; an arbitrary end would also be an "organic" end. The tape itself became the hero, beginning somewhere, taking on aspects and complications, coming to a kind of impasse, then finding some way to conclude. The material itself seemed secondary; it fulfilled its function whether it was good or bad material just by occupying space. In many ways the arbitrary was indistinguishable from the functional.

So with the other long poems, I wrote them when I had a new form to consider, some idea that would play through. *Garbage* came from the sight in passing of a great mound of garbage off the highway in Florida. When I found a single image that could sustain multiplicity, I usually could begin to write.

INTERVIEWER

Were you surprised by the success enjoyed by *Garbage*? The title is a pretty audacious gesture.

AMMONS

I'd paid little attention to *Garbage* after writing it. But there was a real spurt of interest in the first five sections after they appeared in *American Poetry Review*, so I engaged a student to type up the rest of it presentably, and I sent it off to Norton, where my editor surprisingly took it. My hope was to see the resemblances between the high and low of the secular and the sacred. The garbage heap of used-up language is thrown at the feet of poets, and it is their job to make or revamp a language that will fly again. We are brought low through sin and death, and hope that religion can make us new. I used garbage as the material submitted to such possible transformations, and I wanted to play out the interrelationships of the high and the low. Mostly, I wanted something to do at the end of a semester.

INTERVIEWER

How about *Sphere: The Form of a Motion*? You once told me that the subtitle of that poem occurred to you at a Cornell faculty meeting when somebody talked about putting something in "the form of a motion," and you liberated this phrase from its parliamentary context.

AMMONS

That's right. My application of the phrase had nothing to do with such meetings, but that was an interesting place for it to arise from. *Sphere* had the image of the whole earth, then for the first time seen on television, at its center. I guess it was about 1972. There was the orb. And it seemed to me the perfect image to put at the center of a reconciliation of One-Many forces. While I had had sort of philosophical formulations for the One-Many problem before, the earth seemed to be the actual body around which these forces could

best be represented. So when I began *Sphere*, I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to kind of complete that process, that marriage of the One-Many problem with the material earth.

INTERVIEWER

The One-Many problem in philosophy has to do with the nature of reality, whether reality inheres in various things of which there is an infinite supply or whether there is one organizing, unifying principle that unites all the disparate phenomena. Is that a fair summation?

AMMONS

Yes. Another way that I think of it is the difference between focus and comprehensiveness. For example, if you wish to focus on a single point, or statement, to the extent you've purified the location or content of that statement, to that extent you would eliminate the comprehensiveness of things. You would have to leave out a great many things in order to focus on one thing. On the other hand, if you tried to include everything comprehensively, you would lose the focus. You see what I mean? So you have a polarity, a tension between bringing things into a sort of simplified clarity and going back to the wilderness of comprehensiveness, including everything.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel this as a tug of war inside yourself?

AMMONS

An ambivalence, I suppose. Or ambiguity. But somewhere along the line, I don't know just when, it seems to me I was able to manage the multifariousness of things and the unity of things so much more easily than I ever had before. I saw a continuous movement between the highest aspects of unity and the multiplicity of things, and it seemed to function so beautifully that I felt I could turn to any subject matter and know how to deal with it. I would know that there would be isolated facts and perceptions, that it would be possible to

arrange them into propositions, and that these propositions could be included under a higher category of things—so that at some point there might be an almost contentless unity at the top of that sort of hierarchy. I feel that you don't have to know everything to be a master of knowing, but you learn these procedures and then you can turn them toward any subject matter and they come out about the same. I don't know when I saw for myself the mechanism of how it worked for me. Perhaps it was when I stopped using the word *salient* so much and began to use the word *suaion*.

INTERVIEWER

In a few weeks I'm going to be on a panel, a symposium on the question, "What is American about American poetry?" It seems like a good question although not an easy one. How should I answer?

AMMONS

Well, I think that question addresses itself to the past and not to the present or the future.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think poetry has any future?

AMMONS

It has as much future as past—very little.

INTERVIEWER

Could you elaborate on that?

AMMONS

Poetry is everlasting. It is not going away. But it has never occupied a sizable portion of the world's business and probably never will.

INTERVIEWER

It seems that few of your contemporaries strike you as indispensable, with the exception of Ashbery.

AMMONS

Wouldn't that be true of almost any period? Of the great many who write at any time, history has kept track of few.

INTERVIEWER

Who are the few that you hold dearest?

AMMONS

Do I have to answer that? As a peripheral figure myself, I hesitate to comment on the devices of my contemporaries.

INTERVIEWER

I meant from earlier generations.

AMMONS

I would say Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton. I'm not that crazy about Dryden and Pope and the eighteenth century, but I like the Romantics and I like Whitman and Dickinson. That's all. That's enough. Isn't it?

INTERVIEWER

You've said many times that Ashbery is our greatest poet.

AMMONS

Ashbery has changed things for poetry in interesting ways above any other of my contemporaries. I admire almost everyone else equally.

INTERVIEWER

You are often identified as a distinctively American poet.

AMMONS

Do you find that to be true?

INTERVIEWER

Certainly your idiom is American, your conception of the poem, and I would say your relation to poetic tradition seems to me American.

AMMONS

I have tried to get rid of the Western tradition as much as possible. You notice I don't mention anything in my poetry having to do with Europe or where we come from. I never allude to persons or places or events in history. I really do want to begin with a bare space with streams and rocks and trees. I have a little, a tiny poem that says something about the only way you can do anything at all about all of Western culture is to fail to refer to it. And that's what I do. This makes my poetry seem, and maybe it actually is, too extremely noncultural. And perhaps so. I grew up as a farmer and I had at one time a great love for the land because my life and my family and the people around me depended on weather and seasons and farming and seeds and things like that. So my love for this country was and is unlimited. But that's different from a governmental assessment of things, which I believe is basically urban. And it seems to me a poet such as Ashbery who locates himself in the city, which is the dominant culture now, is more representative of the American poet than perhaps I am.

INTERVIEWER

You said you wanted to eliminate Western culture from your poetry. Why?

AMMONS

Well, I sort of disagree with it.

INTERVIEWER

With the Cartesian mind, or with what? The philosophical tradition of the West? The Roman sense of justice?

AMMONS

If I get back to the pre-Socratics, I feel that I'm in the kind of world that I would enjoy being in, but nothing since then. Especially in the last two thousand years, dominated by Christianity and the Catholic church and other religious organizations. I feel more nearly myself aligned with Oriental culture.

INTERVIEWER

I've always been curious about why you've traveled so little. I think you spent a year in Italy.

AMMONS

Three months. We had the traveling fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, which was for a year, but we came back after three months. I lost twenty pounds and I couldn't wait to get home.

INTERVIEWER

You didn't care for the experience of being an expatriate?

AMMONS

I hated it. I'm not interested in all that cultural crap. It was just a waste of time for me.

INTERVIEWER

Maybe this is part of what you were talking about before when you spoke of your rejection of Western culture, by which I take it you mean more specifically a rejection of Europe or of European cultural domination.

AMMONS

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

But it occurred to me that one reason you have traveled very little is . . .

AMMONS

There's no place to go.

INTERVIEWER

There's no place to go?

AMMONS

Yeah, that's a good reason not to travel. Well, I'm interested in the Orient, but I'm really not interested in going there. I'm *not* interested in Europe. I have no interest whatsoever in going there. Every now and then I go to Owego and sometimes I go to Syracuse, sometimes to Geneva, Binghamton—all over the place.

INTERVIEWER

Geneva, New York, rather than Geneva, Switzerland.

AMMONS

Geneva, New York, right.

INTERVIEWER

It occurred to me that another reason might be that you'd already done a considerable journey in going from your origins on the coastal plain of North Carolina to the hills and lakes of central New York state. A critic could spin a parable about the northward progression of your life: from a state that was part of the Confederacy to a university town in . . .

AMMONS

In the Emersonian tradition. In fact there *is* an essay about how I came to the north and took over the Emersonian tradition.

INTERVIEWER

I thought you had decided to become influenced by Emerson only after Bloom told you that you'd been.

AMMONS

That's basically correct, except that I did have a course on Emerson and Thoreau at Wake Forest. The professor was basically a preacher, however, who treated the hour as an occasion for sermonizing. But yes—it's a marriage of the south to the north.

INTERVIEWER

What is?

AMMONS

The movement of my life.

INTERVIEWER

You've spent more time in the north.

AMMONS

Much more. I lived my first twenty-four years in the south. I've been in Ithaca more than thirty years.

INTERVIEWER

Are you conscious of being a southerner here?

AMMONS

I don't hear my own voice, but of course everyone else does and I'm sure they're all conscious of the fact that I'm southern, but I am mostly not conscious of it. In the first years, I was tremendously nostalgic, constantly longing for the south: for one's life, for one's origin, for one's kindred. Now I feel more at home here than I would in the south. But I don't feel at home—I'll never feel at home—anywhere.

