The Corners of the Wind:

A Study of A.R. Ammons's Poetry

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled ***The Corners of the Wind: A Study of Ammons's Poetry*** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is a record of the bona fide research carried out by Salil Varma R under my supervision, and that no part of this thesis has been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma or any similar title before.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled ***The Corners of the Wind: A Study of A.R. Ammons's Poetry*** is a record of the bona fide research carried out by me and that no part of it has previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title.

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Salil Varma R.

You're sick:
you're on your back:
it's hot:
they take off a leg:
you wake up and feel,
both hands:
you develop pride
in the sewmanship
and show it:

a tube in your skull bursts:
you bleed half
still:
with one arm
you show how
the other flops:
you show, show:
speechless with pantomime:

you're on your back:
it's hot:
they take the other one off:
then you fail
some
with the difficulty
of redundancy:

you're on your back:
you are heavy and hard:
your heart bursts and you are weightless:
you ride to a high stillness:
in death's cure, you exit right.

A.R. Ammons: "The Run-Through"

Dedicated to the memory of my sister
Smitha Varma R. who died of aneurysm

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Salil Varma R.

Contents

Abbreviations		i
Chapter 1	Introduction: The Majors and the Minors of the Substance	1
Chapter 2	A Variable Wind	22
Chapter 3	The Wide Band of Acceptance	128
Chapter 4	The Verbal Provinces	254
Chapter 5	The Miraculous Residence	379
Chapter 6	The Last Translation	507
Chapter 7	Conclusion: The Terrible Dependency	553
Notes		582
Works Cited		603

Abbreviations

T *Tape for the Turn of the Year*. 1965. New York: W. W. Norton, 1993.

CP *Collected Poems 1951-1971*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1972.

S *Sphere: The Form of A Motion*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1974.

D *Diversifications: Poems*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1975.

SNP *The Snow Poems*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1977.

COT *A Coast of Trees*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1981.

WH *Wordly Hopes*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1982.

LEC *Lake Effect Country*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1983.

SV *Sumerian Vistas*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1987.

RSP *The Really Short Poems of A.R. Ammons*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990.

G *Garbage*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1993.

BR *Brink Road*.1996. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997.

GL *Glare*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997.

10

Chapter 1

Introduction : The Majors and Minors of the Substance

> I don't say that nature gives me a complete text – or any textual analogy. But there are configurations of things that surprisingly relate to and often clarify adumbrations we are daily swaying with.
>
> A.R. Ammons "On 'The Damned' "[1]

This study attempts to analyze the significance of the images of weather in the poetry of A. R. Ammons and how these images appear in conjunction with some of the important themes in his poetry. Further it aims to interrogate some of the persistent notions associated with the critical reception of his poetry by a close study of the predominant presence of weather in his poetry. The tendency to classify Ammons either as a transcendentalist or as a scientist-poet has been the standard response to his poetry, and this study argues that such an approach is possible only by an indifference to the way in which the experience of weather interferes to thwart such responses. The study endeavours to prove that the strain of realism with which he approaches the weather-defined landscape becomes increasingly significant as his writing progresses, and that it is

symptomatic of Ammons's growing distaste for the transcendental/romantic aesthetics.

Ammons never escaped his past, which for him was largely geographical and historical. Past in the traditional sense of the term never appealed to Ammons nor does it appear in his poetry. The political past of his country is never a theme in his poetry. As a poet who believes that he has written "more or less in isolation"[2], Ammons has very clear views about the possibilities of committed art. In his interview with Jim Stahl Ammons observes:

> I am not trying to lead a mob for a cause so-and-so in Washington, or to get people to believe in my politics instead of theirs. I would just like to say, as truthfully as I can, what seems to me to be true for me, as an individual, and then if that's true for anyone else in the world who happens across my poems then he will recognize it. And then he will know that I am here and perhaps one day I'll find out he's there.[3]

Ammons knew that such committed writing had very limited and transient value, and his poetry, takes a different direction and a goal, as he made it clear to Cynthia Haythe:

> They want me to be political, but what I do instead of individuating in that direction is to go just the other way toward the deeper layers that we all share, Northerner or Southerner or Easterner or Westerner. - what it would take to discover a more generalizable human value rather than a surface , defined, political, issuistic, Movement value.[4]

