



ECO CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE POETRY OF A.R.AMMONS: AN OVER VIEW

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The recent history of environmental degradation—deforestation; ozone depletion; chemical pollution of air, water, and soil; the loss of species diversity; and human overpopulation—is largely attributed to human exploitation of nature's economy. It is highly alarming that world population will double by 2050 while various forms of soil, water, and air pollution or erosion may poison, suffocate or starve most humans on our planet by that date. We are a subset of nature and completely dependent on its life-support systems for our survival. When our natural world is so stressed, so endangered by the hands of humans, the literary writers take their responsibility of plunging into action to save the mankind by efforting for the health of the natural world with their works of green campaign.

With less than five percent of world population, the United States produces from its automobiles and factories, the technological extensions of the hands of humans, an incredible twenty-three percent of global carbon dioxide emissions, hence the curiosity to comprehensively understand the American Poets' response and campaign against environmental catastrophes as 'poetry helps us to live our lives' (Stevens 18). Like Chloroplasts in plants react to sunlight to create sugar and starch, with the help of carbon dioxide and water, verse is the linguistic starch created by the poet's energy. It is of a great concern that with smothering environmental stresses, nature may someday exhaust the capacities of its ecosystems to sustain humans, and hence the inevitable need for a more discerning awareness of what nature needs to maintain its health. It is to strike a balance between the needs of humans and the needs of nature.

A sustainable poem which is an authentic voice of green health is the verbal record of interactive encounter in the world of our sensuous experience between the human psyche and nature, where nature retains its autonomy and where nature is not dominated. Sustainable poetry treats nature as a separate and equal other and includes respects for natural conceived as a series of ecosystems, especially in the areas of energy flow/retention, cyclic renewal, bioregionalism, and the interdependency of all organisms within an ecosystem. A.R. Ammons a renowned American Eco poet enjoys the credit of contributing commendably to Eco Literature. John Ashbery in his article "In the American Grain" in the book *A.R. Ammons* appreciates the Eco poet A.R. Ammons's acceptance and celebration of the natural world. In the book entitled *A.R. Ammons* (1986), Harold Bloom praises Ammons's poetry for the liberation and subsequent bonding with humanity that Ammons has achieved. Philip Fried in his article "Some Influences of Evolution and Ecology on the Poetry of A.R. Ammons" in *Pembroke Magazine* (1989) appreciates poetry of Ammons where the ecological interconnectedness among all creatures and elements of planet earth is reemphasized. Nathan Scott in his essay "The Poetry of Ammons" in *Southern Review* (1988) traces the biocentric gaze of Ammons impressed in his poetry.

For Ammons, Eco poetry provides exemplary models of human behavior. Certainly, Eco poetry challenges us to alter our perception of eco system. It is to celebrate nature's "unified interdependence". The concept of interdependence, where humans are one of many species interacting to maintain a complex natural system, is central to eco literature. "Man is not just an observer and irresponsible explorer but an integral part, now the world's most dominant organism. He has come into the system and survived thus far by the bounty of that system plus his own marvelous power of adjustment. Even so, the historical record is replete with his failures" (Sears 12).

Wishing the global transformation from the anthropocentric to the bio centric, Ammons has spent his entire career convincing us that nature, not the anthropocentric thinking of humans, provides the standards, the norms, the locus of values. He has to his credit the volumes of poetry *Brink Road, Garbage, The Snow Poems, Sphere, Sumerian Vistas, and Tape for the Turn of the Year*. Ammons first announced ecology as his theme as he discussed centers and peripheries in his *Tape for the Turn of the Year*: ecology is my word /tagme with that. Eco poems help us to live our lives by encouraging us to understand, respect, and cooperate with the laws of nature that sustain us. For Ammons, the planet earth and its organized ecosystem always retain primacy.