—David Lehman

North Carolina Humanities Committee



NEH GRANTS EXEMPLARY AWARD TO NCHC

The North Carolina Humanities Committee has received a special grant of \$48,450 from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a statewide program designed to examine the social history of North Carolina. The grant was made in connection with NEH's exemplary award program for state humanities councils. The Office of Continuing Education at UNC-Charlotte will serve as co-sponsor and state coordinator for the project.

The program, called "The Way We Lived in North Carolina," consists of a comprehensive ten-week series of presentations by prominent historians, readings and discussions in study groups, and guided visits to historic places. Its purpose is to help contemporary North Carolinians understand the development of their state's distinctive social and cultural life. Participants in the study group will read a five-volume text, called "The Way We Lived in North Carolina," which integrates the study of social history with an examination of historic and architectural landmarks and sites.

Lecturers in the program are Peter Wood (Duke University), Harry Watson (UNC-Chapel Hill), Paul Escott (UNC-Charlotte), Jacquelyn Hall (UNC-Chapel Hill), and David Goldfield (UNC-Charlotte). Their talks will address issues concerning contacts between Native Americans and Europeans in the colonial period; independence and freedom as experienced in the early national period following the American Revolution; the consequences of the Civil War in political and social life; industrialization and life in mill villages; and the making of modern North Carolina in the 20th century.

Each lecture will be given in five communities throughout the state. Local scholars from these communities will conduct study groups and lead tours of historic sites that illustrate issues in the lectures and readings. Local sponsors include Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library, High Point Museum, College of the Albemarle, Friends of Haywood County Public Library, and Cumberland County Public Library. The programs begin in September, 1986 and will continue through November, 1987.

According to Lynne V. Cheney, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, "the purpose of the exemplary awards is to encourage the efforts of state humanities councils to provide programs that are substantive, compelling, and appropriate to local needs." NEH recognized exemplary programs in ten states in 1986 with grants totalling nearly \$550,000.

ALBEMARLE REGION TARGETED FOR PUBLIC PROGRAMS

At its June, 1986 meeting, the North Carolina Humanities Committee agreed to initiate a targeted program in the north-eastern region of the state, historically known as the Albemarle. The Committee will encourage sponsorship of public humanities programs in this region during the next year and will offer special consultation and planning assistance to any eligible sponsor located in or addressing issues or themes that concern this region. In addition, sponsors who develop projects for statewide distribution will be encouraged to schedule programs at locations within the Albemarle region. Proposals must meet the criteria of all programs funded by NCHC with special regard to the centrality of the humanities and aimed at out-of-school adult audiences. A project advisory committee made up of civic and educational leaders from the Albemarle region are assisting the Committee to identify potential program sponsors, develop issues for public programs, and evaluate programs funded by NCHC. Examples of themes that could be developed for programs include regional and local history; literature and folklore; changes in families and communities; and implications of economic development.



NCHC's STATE HUMANITIES CONFERENCE featured a tribute to poet A.R. Ammons on May 10, 1986. Highlights of the conference were a lecture by literary critic Helen Vendler, discussion groups led by North Carolina poets and scholars, and an interview and discussion (above) between (left to right) Emily H. Wilson of Salem College, A.R. Ammons, and Wayne Pond of the National Humanities Center. The conference ended with Ammons reading several of his poems and a reception at the home of Tom Litzenburg, president of Salem College. An interview with Ammons can be heard on "Soundings" on many public radio stations on November 9, 1986.

The North Carolina Humanities Committee

Janice Faulkner, Chairperson
Greenville
Katherine Y. Armitage
Waynesville
Donald L. Baker
Durham
John J. Beck
Kenansville
Joseph R. Brooks
Greensboro
Maggie Bushnell
High Point
James C. Cannon
Dillsboro
John R. Dykers
Siler City
John Griffith
Davidson
Jacqueline Heston
Williamston
Suellen M. Hoy
Raleigh

Ruth G. Kennedy
Durham
John W. Kuykendall
Davidson
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James McGowan
Wilmington
Sydney Nathans
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Matty Reed
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Joan Stewart
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Wilbur N. Thomas
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DEADLINES FOR PROPOSALS

October 1
for projects beginning after
November 15

February 1
for projects beginning after
March 15

June 1
for projects beginning after
July 15

Draft proposals due
1 month prior to deadline.

NEW MEMBERS ELECTED TO NCHC

Donald Baker, Todd Savitt, and Judith White have begun serving terms as members of the North Carolina Humanities Committee in June, 1986. Brief biographies of these new members appear below. Profiles of members appointed by Governor Martin will appear in the next issue of the newsletter. Anyone interested in serving on the Committee or in nominating someone to serve is encouraged to contact the NCHC office for further information. A general call for nominations will appear in the next newsletter.

Donald Baker received an M.A. from North Carolina Central University. In recent years, he has served as an Associate Professor of Radio and Television at Shaw University in Raleigh. He also coordinated the Radio/Television Department and directed the campus radio station, WSHA-FM. He has shown his interest in the humanities by developing literature for radio theatre programs for children, and has worked on many public radio programs for general audiences. He was employed by the state to advise and assist minority businesses in his community, and has volunteered his services to several radio stations in his area. He is a member of the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People.



Donald Baker



Todd Savitt

Todd L. Savitt is Associate Professor of Medical Humanities in the School of Medicine and Associate Professor of History at East Carolina University. He attended the University of Rochester School of Medicine (1965-68), received M.A. (1970) and Ph.D. (1975) degrees in history from the University of Virginia, and studied history of medicine and history of science at Duke University from 1974-1976. He taught history and medical humanities at the University of Florida from 1976 to 1982. He has written primarily on the history of black health and black medical education in the United States. *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* appeared in 1978, and the *Dictionary of American Medical Biography* (of which he was co-editor) in 1984.

Judith White has a Ph.D. in English from the University of Virginia, and is presently teaching English and humanities at Queens College in Charlotte. Previously, Judith was the Director of the Woman's Resource Center at UNCG and has written several articles on subjects related to women's issues including women and the humanities. She has experience as a project director for projects for the NCHC, the U.S. Department of Education, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, and the National Science Foundation. Judith is a member of many professional groups, such as the National Women's Studies Association and the Education Task Force—Women and NC Law (N.C. Council on the Status of Women).



Judith White

DISCUSSION AND THE GOALS OF HUMANITIES PROJECTS: AN OBSERVATION

by Nancy King

Nancy M.P. King, JD, holds appointments in the medical school and the law school of UNC-Chapel Hill, teaching about ethical and legal issues in medicine. She recently directed a public program on the role of doctors in American society and has evaluated several programs as a member of NCHC's Advisory Board for the Program on Medicine and Society.

Many humanities projects incorporate small group discussion sessions into their programs. As we all know from our own experience of discussions in many settings, when they work well they are very, very good but when they work badly—which happens too often—they are awkward and disappointing. A failed discussion in a humanities project can undermine the impact of other parts of the program and leave an audience frustrated and unsettled.

In the Medicine and Society Program projects in which I have taken part, I have noted that imperfect discussions have often been directed by the audience's need and desire for *self-affirmation*. Both health professionals and patients seek in discussion to validate their own health care experiences in the face of preceding presentations by "experts:" to tell their own stories, to give their own opinions, to have their own worthwhileness acknowledged by the group.

This is not to say that self-affirmation is not a worthy goal for discussion. It often seems, however, that once this goal is established in a group, movement toward other goals becomes threatening. Discussions are often begun with the introductory question: "Who are you and why are you here today?" From there it seems natural to begin to talk further together by examining some of the perspectives put forward in answer to that question. However, if no other groundwork is laid, this sort of probing is easily seen as a challenge, not to the ideas so expressed but to the *person expressing them*, because the ideas emerged from what began as a self-affirming exercise. (For example, when a discussion group member answers the question by saying "I'm a physician's wife and I'm here because I think it's unfair that people want their doctors to be perfect," the group could usefully examine the possibility of a symbiotic relationship between patients' expectations and physicians' understanding of those expectations and of their own image. This may mean suggesting that there are things about those expectations that physicians like or even encourage patients to want, an observation that the speaker may perceive as threatening.)

If we wish discussion to move beyond the self-affirmation of individual group members, we must first identify the discussion's other goals. Like any event or activity—whether concert, lecture, or sports event—Humanities Committee projects have more than one goal. The three goals I believe necessary for success are: learning, pleasure, and self-affirmation. Learning may seem a pretty obvious goal; after all, it is the major purpose of a humanities project, isn't it? But part of my point is that humanities projects are not different from other events in their dependence for success upon satisfaction of all three of these things. Learning is not merely the acquisition of new knowledge; it is the activity of taking thought forward, which also encompasses the application and exercise of skills already acquired. Thus defined, learning is an important component of things like sports and entertainment, as well as of the activities more commonly associated with learning.

The second goal is pleasure, in an aesthetic sense: "This is lovely" rather than "I feel pleasure." It is easy to see the place of pleasure in most events and activities. We know that an uncomfortable meeting room can derail a project, and that particularly graceful imagery in a lecture can be very fruitful for a discussion. Most of us experience

such an aesthetic delight in learning, which closely relates these two goals even though they remain separate.