Ammons was fully aware that he and his poetry were always away from the "immediate concerns of the South."[5] He was also conscious of the critics whose taste for what Josephine

Jacobsen calls "explicitly considered human problems"[6] demanded involved writing. His rejection of such camp writing can be traced to a conviction, which he held as early as 1973. In the *Diacritics* interview Ammons observes:

> Consequently, I feel that my terrors, which in my life have been at times quite severe, though not so much lately perhaps because my work has been more accepted, have as their root a secular, social structure, deriving from something situated somewhere down all of our spines, and racial experience- a sense that we do better within the compromises of the group than in the terrifying precision of being alone.[7]

The search for the deeper roots that he speaks of is part of his rejection of the conceptual, which Ammons feels has enjoyed privilege in the scheme of things. In an interview that he granted to David I. Grossvogel, Ammons was unambiguous about his position:

> My feeling is that the critical function, at least at the lower level about which we were speaking earlier, engages the intelligence primarily as a conceptual function and I take that to be a very small part of a possible human response that is, the physiological, the emotional, the visceral, whatever, so that I distrust the conceptual in that it separates out and over-emphasizes one particular function of the human organism.[8]

The significance of this observation assumes greater relevance in this study, which explores the pervasive preoccupation with weather in his writing, and for Ammons it is an experience that rejects the conceptual in favour of the more primitive impulses. The powerful presence of the images of weather in the poetry of

Ammons is traceable to his background, which he reveals in his *Michigan Quarterly Review* Interview:

> I love the land and the terrible dependency on the weather and the rain and the wind. It betrays many a farmer, but makes the interests of the farmers' life tie in very immediately with everything that's going wrong meteorologically. I miss that. That's where I got my closeness and attention to the soil, weeds, plants, insects, and trees.[9]

The "terrible dependency" that Ammons confesses to William Walsh, persists to the end of his career and its influence extends itself to the images of wind, animal life, problems of writing, experience of the body and death which are his principal preoccupations. The distant past makes only occasional appearance in his poetry since his concern with weather forces him to be constantly conscious of the present.

Weather makes his poetry "extremely non-cultural"[10] and this non-cultural experience that weather offers allows Ammons to erect a historically vacant space and place independent of European culture, which he rejected. This rejection of European culture surfaced in his conversation with David Lehman, the *Paris Review* interviewer:

> 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.[11]

There is in Ammons a dislike of European culture and this is conveyed in his poetry by consciously "failing to refer to it."[12] His observation to David Lehman is significant:

> This makes my poetry seem, and may be it actually is, too extremely non-cultural. 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.[13]

Weather thus becomes a powerful presence and an answer to history. The "governmental assessment of things" is part of history and politics, and Ammons's interest in weather becomes crucial to this study in the light of a comment he has made on the primacy of this natural phenomenon to Steven P. Schneider. Ammons's statement can be read as an explanation of his interest in weather, which becomes a space capable of accommodating the larger issues of life:

> Yes, because another interest I've had is not to be responsible for anything - feeling guilty and scared about being responsible for saying something about this, that, and the other. The weather is almost completely innocent territory. You could write about that forever and feel as if you're writing about nothing. That's been another prospect for me, writing about something that doesn't matter - if it's not taken seriously or if it's almost so far on the periphery it's like the weather.[14]

The expression "completely innocent territory" is central to the understanding of Ammons's poetry since it gives the impression of steering clear of the turbulence of the century in which he lived. Ammons was conscious of it; and he gave clear indication of it more than once. In his interview with Steven P. Schneider he draws a bleak picture of his century: "A century of vast torment, warfare, misery, genocide and this century we have lived in perhaps the most barbaric one that was ever invented. Who the hell needs a "success" in such circumstances?"[15] For Ammons weather offered the opportunity to escape the pressure of history, and it is only natural that he should turn to it. Ammons's idea of the present moment aided him in his rejection of a traditional notion of history. Digging into the past never appeals to Ammons, which is an enterprise that he finds useless. It is an undercurrent of his belief that he voices to David I. Grossvogel:

> Perhaps this is another reason why I do not have problems with the anxiety of influence, because I believe that what is here now, at this moment, is the truest version of history that we will ever know. Consequently, I have as much right to enter into it with all the innocence of immediacy as anyone else possibly ever could.[16]