The poet's career from *Ommateum* (1955) through *Glare* (1997) represents a journey from the severe isolation, loneliness of the early short poems to the gradually more open-armed acceptance of society and embrace of ordinary living in quotidian reality in the long poems. Ammons's movement from alienation and loneliness toward a comfortable acceptance and celebration of the natural world parallels a deepening understanding of how the creative act of perception and its recreation in language is homologous in agreement to the working of the energy-driven ecosystems of our planet. In his more recent poetry *Sumerian Vistas, Garbage, Brink Road, and Glare*, the keen perceptive power of Ammons's biocentric perception



gives a deep understanding of the thick textures of interconnectedness among all creatures and elements of planet earth and of Nature. *Tape for the Turn of the Year* suggests continuities among the elements and beings of the natural world. In the poem Ammons asserts a bio centric acceptance of all life by recognising his affinities with animals. *Garbage* emphasises homologous relationships between humans and various orders of sentient life. Ammons uses a homologous method in *Garbage* to reveal the wondrous, joyous, astonishingly beautiful interrelations of the human and the nonhuman worlds that share nature's creative energy.

A.R. Ammons embodies in his poetry the simple biological realities of every day living. Harold Bloom's praise of Ammons's poetry and his continued support since the early seventies and the liberation and subsequent bonding with humanity that Ammons has achieved are cited reasons for why there has been embrace of everyday in Ammons. Reiman reasons out that Ammons's development in part depends on his continued willingness to make poetic uses of science in order to see individual fate not only from within but also "from the imagined vantage point of other creatures and of the processes of nature" (24). This is the ecological pole of what he calls Ammons's "ecological naturalism". Reiman quotes from an interview with Philip Fried, where Ammons acknowledges his use of scientific material for poetry and also emphasizes knowing referential reality, "the nature of the thing out there" (22).

Ammons's poems end with the biocentric affirmation that we are all parts of an integrated world. Our human perceptions of that world have been refreshed and enlarged by removing our anthropocentric blinders. Ammons gives weight to the referential experience that our senses bring before the mind in the act of perception. Our perception of a referential world instructs us about intricate order and survival mechanisms. Ammons becomes so intoxicated with referential experience that he longs for the organic marriage with the nature. "The world was the beginning/of the world (*Garbage* 50)". The world made us, and we are a subset of it, not vice versa.

Ammons in an interview characterised a "presence" as a portion of the referential world in the act of perception: "One can search out another 'presence' for its otherness as for its sameness. I was alone enough as a child to want to know something besides myself. It was easy for me later to adopt the rhetorical device of 'speaking' mountains and winds: I recognised them as presences and wondered, if they spoke, what nature they would speak out of" (Stephenson 89). The "nature" of presences in the world beyond the self interests Ammons.

Ammons is always conscious of how human intentionality leads to the "merciless" exploitation of nature. The poet in *Sumerian Vistas* states that he goes to nature "because I have filled it with / unintentionality". The referential world of nature for Ammons is a separate and equal other, the place where nature readjusts and corrects human willfulness. To Ammons, in a well integrated poem, visible referential world and invisible mental world become one. The poet emphasizes throughout his work that, because humans derive from the same ancestor, nature, they should live in harmony with all other elements and creatures on our planet.

In his "Essay on Poetics" Ammons quotes from scientific works emphasizing that all "living matter" organises itself into structures and that excretion and death in the living world are simply occasions for the recycling of energy into new life, for both produce worms. Ammons often uses worms in his longer poems to underscore homologous recyclings in the human and nonhuman worlds. For Ammons's Nature, not language, is the model for the poem's structure. Any homely experience becomes "homily on nature's interrelations. If one moves in consort with the motions of nature, one learns survival skills at the same time that one learns to appreciate the biocentric harmony of life. Since humans are a subset of nature and in all respects depend on nature for survival, it is important for humans to live in harmony with nature's speech- the fluctuations of eco systems and biological processes. We must love nature and remain at peace with her. Love is the forceful motion that impels life and meditations about life, for "Everything is sacred" (Glare 201) and "Where there is no love nothing will take root" (Glare 70). Heavenly peace resides in taking a biocentric position, in following nature's movements, not in trying to dominate the process.

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