Because self-affirmation is self-focused, it is crucially unlike these two goals. Learning and pleasure require a kind of trusting abandon where one ceases to concentrate directly on one's self in order to concentrate on the thing examined. A kind of leap outside oneself is necessary. The self becomes an *instrument* for learning and appreciation, rather than the sole object of attention, and thus enables us each to look beyond ourselves in order to reach each other. But when self-affirmation emerges as a goal of discussion, it tends to stop that discussion dead in its tracks.

The key is not to eliminate self-affirmation as a program goal but to, first, find the proper place for it in a given program and, second, ensure that the other two goals are well met so that self-affirmation is not something that discussion groups will fall back on in default of other tools and directions. A well-managed discussion session can be a place for telling one's story, and telling one's story—that is, using, translating, and sharing one's own experience with others—is a vital part of the learning process. A discussion session that focuses on storytelling could move from there into a discussion designed to trace relationships between the stories just presented and other parts of the program, in order to keep going forward.

Because discussion is often viewed as the part of the program where the community gets to have its say, it often happens that the discussion session is not really *planned*; we have a kind of faith that the community will know what to do with the allotted time. But in order that a discussion group does not just head for self-affirmation and stop there, the project director must be bold about steering discussion beyond it. This requires project directors to exhibit an understanding of and assertiveness about project expectations and goals that many have been content to seek only from the "experts," the humanities scholars. Of course, this boldness raises directly the possibility of failure, because the declaration of a goal invites comparison with what actually happens. Yet in the absence of such declaration and leadership, failure may be all but inevitable.

Setting a goal or goals for discussion (and relating them to overall project goals) means facing the fact that engaging any audience in effective discussion is supremely difficult. What is needed is a discussion that will enable group members to achieve self-affirmation *through learning and exchange with others*. This means providing the group with tools for learning that they can use. For a community audience to successfully make the transition from self-affirmation to learning together requires a program that presents ideas and a discussion group that can take ideas forward. Discussion group leaders must be more than referees; they must be able to step back and steer, help draw connections between the different kinds of experiences; ask questions that invite deeper probing and comparison, facilitate the movement from example to idea and back again. A discussion group needs a clear agenda: not an agenda of conclusions but a plan of exploration, a territory to explore, and an atmosphere that supports the group members' recognition that they already have the tools for learning and can derive both pleasure and personal satisfaction from using them together.

NEW CHAIRMAN APPOINTED AT NEH

Dr. Lynne V. Cheney was unanimously confirmed as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities by the U.S. Senate on May 21, 1986.

Mrs. Cheney was most recently a senior editor of *The Washingtonian* Magazine and is a widely published author. She is a member of the Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, to which she was appointed in April 1985 by President Reagan.

Cheney is a native of Wyoming. She attended Colorado College, where she earned her bachelor's degree, then went to the University of Colorado, where she earned her master's degree in 1964. She received a doctoral degree, with a specialty in nineteenth-century British literature, from the University of Wisconsin in 1970.

Since that time, Cheney has worked as teacher and writer, serving on the faculties of Northern Virginia Community College, the University of Wyoming, and George Washington University. She has written many articles which have appeared in national publications, including *American Heritage* and *Smithsonian* magazines, and has worked as a researcher/writer for the public television show "Inside Washington." She is the author of two novels, *Executive Privilege* and *Sisters*, and the co-author, with her husband, Representative Richard Cheney (R-WY), of *Kings of the Hill*, a history of the House of Representatives.



Lynne V. Cheney

MAY WE HELP?

The North Carolina Humanities Committee staff can help you to develop an educational program. We won't design it for you, but we can help your organization to do so. If you have some ideas about the use of the humanities in educational activities for adults, call us and we'll arrange to visit with you (919-334-5325) — or mail the coupon at right and we'll call you. Upcoming deadlines for grant proposals are: October 1, 1986; February 1, 1987; and June 1, 1987.

- ☐ Please send me a project planning packet.
☐ Please ask a NCHC staff member to contact me.

Clip and Mail to:

Brent D. Glass
Executive Director, NCHC
112 Foust Bldg., UNC-G
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North Carolina Humanities Committee



FAULKNER ELECTED CHAIR



Janice Faulkner

The North Carolina Humanities Committee has elected Janice Faulkner to serve as chairperson. Ms. Faulkner has been a member of the Committee since 1983 and has served as vice-chair since 1984. She will begin her two-year term on June 1. She is director of the Regional Development Institute at East Carolina University in Greenville. A native of Martin County, she received both her

B.S. and M.A. degrees from East Carolina University and has been affiliated with the university in various capacities since 1957. She has taught English on the high school and college levels and has held several administrative positions including Director of Alumni Affairs. Among her publications are two English textbooks as well as numerous articles on folklore, local history, and historic preservation. She has also been very active in state and local Democratic Party politics and in local historic preservation activities. Succeeding Ms. Faulkner as vice-chair will be Ruel W. Tyson, Associate Professor of Religion at UNC-Chapel Hill.

MEDICINE AND SOCIETY PROGRAM RECEIVES ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

The Duke Endowment and the Kate B. Reynolds Health Care Trust have awarded the North Carolina Humanities Committee grants of \$72,000 and \$30,000 respectively to continue the Carolina's Program on Medicine and Society in 1986. The program is sponsoring community education for health care professionals and the general public on a wide range of issues commonly called "medical ethics." The National Endowment for the Humanities has also approved an allocation of \$25,000 from its annual grant to the Committee to support this program. Initial funding for the program came last year from The Duke Endowment with matching support from the Humanities Committee. The Duke Endowment, created in 1924, and the Reynolds Health Care Trust, created in 1946, are foundations that have made major commitments to improving health care for citizens in North Carolina. For more information on the Carolina's Program on Medicine and Society, call Alice Barkley at 919-379-5325.

NEW MEMBERS APPOINTED, ELECTED

Governor James Martin has appointed four new members to the North Carolina Humanities Committee. They are John Griffith, Vice President for Development, Davidson College; John Kuykendall, President, Davidson College; Richard Levy, President, HBD, Inc. in Greensboro; and Mattye Reed, Curator of the African Heritage Center, North Carolina A. and T. University. Each appointee will serve a term that coincides with that of the Governor, who is allowed to make four appointments out of the twenty-four members serving on the Committee.

At its February meeting, the Committee reelected three members who were serving out unexpired terms. They are Joseph Brooks (Greensboro), Maggie Bushnell (High Point), and Bev Smalls (Wilmington). Two new members elected to four-year terms are Donald Baker (Durham) and Judith White (Charlotte). Todd Savitt (Greenville) has been elected to fill a one-year unexpired term. Biographical profiles of the new members and of the governor's appointees will appear in future editions of the NCHC Newsletter.

"THE HOME COUNTRY OF A.R. AMMONS" is the theme of the first state humanities conference sponsored by the North Carolina Humanities Committee. The conference will be held on May 10 at Salem College. See page 3 and a special insert for more details.

The North Carolina Humanities Committee

Joseph Mann, *Chairman*
Raleigh
Katherine Y. Armitage
Waynesville
John J. Beck
Kenansville
Joseph R. Brooks
Greensboro
Margaret Bushnell
High Point
James C. Cannon, Jr.
Dillsboro
Blanche R. Curry
Durham
John R. Dykers
Siler City
Janice Faulkner
Greenville
Ellen W. Gerber
High Point

John Griffith
Davidson
Jacqueline Heston
Williamston
Suelen M. Hoy
Raleigh
Ruth G. Kennedy
Durham
John Kuykendall
Davidson
Richard Levy
Greensboro
James K. McGowan
Wilmington
Sydney Nathans
Durham
Matty Reed
Greensboro
Beverly E. Smalls
Wilmington

Joan Hinde Stewart
Raleigh
Father Wilbur N. Thomas
Charlotte
Ruel Tyson
Chapel Hill
Robert F. Yeager
Swannanoa

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Program Associate:
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Administrative Associate:
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March 15

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1 month prior to deadline.

Executive Director's Message

"A SURGICAL DELETION"

A friend told me about a family member who had a leg amputated because of circulation problems. "The odd thing was," she observed, "the doctors never used the word 'amputation.' They called it a 'surgical deletion.'"

Under any circumstances, I would have winced at this clumsy attempt to describe a tragic human experience in the guise of "professional" language. However, in recent months I have become especially attuned to the problems and issues surrounding the practice of medicine. A year ago, I reported in this newsletter about the establishment of the Carolina's Program on Medicine and Society, co-sponsored by the North Carolina Humanities Committee and The Duke Endowment during 1985 with the Katherine B. Reynolds Health Care Trust joining us for a second year of programming in 1986.

The local programs we have sponsored in the past year have differed widely in their content and format. They have all attempted to respond in some way to the concerns of the communities in which they take place. Despite these differences, there is a common theme that unites these local efforts: the anxiety we experience in talking about medicine, illness, and disease is due in part to our tendency to think about these subjects as purely scientific, technical, or even legal questions. What is emerging in these programs is the recognition that "medical ethics" really concern issues of values and beliefs, what we mean when we try to talk about what it is to be human.