The "innocence of immediacy", which Ammons speaks of, makes weather the most vital experience, and it offers him a context for observing life. The sense of the past can seldom be part of weather. Ammons resists the temptation to romanticize the rural background and experience that as a member of an

agrarian community he underwent. Ammons was painfully conscious of the passing away of the rural world, a point he stressed in his conversation with William Walsh:

> It was rather a desperate time until the beginning of the war provided jobs for people and changes - radical changes. Do you realize that when I was born in 1926 something like eighty-five per cent of the people in the country were rural, lived on a farm and now it is about 3 per cent? So the most incredible silent revolution has taken place just in my lifetime.[17]

This "incredible silent revolution" which he was deeply conscious of never surfaces in his writing though he maintains certain views regarding the city that are central to a set of positions collectively called romantic ideology. Ammons observes:

> I identify civilization (the city) with *definition*, as against the kind of center-and-periphery, closed-openness that I identify with nature. That's why I'm not in the city; that's why I am not an urban person. The city represents to me the artificial, the limited, the defined, the stalled, though obviously the city changes. I often think the city represents the confrontation of the artificial in man with the natural process and I tend to think that the natural process produced everything - including the city.[18]

The romantic ideology evident in this passage has done Ammons more harm than good. It has resulted in the projection of Ammons as a romantic poet. The distaste for the idea of 'definition' becomes more relevant in the experience of weather, which creates a sense of constant change that defeats all attempts to define experience. Weather also offers an escape

from the condition of 'being' to 'becoming' from 'is' to 'flowing.' It is a thought that he articulates in many of his poems. Ammons who was fascinated by the idea of process saw Lao-Tsu, as "the most complete version, the central philosophical source"[19] and his unambiguous position is clear in the statement he made to William Walsh:

> I can't get stuck in a pattern, because I don't believe in patterns. I believe in process and progression. I believe in centralizing, integration, that kind of ongoing narrative, more than I believe in the boxes of identification and completion. That's just the way I am structured as a human being.[20]

Ammons's remark to William Walsh conveys a sense of reality, which is endorsed by a sense of nature where weather comes to stand for a very fluid reality, for change happening every minute. For Ammons, weather offers changes that are more easily palpable and immediate than historical and political moments. Ammons, who considered himself "emotionally unable to make any commitment to what was going around"[21], felt very defensive about his lack of political motivation. He found in weather an experience for a better understanding of reality. The search for what he called "generalizable human value" is part of his intention to overturn the western mind. In response to a question by Cynthia Haythe on the scope of political poetry Ammons explained his objectives:

> All I mean to do is overturn the Western mind. You don't need a political movement. You need something more radical that's where I would head toward the deepest roots of the

> frameworks by which we dispose ourselves in social and political ways.[22]

Ammons finds these "deepest roots", in nature, where weather offers an experience most unlike the political and social side of existence for which he had reservations. Weather offered him a wide band of experience to be discussed under it, which is clear from his words to Steven P. Schneider:

> That's how I become interested in the weather as being a tonal thing that you can write about. It introduces as much subject matter as anything else, even though you're just talking about the weather. And nobody is going to come and get you on account of that, or shoot you up against the wall or something like that.[23]

The observation assumes a curious meaning when one places it against his defensiveness about not being politically committed. But the inclusiveness of weather affords Ammons a sense of a more rich, meaningful and comprehensive aspect of existence, which helps him to defend himself against the charge of not having addressed the dominant questions of his times.

Weather was vital for Ammons for another reason. Ammons rejected the notion that contemporary politics and history is fit for poetry, and was in search for a bare space innocent of the traces of history and politics and weather offered it. Ammons pointed out to Steven P. Schneider the immense poetic potential of the experience of weather in reply to a question whether his interest in weather could be traced to his upbringing on a farm where weather was so important: "Also it

is always something there - something to write about. If you have nothing to write about, you can just look out the window and say it is 50 degrees today."[24] This study undertakes to show that the inexhaustibility of weather, which Ammons admitted to William Walsh and Steven P. Schneider, is central to Ammons's writing. Further, such an enquiry into the dynamics of weather in his writing makes an attempt to rethink many of the dominant images of Ammons that the four decades of critical reception have produced.

