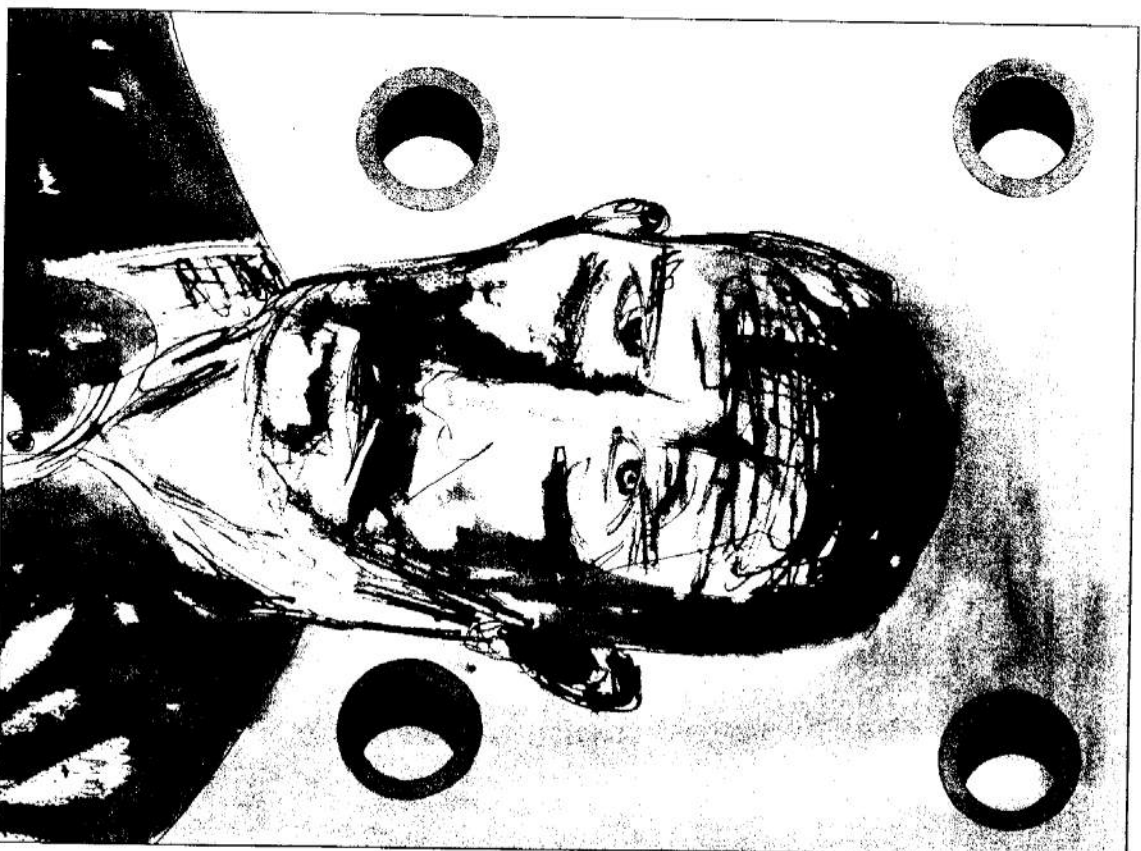


EPOCH

VOLUME 52, NUMBER 3

This is Just a Place
An issue devoted to the life and work of A. R. Ammons



Self-Portrait, 1978. Watercolor by A. R. Ammons; courtesy of Emily Herring Wilson.

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Suet Pudding, Spotted Dick

All well and good for autonomy that it find
its way into the full array of itself—good

or evil: that it achieve (whether poem or
self) whatever standing defense can carve out

of imposition or inner resources can assert;
but what of it if one thing, uncompromised,

unassaulted by the world's mixtures, stands
out alone in the glorious testament of itself:

what good is it if it cannot bend to use:
is being, however fully realized, enough: one

can be in oneself alone and each of us must,
of necessity, so be alone each in the measure

of himself: but only when one's self engages
other selves does whatever is apply: and what

will application (wyrcean) to search out among
the diversities of others a riding autonomy:

an autonomy that will ride over, do what it
can, invoke, say, justice, liberty, wellbeing

for all (or many, or as many as possible,
some?): hidden by leaves on the limber end

of a twig all summer, the hornet's nest is now, after
fall, the only thing in the tree: except for

a scrap of leaves blown in from the oak close
by, but where are the hornets, are they in

there: is there more endangerment in summer
than winter notice: I hope the plague of the

bee nites will pass this year: I sure did
miss the bees, the honeybees, the flower people.

"can" (but it may
ility, in the stoic
acing illusions of
ego and efface-

or at Harvard.

ROALD HOFFMANN

on "Suet Pudding, Spotted Dick"

A light year or two from "I am Ezra," but who else but Archie could have written this poem? It has all the trappings of later Ammons: concepts carved so they stand physical, or set into motion, riding or being ridden. It has flights of syntactical shrapnel—here colons pressed into action to make us read on. There is a word, never Latinate, that makes me turn to a dictionary. There is that gentle, discursive tone of the natural philosopher turned philosopher of nature. And a double-entendre title; it was always hard to keep the man down.

Archie is never far from carefully observed nature. The switch to the hornet's nest in a winter tree is abrupt, but necessary, for something must take us out of the philosophical riff that has played itself out in spreading vaguenesses of alternative ("many, or as many as possible, or some?"). Ammons's second switch, his mind wandering from hornets to bees, is no accident. A coda, for sure. But it is also his mirror move, propelling us gently back to the beginning of the poem. Through the pervasive "I" in the latter part of the poem, the distancing "oneself" of the beginning comes alive. It does not suffice to make autonomy stand tall; only if we worry about hornets, bees, and mites, can we earn being alone.

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