How we talk about these issues is as important as resolving the issues themselves. That point came home to me again and again when I participated in one of the Medicine and Society programs offered through Duke University's Office of Continuing Education and the School of Medicine. The program, entitled "Finding Medical Ethics in Literature," consisted of five weekly seminars, assigned readings, and films. Thirty-five citizens — doctors, nurses, social workers, ministers, medical students, a barber, a chemist and several others — registered for the program. We read selections from Alice Walker, Eudora Welty, William Carlos Williams, Anton Chekhov, George Orwell, and Judith Guest. We saw the film "Whose Life is it Anyway?" and we heard a stirring keynote address by Robert Coles. Mostly, we talked. We talked about the stories we read, about our personal experiences, and about the vast complexities that emerge whenever the subject of medical ethics is raised. We discovered in these discussions that

our attitudes about the practice of medicine were linked closely to what we thought about several other significant issues such as poverty, bureaucracy, mental health, suicide, and the quality of medical education. We also confronted some important human values such as privacy, autonomy, and justice. I do not recall developing a single rule or ethical law as a result of these weekly meetings. I did feel, however, a growing sense of confidence within the group that we could discuss these issues, that we were capable of such dialogue without an advanced education, and, most important, that we needed as citizens to take responsibility that these discussions take place on a regular basis in our community. When one participant complained that we did not reach any conclusions in our programs, our instructor, Jeremy Sugarman offered the comment that "ethics is communication," that the role of ethics is to develop a way of talking about things that matter most to us. The stories we had read and conversations we held allowed us to reach across many barriers — race, gender, age, occupation, income, education — and to use language to enhance meaning rather than to obscure it as we do when we call an amputation a "surgical deletion."

The conversations we had at Duke University were the beginning stages in the creation of what Elizabeth Minnich calls "a moral community." Dr. Minnich, a philosopher living in Charlotte who is working with a Medicine and Society program in that city, has written that medical ethics involves making "hard choices that we can live with." Reaching a consensus about these choices is not a one-time proposition. It involves sustained efforts and continuous participation by citizens at all levels of community life. I am pleased that the NCHC has initiated these conversations in several parts of the state. Programs have been completed in Durham, Charlotte, Greensboro, and Siler City. The conversation continues later this year in Chapel Hill, Greenville, Asheville, Spartanburg, and in a dozen small towns where nurses will compare the language of the American Nurses Association Code for Nurses with the realities of the ethical choices they have to live with daily.

To cause people to think critically about significant issues is one of the enduring roles of the humanities. Through the Carolina's Program on Medicine and Society we hope to achieve that goal through dialogue between scholars, health care professionals, and the general public and to encourage a sense of responsibility for "the moral community" throughout the state.

The North Carolina
Humanities Committee
Invites You To

**THE HOME COUNTRY
OF A.R. AMMONS**



A.R. Ammons

MAY 10, 1986
SALEM COLLEGE
WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

THE 'HOME COUNTRY' OF A.R. AMMONS

May 10, 1986

- 11:00 a.m. Registration and coffee: Lobby, Fine Arts Center, Salem College
- 12:00 noon Lunch by reservation: Club Dining Room Refectory, Salem College
- 1:30 p.m. A.R. AMMONS: DWELLING IN THE FLOW OF SHAPES
**A tribute by Dr. Helen Vendler, Professor of English, Harvard University
- Break
- 3:00 p.m. WHAT KIND OF COUNTRY IS THIS ANYWAY
*Small-group discussions of the poetry of A.R. Ammons, Main Hall
- 5:00 p.m. Dinner Break
- 7:00 p.m. IT'S CONVENIENT TO VISIT
A conversation with A.R. Ammons and Wayne J. Pond, National Humanities Center
- 8:00 p.m. BRINGING HOME A SHEAF OF LIGHT
Poetry reading by A.R. Ammons

Reception at the President's home:
Tom and Jayne Litzenberg, hosts
723 S. Main Street
Old Salem

- *Small group discussion leaders:
- Doyle Fosso, Wake Forest University
 - Louise Gossett, Salem College
 - William Harmon, UNC-Chapel Hill
 - Michael McFee, Durham, N.C.
 - Patsy Perry, North Carolina Central University
 - Shelby Stephenson, Pembroke State University

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

The NCHC conference will convene with lunch on May 10, 1986. A \$10 registration fee includes lunch and printed materials. Luncheon reservations will be limited to the first 90 registrants and must be made by May 1. Those attending only the afternoon sessions will be charged \$3.00 for printed materials. Confirmation of your registration is receipt of Issue #18 of the "Pembroke Magazine," devoted to A. R. Ammons. No registration is required for the evening program.

A block of rooms will be held until 6 p.m. on May 10th at the Old Salem Holiday Inn, (919-725-8561), for those who wish to make overnight accommodations.

NORTH CAROLINA HUMANITIES COMMITTEE CONFERENCE

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

☐ I plan to attend "The 'Home Country' of A. R. Ammons"

There will be _____ in my party.

Additional names _____

Make checks payable to:

NCHC

112 Foust Building

UNCG

Greensboro, North Carolina

27412

(919) 379-5325

Please find enclosed my check for \$_____ @ \$10 per person.

Please find enclosed my check for \$_____ @ \$3 per person.



Helen Vendler

COME TO THE "HOME COUNTRY:" A NORTH CAROLINA HUMANITIES COMMITTEE CONFERENCE

by Emily Wilson

As if by luck, or fate, or happy accident, A. R. Ammons turned sixty years old at the same time the North Carolina Humanities Committee was talking about a way to recognize fourteen years of public humanities programs and the significance of the humanities for our day-to-day ordinary life. "The Home Country of A. R. Ammons" which will take place at Salem College in Winston-Salem on Saturday May 10 is a tribute to North Carolina's nationally known poet and is the first state humanities conference sponsored by the North Carolina Humanities Committee.

Ammons has a close association with North Carolina. In 1926 he was born in Whiteville; attended New Hope School in Columbus County, came home from the war to be a student at Wake Forest College, where he received the bachelor's degree; married and taught at Hatteras. Since settling down in Ithaca, New York, on the English faculty at Cornell University, he has returned to North Carolina often to see family and friends.

While Ammons has been widely known through his eighteen publications and laudatory reviews and analyses by major American critics and while he has kept and made many friends in North Carolina, he has carefully avoided the public limelight both at home and abroad. In fact, Ammons is a shy public man who lets his poems speak for him — except when he feels comfortable among friends. And that is precisely where we hope to place him on May 10. In return for an affectionate and attentive audience, Ammons has promised to give for us one of his rare public readings. If you will join us May 10 in Winston-Salem, you will be a participant in an important literary and cultural event which we hope will give you a better understanding not only of a poet and his poetry but of the poet's place in our society and the significance of poetry in your life and in the life of Ammons' home country — North Carolina.

To honor Ammons' achievement we have invited one of America's most outstanding critics: Helen Vendler of the Department of English at Harvard University. Vendler has written admiringly and insightfully about Ammons' work and was an enthusiastic respondent to our invitation to place him in the landscape of American poetry and to work on selected poems which will give us new ways to think about the mean-

ing of **home** and **country** in "home country."

For some thirty years Archie Ammons has been publishing poetry which is certain to survive in the history of American literature and to place him in the ranks of the best twentieth century poets. More than recognizing a reputation on this visit to "The Home Country of A. R. Ammons," we seek to understand, experience, and enjoy his poetry much in the manner of which Helen Vendler speaks when she says

Ammons's lines rivet us where we stand and we find ourselves uttering them as though our own life had suddenly found its outlet - speech.

If you already know Ammons' work you will welcome this chance to hear it discussed and especially to hear him read. If you have not yet encountered Ammons the man and Ammons the poet, this is a chance not to be missed.

The day will begin at noon with lunch at the Club Dining Room of the Salem Refectory. Please make your plans now to attend and return the enclosed form to us no later than May 1. We'll confirm your registration by sending you a copy of Issue #18 of *Pembroke Magazine* (to be used in small group discussions) and a map directing you to Salem College.

In the afternoon, small group discussions will be led by teachers from throughout North Carolina: Doyle Fosso, Wake Forest University; Louise Gossett, Salem College; Michael McFee, Durham, N.C.; Patsy Perry, North Carolina Central University; and Shelby Stephenson, Pembroke State University. These informal groups are meant to give each participant a time to read some individual Ammons poems, to hear them discussed, and to discuss them with their fellow North Carolinians.

After dinner, we will assemble to hear a conversation between Ammons and Wayne Pond, who conducts interviews for "Soundings," a radio program broadcast on National Public Radio from the National Humanities Center. Pond will introduce a variety of topics for the poet's commentary. Immediately after this conversation, Ammons will read. And then participants are invited to celebrate with a party in the yard of the Salem College President.