Stressing Ammons's scholarship of science which gets revealed in his use of scientific images, critics have read him as a "countrified scientist"[25] and not as a poet and have attributed some of his flaws to the strain of science in his poetry. The image of the scientist-poet still persists, and a classic case is the observation Willard Spiegelman makes: "Ammons's poetry, again like Lucretius, has as its two characteristic, excessive flaws the dullness of prosaicism and the airiness of abstraction. He is well aware of both, and both are the necessary risks of a scientific, discursive poet."[26]

Such a reading of Ammons whom Spiegelman calls "the sophisticated city boy who turned to nature late, the countrified scientist"[27] is the result of yet another myopic reading of Spiegelman himself who observes, "For all his fascination with the details of the natural world, and despite his precise attempts to capture its dappled, Hopkinsesque Grandeur,

Ammons often seems alone and uncomfortable out of doors."[28] Ammons may be alone, but he is definitely not uncomfortable out of doors. Willard Spiegelman is indifferent to Ammons's treatment of nature and he dwells on the "meandering expansive ruminations"[29] and he senses in his poetry a dominant "impulse towards abstraction in phrasing and in substance."[30] The foregrounding of the abstract and the scientific aspects in Ammons at the cost of ignoring him as a nature poet is widespread in the history of the critical reception of Ammons. It is such an error Spiegelman commits when he notes: "Ammons shares Auden's and Nemerov's interest in scientific discovery and James Merrill's impulse to present "poems of science," explanations of worldly reality whose primary subject matter is biochemical, ecological, and geological."[31]

A similar thrust on science is to be noted in Alan Holder's statement that "science does not function as a source of metaphor for Ammons but as a supplier of knowledge and concepts whose contemplation gives him pleasure."[32] Such studies are necessarily the result of readings, which refuse to consider the entire corpus of his poetry and what is essentially a period argument masquerades as a statement representative of the poetic career of Ammons. The strong presence of scientific imagery and themes is limited to his early phase, and scientific poems in terms of frequency and number occupy only a very

small portion of his writing. One senses another problem in the critical reception of Ammons's poetry when a critic starts with a declaration: "The real poets today, you know are scientists."[33] Consider Alan Holder's statement:

> One way in which Ammons' endorsement of form manifests itself is in his concern with scientific materials. This concern, which is a distinctive feature of his work, is not a matter of drawing on science for metaphors, as other poets might do. Rather, the scientific references that get into his poetry reflect a real attraction to the objects and the processes that concern biologists and physicists, and show as well Ammons' own cast of mind.[34]

Along with this thrust on the elements of science comes the impression of Ammons being a cold poet, which can largely be toned down by a closer look at the presence of nature, which for Ammons is largely an expression of weather. The impression is to a great extent the result of a neglect of the concrete and the physical in his poetry, which manifests as weather.

The study of weather is significant for the way it helps to modify, if not replace, the dominant image of Ammons established and encouraged by Harold Bloom who places him in the visionary company of Emerson and Whitman suggesting the impossibility of an escape from transcendentalism which he sees as the most significant aspect of Ammons whom he calls "the most direct Emersonian in American poetry since Frost."[35] As early as 1971 Bloom placed Ammons in the visionary company when he noted: "Ammons's more significant concern is

for an identity transcending natural specifics in the tradition of Emerson, Whitman and American Orphism."[36]

The transcending of the "natural specifics", this study suggests, is a characteristic limited to the early poems of Ammons. Further, this study proposes that weather is the most powerful natural specific that inhibits transcendentalist enterprises. Bloom's labelling of Ammons, as a poet of the "romantic sublime"[37] is applicable only if one ignores what Bloom calls the "ecological and geological strain."[38] This study argues that the presence of ecology and geology, which Bloom laments in his haste to classify Ammons as a transcendentalist, is, predominantly an impression created by weather. The same ecological strain, which irritated Bloom ironically, becomes the centre of the later readings of Ammons as an ecologically and environmentally conscious poet.