We are unabashedly proud of our first Humanities Conference: A. R. Ammons at Home in North Carolina.

Emily Wilson is a poet and a member of the English Department of Salem College.



CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to the Independent Scholars Association of the North Carolina Triangle for receiving a second place award from the National University Continuing Education Association in the area of creative programming for its lecture, exhibit, and mini-course entitled "Women and War." The project examined the effect of war upon the lives of women as reflected in the disciplines of history, literature, religion, and cross cultural studies. Funding for the program came from the NCHC and assistance for developing the eight-week series came from the Office of Continuing Education at Duke University. The program took place in Durham in 1985 and is being repeated for audiences in Sanford in the spring of 1986.

NEH FUNDING

NEH FUNDING for the North Carolina Humanities Committee has been established at \$360,000 for FY 1986. An additional \$72,000 is available to match gifts that are made to the Committee on behalf of public humanities programming in the state. While the basic grant to the Committee is slightly lower than last year, the matching fund allocation has increased so that the overall amount of funds available for grants is roughly the same as last year.

MAY WE HELP?

The North Carolina Humanities Committee staff can help you to develop an educational program. We won't design it for you, but we can help your organization to do so. If you have some ideas about the use of the humanities in educational activities for adults, call us and we'll arrange to visit with you (919-379-5325) — or mail the coupon at right and we'll call you. Upcoming deadlines for grant proposals are: June 1, 1986; October 1, 1986; and February 1, 1987.

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- ☐ Please contact me to arrange for a visit by a NCHC staff member.

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Executive Director, NCHC
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#4517

A. R. AMMONS PAPERS
Inventory

Abstract: North Carolina poet A. R. Ammons (1926-), who, since 1961, has been on the English faculty of Cornell University.

Letters from Ammons to his sister, Vida Ammons Cox; letters from Ammons to poet William Harmon of the English Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; writings by Ammons, including poems and a World War II journal; photographs; and other items relating to Ammons. The Cox letters chiefly relate to family affairs and to Ammons's life while a student at the University of California at Berkeley and teacher in the Hatteras (N.C.) public school system; the Harmon letters chiefly deal with literary matters and with Ammons's college teaching career. There are also other Ammons materials.

Online Catalog Terms:

Ammons, A. R., 1926-
Berkeley (Calif.)--Social life and customs.
Cornell University--Faculty.
Cox, Vida Ammons, b. ca. 1925.
Family--North Carolina--Social life and customs.
Harmon, William, 1938-
Hatteras (N.C.)--Social life and customs.
Poets, American--Correspondence.
University of California at Berkeley--Students.
World War, 1939-1945--Personal narratives.

Size: About 310 items (0.5 linear feet).

Provenance: Purchased from Vida Ammons Cox of Clarkton, N.C., in April 1988; received from William Harmon of Chapel Hill, N.C., in May 1988, December 1991 (Acc. 91010 and 92004), and December 1992 (Acc. 93014); received from Laurence Avery in February 1992 (Acc. 92029).

Access: No restrictions.

Copyright: Retained by the authors of items in these papers, or their descendants, as stipulated by United States copyright law.

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INTRODUCTION

Biographical Note

A. R. Ammons was born in Whiteville, North Carolina, in 1926. He served as a sonar operator aboard the U.S.S. Gunason during World War II, traveling widely through the South Pacific. Returning to North Carolina, Ammons attended Wake Forest University, from which he received a B.S. degree in 1949. After a year as principal of Hatteras (North Carolina) Elementary School, Ammons and his wife Phyllis headed west, where Ammons did graduate work in English at the University of California at Berkeley until 1952.

Starting in 1952 and continuing into the early 1960s, Ammons worked for Freidrich & Dimmock, Inc., a New Jersey laboratory glassware manufacturing company. During this time, his poetry gained increasing acceptance. He left his manufacturing career in 1961 for a position on the English faculty at Cornell University. In 1971, he became a full professor, and, in 1973, Goldwin Smith professor of poetry.

Ammons has received many awards, among them the National Book Award for Poetry (1973), the Bollingen Prize in Poetry (1974), and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry (1981). Besides frequent publication in literary journals, Ammons has published many books, received numerous honorary degrees, and been the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Award.

Collection Overview

The division between papers purchased from Vida Ammons Cox and those received from William Harmon has been preserved. Subcollection 1 is the Vida Ammons Cox material; the William Harmon materials are in Subcollection 2. Both subcollections are composed chiefly of letters from Ammons. There is little overlap in content among the letters housed in the two subcollections, however, because those in Subcollection 1 deal chiefly with family affairs and those in Subcollection 2 with literary matters. Subcollection 3 contains materials relating to Ammons and others.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Subcollection 1. Materials purchased from Vida Ammons Cox

Letters from and to A. R. Ammons, chiefly to Vida Ammons Cox; writings of Ammons, including a journal of his naval experiences during World War II and poems; letters to Vida Cox about A. R.

Ammons; papers relating to Ammons's poetry readings and speaking engagements; and pictures, chiefly photographs of A. R. Ammons.

Series 1. Correspondence of A.R. Ammons

Subseries 1.1. Letters from A.R. Ammons

1944-1973 and undated. About 200 items.

Arrangement: chronological.

Chiefly letters from A.R. Ammons (Archie) to his sister Vida Ammons Cox of Clarkton, North Carolina. Early letters describe Ammons's struggles to establish himself as a poet; later letters document his success.

1944-1946.

Letters from Ammons during his tour of duty in the United States Navy. Letters in 1944 are from Camp Peary (Williamsburg, Virginia); those from January 1945 to February 1945 are from the Fleet Sonar School (Key West, Florida); and those from May 1945 to January 1946 are from aboard the U.S.S. Gunason. The letters include vivid descriptions of islands in the South Pacific; Ammons's loneliness aboard ship; and, after the lifting of censorship regulations late in 1945, his training and duties as a sonar operator. They also contain advice to Vida about men, marriage, and her career in nursing. (See also Series 2 for journal kept aboard the Gunason.)

Folder 1	1944
2	January - May 1945
3	June 1945 - 1946

1949-1964

Letters from September 1949 to April 1950 document Ammons's duties at Hatteras (N.C.) Elementary School. Ammons married Phyllis Plumbo on 26 November 1949, and letters after that date often discuss his adjustment to married life. After a short stay in Ventnor, New Jersey, the Ammonses moved to Berkeley, California. From late 1950 to May 1952, Ammons did graduate work in English at the University of California at Berkeley. Letters from these years contain Ammons's reflections on his academic work and growing confidence in his writing abilities. The Ammonses spent July to mid-February of 1951 back in New Jersey, where Ammons worked for Friedrich & Dimmock, Inc., a laboratory glass manufacturing company owned by his father-in-law.

The Ammonses returned to Berkeley in February 1951, but, by September 1952, they were back in New Jersey with Ammons again working for Friedrich & Dimmock. In 1956, Ammons was promoted to executive vice-president of the glass firm. Ammons's poetry gained increasing acceptance during this period; from the mid-1950s on, he frequently commented on the publication of poems and reviews of his work in various journals. In 1963, Ammons received an offer from Cornell University to join the English faculty, but no further information about the job is given until 1965, when he was already on staff there.

The letter of 27 April 1960 discusses Ammons meeting with William Carlos Williams; letters of 13 and 31 October 1960 relate to Guy Owen; those in August 1961 describe Ammons's experience at the Breadloaf Writers Conference, where Howard Nemerov read some of Ammons's poetry.

Folder	4	1949
	5	January - April 1950
	6	May - December 1950
	7	1951
	8	January - May 1952
	9	June 1952 - December 1953
	10	1954 - 1955
	11	1956
	12	1957
	13	1958
	14	1959
	15	1960
	16	1961
	17	1962 - 1964

1965-1973

Ammons finally returned to Berkeley in the summer of 1965, but in a letter dated 23 July 1965 he complained about not being able to get back into "the art of studying." By this time, he had apparently accepted the teaching position at Cornell. Letters beginning in September 1965 discuss Ammons's work at Cornell and continuing success as a writer. The letter of 27 September 1969 in particular lays out Ammons's reactions to his growing popularity.

Folder	18	1965 - 1966
	19	1967
	20	1968 - 1969
	21	1970 - 1973

Subseries 1.2. Letters to A.R. Ammons

1949-1988. 5 items.

Arrangement: chronological.

Notification of Ammons's employment in the Hatteras (N.C.) Public Schools (1949); notice of a credit to Ammons's account with the Waccamaw Bank & Trust Company of Clarkton, North Carolina (1952); letters from the Yale Review and Poetry, both expressing interest in Ammons's work (1988); and a note (1988) from Ken [Frazzelle?] that includes musical notation for a passage from *Worldly Hopes* (1985).

Folder 22

Series 2. "Log of the U.S.S. Gunason"

1945-1946. 1 item.

Photocopy of typed transcription of journal kept by Ammons aboard the U.S.S. Gunason from March 1945 to May 1946 (51 pages).

(See also letters from this period in Subseries 1.1.)

Folder 23

Series 3. Poems

11 items.

"Canto 38" (mimeographed copy of typescript)

"A Complete Life" (typescript with autograph revisions)

"The Damned" (typescript with autograph revisions)

"The Incomplete Life" (typescript with autograph revisions)

"Rosalie" (galley)
"Stirring Early" (typescript)
"Telltale/The Elite Meet" (typescript with autograph revisions)
"The Way Things Go Wrong" (typescript)
"The Way Things Go Wrong," 2nd and 3rd drafts (typescript with autograph revisions)
"What Was That Again" (typescript with autograph revisions)
"Withywinds" (typescript with autograph revisions)

Folder 24

(NOTE: See also poems attached as enclosures in the following letters:

Subcollection 1, Subseries 1.1:

10 January 1960	"Canto 7"
	"Canto 10"
31 October 1960	"Moon of harvest--moon of reaping"
15 May 1967	"The Little Him"
16 April 1969	"Periphery"; "Clarity"; "Snow Log"; "Classic"; "Upland"

Subcollection 2, Series 1:

15 December 1975	"Near dusk, approaching"
27 October 1986	"The High Desiring"
undated	"Zero and Then Some"; "The Spiral Rag" "The Fairly High Assimilation Rag"

Series 4. Letters to Vida Ammons Cox about A.R. Ammons

1971-1986. 4 items.

Arrangement: chronological.

Letters chiefly relating to honors bestowed upon A.R. Ammons.

Folder 25

Series 5. Other Papers

1949-1986 and undated. 15 items.

Clippings about Ammons and posters or other items relating to Ammons's poetry readings and speaking engagements.

Folder 26

Series 6. Pictures

P-4517/1-2	A.R. Ammons as a child
/3-9	A.R. Ammons, chiefly from the 1940s
/10	A.R. Ammons and Vida Ammons Cox, 1940s
/11-13	A.R. Ammons with unidentified others, 1940s
/14	Cape Hatteras Ferry dock, 1950s
/15	Ammons's car, [1950s?]

Subcollection 2. Materials received from William Harmon

Letters from Ammons to William Harmon at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and letters to Harmon about Ammons.

Series 1. Letters from A.R. Ammons to William Harmon

1972-1992 and undated. About 60 items.

Arrangement: chronological.

Letters contain much information on the progress of Ammons's writing career. There are many musings on the nature of poetry and some discussion of the technical aspects of writing. Most letters are fairly chatty in style.

Folder 27	1972 - 1975
28	1976 - 1978
29	1979 - 1984
30	1985 - 1992
31	Undated, including many poems

Series 2. Letters to William Harmon about A.R. Ammons
1976-1986. 6 items.
Arrangement: chronological.

Letters and other materials relating to Ammons and to Harmon's lectures on and reviews of Ammons's work.

Folder 32

Subcollection 3. Other Materials
1989. 1 item.

Letter from Ammons to Laurence Avery.

Folder 33

SHELF LIST

Box 1 (only)

Items separated:
Subcollection 1, Series 6: Pictures□

Order for Baptist

Holder, Alan . A. R. Ammons Boston : Twayne
1978 179 pp.

PS . 3501

M6

Z8

Wright, Stuart J. - A. R. Ammons : a bibliography,
1954-1979.

Ref
28032.54

W7X

Current Biography

Charles Moritz, Editor

Associate Editors: Evelyn Lohr, Henry Sloan, Kieran Dugan, Judith Graham

Assistant Editor: Edward Tallman

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Cover: Nancy Landon Kassebaum

(Photo: Wide World)

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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Current Biography (published every month except December) presents articles on people who are prominent in the news—in national and international affairs, the sciences, the arts, labor, and industry. Sources of information are newspapers, magazines, books, and, in some cases, the biographees themselves. It should be pointed out, however, that these are objective rather than authorized biographies. At the end of the year the articles in the monthly issues are cumulated in one alphabet, revised, and printed in a single volume known as *Current Biography Yearbook*.

Authorities for biographees' full names, with some exceptions, are the bibliographical publications of The H. W. Wilson Company. When a biographee prefers a certain name form, that is indicated in the heading of the article: for example, PRIESTLEY, J(OHN) B(OYNTON) means that he is usually referred to as J. B. Priestley. When a professional name is used in the heading, as, for example, ELTON JOHN, the real name, in this case REGINALD KENNETH DWIGHT, appears in the article itself. When the biographee's preferred forename is a nickname, the full original name is usually given in a cross-reference as well as in the article. Thus, JIMMY CARTER and JAMES EARL CARTER JR. are cross-referenced. When the nickname is tantamount to a professional name, as with some sports and entertainment figures, the cross-reference is sometimes dispensed with.

The heading of each article includes the pronunciation of the name if it is unusual, date of birth (if obtainable), and occupation. The article is supplemented by a list of references to sources of biographical information, in two alphabets: (1) newspapers and periodicals and (2) books.

References to newspapers and periodicals are listed in abbreviated form; for example, "Sports Illus 33:26+ J1 20 '70 pors" means *Sports Illustrated*, volume 33, pages 26ff, July 20, 1970, with portraits. For full names, see section "Periodicals and Newspapers Consulted," which is included in *Current Biography* yearbooks and in at least one monthly issue each year. Whenever feasible, obituary notices appear for persons whose biographies have been published in *Current Biography*.

An index to names that have appeared this year is to be found at the back of this issue.

NOTE: Biographies of authors and musicians not appearing in *Current Biography* may often be found in one or more of the following publications of The H. W. Wilson Company: *Twentieth Century Authors* (1942) or its *First Supplement* (1955); *World Authors: 1950-1970* (1975); *Fourth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators* (1978) or the preceding books in that series; *Popular American Composers* (1962); *Composers Since 1900* (1969); and *Musicians Since 1900* (1978).

KEY TO PRONUNCIATION

ā	āle	ō	ōld	ū	Pronounced approximately as ē, with rounded lips: French u, as in menu (mā-nū); German ū, as in grūn
â	cāre	ô	ôrb	ɔ	the schwa, an unstressed vowel representing the sound that is spelled a as in sofa
a	add	o	odd	e	e as in fitted
ä	ärm	oi	oil	i	i as in edible
ē	ēve	ōō	ōōze	o	o as in melon
e	end	ōō	fōōt	u	u as in circus
		ou	out		
g	go				
ī	Ice	th	then	zh	azure
i	ill	th	thin	'	= main accent
κ	German ch as in ich (ix)	ū	cūbe	"	= secondary accent
ŋ	Not pronounced, but indicates the nasal tone of the preceding vowel, as in the French bon (bōn).	û	ûrn; French eu, as in jeu (zhû), German ô, oe, as in schön (shûn), Goethe (gû'te)		
		u	tub		

Current Biography

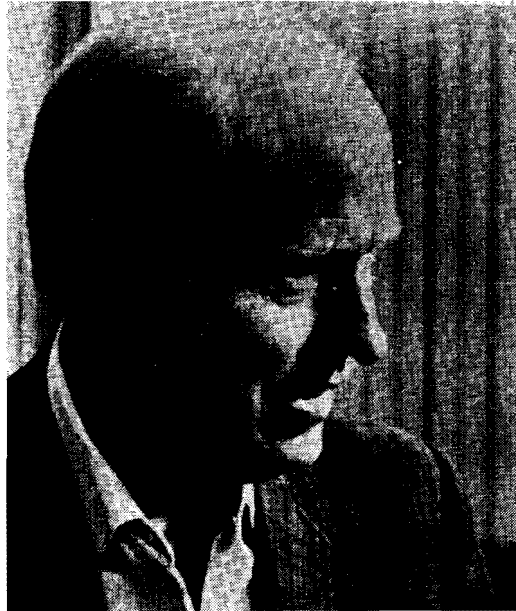
Ammons, A(rchie) R(andolph)

Feb. 18, 1926- Poet. Address: b. c/o Department of English, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850; h. 606 Hanshaw Rd., Ithaca, N.Y. 14850

Having published a book or two of poems nearly every year since 1964, A. R. Ammons is one of the most prolific American poets now writing. He is also among the most accomplished. Experimental in style and concerned, in many of his longer poems, with the contemporary dilemma of reinventing the self, he has otherwise no strong allegiance with other modern poets. Rather, the body of his work, lyrical and sometimes designated "pastoral," has a closer relationship to the nineteenth-century transcendentalists who followed the example of Ralph Waldo Emerson. His preference for that tradition, however, has not excluded him from the praise of today's critics, readers, and other poets. Ammons emerged as a major figure in contemporary poetry in 1973, when his *Collected Poems 1951-1971* won a National Book Award. Since 1964 he has been a faculty member of Cornell University, where he is now the Goldwin Smith Professor of Poetry.

Archie Randolph Ammons was born on February 18, 1926 in a farmhouse four miles southwest of Whiteville, Columbus County, North Carolina. One of three surviving children of William M. and Lucy Della (McKee) Ammons, he has two sisters, Mona Smith and Vida Cox, both of whom live in North Carolina. Another sister and two brothers died in infancy and lie buried, along with his parents, in the cemetery of the "home country" that the poet revisits in "Easter Morning." Although the half-wooded farm never recovered the prosperity that it had lost during the Depression, Willie Ammons eked out a living by cultivating tobacco, corn, and strawberries as commercial crops and keeping a vegetable garden, fruit trees, and a few chickens, cows, and other livestock for family use. Memories of his childhood on a farm haunt the poetry of A. R. Ammons—vicissitudes of the seasons, a mule named Silver, the right way to pick pears, and images like "the earthworm ho-split bleeds/against a damp black clump."

After he had finished five grades at the old New Hope Elementary School, Ammons attended a newly opened school nearby that had electric lights and modern plumbing. "The move required a step into the present that I



have never completed," he wrote in an autobiographical sketch for *World Authors: 1950-1970*. A sense of alienation plagued him at Whiteville High School, where his classmates were "town kids." But as an eighth grader he won their regard with an essay on a prospective breed of cows. In the tenth grade he wrote a poem about Pocahontas. During the first seventeen years of his life Ammons left Columbus County on only one occasion, to go to a picnic at the age of twelve. When he graduated from high school in 1943, at the height of World War II, he went to work in the shipyards at Wilmington, North Carolina, where he installed fuel pumps in freighters. The following year he joined the Navy and began nineteen months of service, mainly in the South Pacific on a destroyer escort.

An anthology of poetry that Ammons read while in the Navy inspired efforts of his own in verse. But on leaving the service in 1946 and enrolling in Wake Forest College (now a university) on the GI Bill, he majored in general science, with the intention of becoming a doctor, not a poet. His academic background proved to have a decided bearing on his poetry. "More than any other living poet, Ammons successfully connects the intricacies of science to the mystery of human nature and what he perceives as the high design of God," A. T. Baker wrote in *Time* (December 30, 1974). Ammons' first job after he graduated with the

B.S. degree in 1949 was as principal of an elementary school with a staff of three teachers in Hatteras, North Carolina. He continued to write during his year there and in 1950 entered the University of California at Berkeley to study English. With the encouragement of the poet Josephine Miles, who taught English at Berkeley, he sent some of his poems to magazines, but editors at first rejected them. Contemporary poetry did not appeal to Ammons, who years later when asked about the influences on his development as a poet mentioned the Old Testament, Browning's monologues, and the work of Whitman, Dickinson, Emerson, and Coleridge.

As if trying to resist the writing of poetry as a vocation, Ammons left the University of California, without a degree, after three semesters and in 1952 took a job with Friedrich and Dimmock, in Millville, New Jersey, a firm that manufactures biological and medical glassware. He was employed there for about a decade, first as supervisor of sales and then as a vice-president. His position gave him the financial independence to write poetry to his own liking. "I never dreamed of being a Poet poet. I think I always wanted to be an amateur poet," he told Russell Brantley in an interview for the *Winston-Salem Journal & Sentinel* (December 1, 1974). "When you have something else to do to earn money, you can do just what the hell you want to with your poems." In 1953 Frederick Morgan, editor of the *Hudson Review*, accepted the first two of the many Ammons poems that have appeared in that literary journal.

Ammons' first book, *Ommateum*, with Doxology, was published by Dorrance of Philadelphia at his own expense in 1955. ("Ommateum" means a compound eye, as of an insect.) During the next five years the book sold only sixteen copies of the one hundred printed, aside from purchases made by Ammons himself and his relatives. It received only one review, by Reuel Denny in the October 1956 issue of *Poetry*. Although the collection went virtually unnoticed, *Ommateum* gave indications of Ammons' developing talent. Richard Howard has observed in *Alone With America* (1969) that *Ommateum* provides as well the first enunciation of the transcendental theme of Ammons' later poetry: "putting off the flesh and taking on the universe."

Except for winning a Bread Loaf Writers Conference Scholarship in 1961 and serving as the poetry editor for the *Nation* during 1963, Ammons had few connections with the literary world before 1964. In the fall of that year he gave a reading at Cornell University that led to the offer of a faculty position in the English department. The book responsible for Ammons' emergence into literary prominence was his *Expressions of Sea Level* (Ohio State Univ. Press, 1964). Here, in poems whose natural settings—North Carolina's back country, New Jersey's tidal marshes—serve as the landscape

of his quest for a single, unified reality, Ammons sets forth his first full rendering of the Emersonian theme. In "Hymn," "Raft," "Mansion," and other poems he longs to shed his temporary shape to embrace the transcendent reality that Emerson called the "World-Soul" or "The Real."

Having a particularly modern perception of Emerson's nineteenth-century endeavor, Ammons realizes, however, that if he is to grasp the single reality of Pure Being, he must be able to do so through the particulars exposed by rational observation. Poems such as "Guide" unfold the immensity of his task. Of that poem, Howard wrote in *Alone With America*, "With the humility of a man whose enormous ambitions have been chastened by a constata-tion of his restricted place in the world—and the chastening has been a religious experience, in the literal sense of religion: a linking, a binding, even a fettering—the poet returns to his body, his particular geography and even his rather bleak sociology."

A kind of turning and returning is indicated by the subject of the book Ammons produced while waiting for *Expressions of Sea Level* to be published. *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1965) is a single long poem that was typed on a roll of adding machine tape and when typeset into book form totaled over 200 pages. Its daily entries, in the form of a journal, from 6 December 1963 to 10 January 1964 make up a mock epic in which Ammons is more concerned with his personal life and with human relationships than he was in his earlier works. Along with *Corson's Inlet*, which was also published by Cornell University Press in 1965, *Tape* marked Ammons' arrival as a poet of impressive stature.

The most representative of Ammons' early books, *Corson's Inlet* continues the poet's visionary quest. But in the title poem of the collection Ammons acknowledges, "Overall is beyond me: is the sum of these events/ I cannot draw." The setting of his poem, as of so many others, is the seashore—here, specifically, the southern New Jersey coast—where life and death, chaos and order, as well as abstract law and individual variation intermingle in a permanent, ever-changing configuration. Such intermingling is for Ammons a sign of the interconnectedness of all things, and the scene suggests an idea of order that the poet's vision seeks to reveal.

Yet the poet notes that his vision, or rather envisioning, is a process, having as an emblem the walk, the poet's quest. Although Ammons concludes that "there is no finality of vision," he is loyal to his strategy of finding such vision: "I will try/ to fasten into order enlarging grasps of disorder, widening/ scope, but enjoying the freedom that Scope eludes my grasp." As in the poem "Prodigal" in the same collection, the poet "consigns knowledge to approximation," as does the scientist with

his models created out of statistical probability. In that way Ammons' poems become a demonstration of the process of envisioning as well as a demonstration of what finally limits such vision.

With their Whitmanesque formal looseness, their frequent enjambment, and use of the colon to link sentence to sentence, the poems of *Northfield Poems* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1966) as well as *Uplands* (Norton, 1970) and *Briefings: Poems Small and Easy* (Norton, 1971) further emphasize Ammons' view of reality as a continuum and of poetry as a process through which the poet attempts to realize the sum total of fluid and changing experiences. In 1972 all, or almost all, of Ammons' poetry, except for *Tape for the Turn of the Year*, was gathered and published as his *Collected Poems 1951-1971* (Norton), for which he received a National Book Award.

Although Ammons' Southern upbringing had a strong influence on the shaping of his character, he does not think of himself as a Southern writer. In an interview with Cynthia Haythe in December 1978, he said, "When you speak to me of literature, all regionalism vanishes from my mind." Perhaps it was a feeling for the land beyond regionalism that influenced Ammons in the writing of *Sphere: The Form of a Motion* (Norton, 1974). In that long poem, according to the *New York Times* (January 8, 1975), he "was trying to explicate a state in which the rights of both nations and individuals would be respected" in order to arrive, in Ammons' words, at "a whole state of consciousness that will at once maintain its wholeness, and not surrender the individual."

A 2,000-line poem in 155 numbered sections, *Sphere* advances Ammons' idea of the relationship of the underlying and all-encompassing motions of existence with the lesser motions through which it expresses itself. Calvin Bedient declared in the *New York Times Book Review* (December 22, 1974) that Ammons had created in *Sphere* "a new poetic structure: the poem as democratic continuum."

As such, *Sphere* acknowledges a model in the poetics, the democratic feeling, and the spirit of transcendence of Walt Whitman, a fact noted by a reviewer for the *National Observer* (June 21, 1975): "Ammons touches the universe anywhere and everywhere, finding the resolution of . . . seeming opposites [such as each and all, the visible and invisible] in birds and plants, in scientific concepts, in his daily activities, in the human body, in the metamorphoses of poetry, even (at least potentially) in the relations between cultures." For *Sphere*, he was nominated for another National Book Award and was given the Bollingen Prize in Poetry for 1974-75.

Continuing to write and publish at an extraordinary rate, in the later books *Diversifications* (Norton, 1975) and *The Snow Poems* (Norton, 1977) Ammons faced the dilemma of forging new directions while maintaining the

excellence of the *Collected Poems and Sphere*. As one departure, he utilized humor as a way to deal with acknowledged human limitations to a much greater extent than in the earlier volumes. Yet in *Diversifications*, as David Ignatow pointed out in the *New York Times Book Review* (November 30, 1975), Ammons did not break new ground in regard to his poetic style: "If there is a surprise in this book, it is to discover that he has returned to earlier forms before *Sphere*."

To some critics, notably Hayden Carruth, Ammons' *The Snow Poems* represented a falling off of the poet's talents. But to others, including Robert McDowell, the book merited unlimited praise. *The Snow Poems* contains 119 poems that can be read as a single poem, structured, like *Tape*, as a kind of poetic journal and concerned with many details of Ammons' personal life. Generalizing from the snowbound isolation of the poet, who is forced by the weather into daily meditations about himself, to the shared conditions of human isolation, Ammons experimented with the use of parallel columns and with word arrangement in the manner of Conceptualist poets. In the *New Republic* (November 6, 1977) Harold Bloom referred to the *Snow* sequence as a "mixed achievement," taking more delight in the appearance in the same year of Ammons' retrospective collection *Selected Poems 1951-1977* (Norton). Five additional poems, including "Essay on Poetics" and "Hibernaculum," were published in 1980 in *Selected Longer Poems* (Norton). New poems appear in *Highgate Road* (Inkling Press, Ithaca, 1978) and *Six-Piece Suite* (Palaemon Press, Ithaca, 1979).

A Coast of Trees (Norton, 1981) contains Ammons' more recent shorter poems. In the past some critics, such as Samuel Hazo in the *Hudson Review* (Autumn 1978), have criticized Ammons' poetry for its scarcity of people, "men and women with names, identities and all the other fragilities." In "Easter Morning," however, he reflects on the loss to him through death of the people who had been important in his childhood. "Easter Morning," which begins, "I have a life that did not become,/that turned aside and stopped,/astonished:" is "a classic poem" in the opinion of Helen Vendler, who further observed in the *New Republic* (April 25, 1981) that "to review *A Coast of Trees* is first of all to give notice of 'Easter Morning' as a new treasure in American poetry." The National Book Critics Circle chose *A Coast of Trees* for its 1981 award in poetry.

At Cornell University, Ammons advanced to a full professorship in 1971 and to an endowed professorship in 1973, when he became the Goldwin Smith Professor of Poetry. He has honorary doctorates from Wake Forest University, awarded in 1972, and from the University of North Carolina, awarded in 1973. He was also the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1966, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Traveling Fellowship in 1967,

a Lewinson Prize from Poetry in 1970, a National Institute of Arts and Letters Award in 1977, and a grant from the Catherine and John D. MacArthur Foundation in 1981.

While a student at Wake Forest, A. R. Ammons met Phyllis Plumbo of Northfield, New Jersey, who taught Spanish briefly at that college. They were married on November 26, 1949 and have one son, John Randolph Ammons. Professor Ammons has hazel eyes and sandy red hair, stands six feet one inch tall, and weighs 185 pounds. His recreations are walking and pool. "He is perhaps the only contemporary poet to have escaped the damaging

assaults of jealousy and logrolling," according to a notation in the *New York Times Book Review* (May 9, 1971). "The reasons for this come clear watching how his colleagues at Cornell treat him—gently, quizzically, even sacredly—sensing that, like some wise, extra-human creature, he can see things they can't."

References: *N Y Times Book R* p13+ Ja 17 '82 por; *Authors in the News* (1976); *Contemporary Authors* 1st rev vols 9-12 (1974); *Contemporary Poets* (1980); *Who's Who in America, 1980-81*; *World Authors: 1950-1970* (1975)



Baker, James A(ddison), 3d

Apr. 28, 1930- United States government official. Address: b. The White House 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500

Shortly after his election to the Presidency of the United States in November 1980, President Ronald Reagan astonished Washington prognosticators by naming James A. Baker 3d., a moderate former Democrat, White House Chief of Staff. The appointment was all the more surprising because Baker, a corporate lawyer by profession, had managed the primary election campaigns of two of Reagan's most determined political opponents: President Gerald R. Ford, in 1976, and George Bush, in 1980. Widely regarded as one of the Republican Party's best election strategists, Baker, who joined the Reagan campaign staff in mid-1980,

quickly impressed the candidate with his political know-how and organizational skill. As White House Chief of Staff, Baker's main function is to supervise the activities of nearly 1,300 White House employees, but he is also a trusted senior adviser to the President, particularly in the area of legislative affairs.

James A. Baker 3d. was born in Houston, Texas on April 28, 1930, the son of a well-to-do attorney. As he explained to Tony Kornheiser of the *Washington Post* (January 18, 1981), he was "made conscious of the fact that [he] sort of had a heritage to live up to" at an early age. His great-grandfather was a founder of Baker & Botts, one of Houston's first legal offices, and his grandfather, "the Captain," built it into the largest and probably the most prestigious law firm in the city. Like his father before him, Jim Baker, as he prefers to be known, attended the Hill School, a college prep school in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, then enrolled at Princeton University. Although he was a classics major, he wrote his senior thesis on the British Labour party from 1945 to 1952. After receiving his B.A. degree from Princeton in 1952, he spent two years in the United States Marine Corps. Having learned to shoot when he was a child, he became an expert marksman and was a member of the pistol and rifle team at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. At his father's insistence, Baker returned to his home state upon completion of his military service to study law at the University of Texas at Austin.

Prevented from joining the family business by a company rule against nepotism, Baker went to work for Andrews, Kurth, Campbell & Jones, another high-powered corporate law firm in Houston, immediately after he earned his J.D. degree in 1957. "It was one of the best things that ever happened to me," he said years later, as quoted in *Newsweek* (September 6, 1976). "I always would have wondered if I would have made it on my own." Within a decade, he was made a partner.

Although he was nominally a Democrat somewhat in the John B. Connally-Lloyd Bentsen mold, Baker was, by his own account, "totally

THE NORTH CAROLINA AWARDS



1936

THE AWARD

The North Carolina Awards were instituted by the 1961 General Assembly, which acted on the idea of the late Dr. Robert Lee Humber of Greenville, then State Senator from Pitt County. The purpose of the Awards, as set forth in the statutes, is to recognize "notable accomplishments by North Carolina citizens in the fields of scholarships, research, the fine arts and public leadership." It is the highest honor the state can bestow.



The North Carolina Award was designed by the eminent sculptor Paulanship and was one of his last commissions before his death.

LITERATURE

A. R. Ammons



A. R. Ammons receives the 1986 North Carolina Award in Literature for a native North Carolinian living outside the state. One of America's most prolific poets, he is also one of its most accomplished. His experimental style owes much to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and the traditions of nineteenth century transcendentalism.

Born on a farm near Whiteville, Ammons' early experiences in his "home country" of rural Columbus County would help fuel his poetic imagination in years to come. He recalls those times in later poems.

Graduating from high school in 1943, at the height of the Second World War, he went to work in the shipyards at Wilmington. In 1944 he joined the Navy and spent nineteen months in the service.

Returning home after the war Ammons entered Wake Forest College with the intention of becoming a doctor. After graduation in 1949 he served as an elementary school principal in Hatteras, North Carolina, before entering the University of California at Berkeley in 1950 to study English.

Ammons had always been interested in writing. Although he left the University of California in 1952 and took a position with a New Jersey medical glassware firm, he continued to focus his free time on what he loved most: poetry. In 1953 the *Hudson Review* published two of his poems, and his first book of poetry, *Ommateum*, appeared in 1955. But it was in 1964 that he would emerge into literary prominence with his volume, *Expressions of Sea Level*. It was there that his readers could first behold his full expression of the Emersonian longing to transcend this world and grasp a higher reality.

Other volumes followed in quick succession: *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (1965), *Corson's Inlet* (1965), *Northfield Poems* (1966), *Uplands* (1970), and *Briefings: Poems Small and Easy* (1971). In 1972 most of his output was gathered and published as *Collected Poems, 1951-1971*, which volume earned him a National Book Award.

His two-thousand line poem, *Sphere: The Form of A Motion*, published in 1974, brought him another National Book Award nomination and the Bollingen Prize for Poetry for 1974-1975. Almost Whitmanesque in its democratic feeling, *Sphere*, according to its reviewers, projects Ammons' idea of continual transcendental motion and the interworking of relationships in the universe.

Since 1964 Ammons has been a professor at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. He has honorary degrees from his alma mater, Wake Forest University, and the University of North Carolina. Recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1966 and a Traveling Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1967, he has also received awards and prizes from the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

A major figure in contemporary American poetry, A. R. Ammons combines tradition with bold experimentation. Like his mentors, Emerson and Whitman, poetry for him is a means to express what one critic has called "the democratic continuum."

He is married to the former Phyllis Plumbo of Northfield, New Jersey. They have one son and