The powerful presence of weather that runs through Ammons has another revisionary role. It strengthens the pull away from a Christian worldview, which Ammons rejected as early as 1987:

> If I get back to the Pre Socratics, I feel that I'm in the kind of world that I would enjoy to be in, but nothing since then. Especially in the last two thousand years, dominated by Christianity and the Catholic Church and other religious organizations.[39]

The rejection of the Christian worldview assumes enormous significance in the emergence of a number of environmental readings of Ammons, which reject the anthropocentric views

that exclude all concerns other than those of men in the universe. Ammons's poetry of the animal world under the influence of weather exhibits the awareness of a complex interdependence and variety of life, which is delicate, and of a feeling of a space over which man does not have any monopoly. Ammons rejects, in his observation of the life around, the hierarchies endorsed by Christian ideology. The sense of being a witness to the complex interdependency rather than offering support to an ideology that encourages aggressive domination over nature, is characteristic of his impressions of animal life. This suggests an environmental and ecological consciousness that takes his poetry forward from the initial transcendental experiences of *Ommateum*. Weather becomes an image that underscores the idea of the susceptibility of human life to weather, which consequently deflates the inflatory stances that Christianity vociferously propounded. The ecological strain of Ammons, which Bloom complains of, becomes most obvious in his observations of the life around which do not grant any privileged status to man.

The experience of weather has another corrective function. The presentation of weather suggests a treatment of nature, which qualifies the romantic readings of Ammons. His poetry does not glorify the rural landscapes nor does it actively condemn city experiences. Ammons carefully eschews the egocentricity of the romantics by his constant references to

nature as weather. Reality that is mostly experienced as motions of weather constantly interrupts the idea of the romantic ego in Ammons's poetry. Consider Denis Donoghue's statement:

> He protests that he is concerned with Nature, including human nature, but he rarely makes me feel that he cares much about any human nature but his own. His poetry is rural in the sense that you can walk for miles in it without meeting anyone; so the dramatic sense of life never appears. Ammons could write his poetry if there were nothing in the world but mountains, winds, weather, birds, fish, sand dunes, beaches, and a poet accustomed to living in his art alone.[40]

Denis Donoghue manages such a tirade against Ammons, by a total disregard for symptomatic evidence that Ammons offers in his poetry, the evidence of weather, which builds up an impression of the outside world. The primacy of imagination and the constant attempt to transfigure external reality by empathy and pathetic fallacy which Ammons was guilty of in his early writings partially justify the critical reception of Ammons as a romantic. But these tendencies in Ammons are progressively eroded by a treatment of weather in a powerful current of realism that signifies the disappearance of the romantic Ammons.

Weather is central to Ammons for the way it becomes a necessity, a necessity dictated by his poetics. Ammons who was always troubled by form and formlessness explained the problem to William Walsh:

> The air between me and that oak tree is invisible and formless. I can't see the air. So I see nothing but form out the window. I

> know the air is there because I see it work on the trees, and so I begin to think there is an invisible behind the visible, and a formlessness, an ongoing energy that moves in and out of a discrete formation. It remains constant and comes and goes and operates from a world of residual formlessness. That space, at some point, develops what we perceive. In a way I have experienced the idea of formlessness and boundlessness, but these are imperceptible thanks to our senses .[41]

Such a tension between form and formlessness becomes in Ammons's poetry the tension between the concrete and the abstract where the abstract stands for discussions on the nature of reality and language. What Ammons calls the "conceptual aspect"[42] of poetry, is countered by the idea of forms which nature furnishes, and this counterpoints the 'formlessness' of conceptual thought in Ammons. Further, the idea of inclusiveness that Ammons desires as the ideal quality of his writing, forces Ammons to be in search of "a single governing image"[43] that would hold together the disparate experiences that are available to men and the curvature of inclusiveness becomes a curvature of weather. The statement that he made to Zofia Burr throws light on his aesthetics, since it comes from a man who believed that "twentieth century poetry has aimed at distortion rather than classification.[44]

> What I'm aiming toward is clarification but at the same time inexhaustibility. The deconstructionists talk about the multiplicity of a work, its soliciting. But that sounds as if they're making negative what I always consider as positive. What's positive about a poem is that it can be clear in the way it structurally or procedurally sets itself up, and yet absolutely inexhaustible in its suggestiveness.[45]

The structural clarity coexisting with the absolutely inexhaustible suggestiveness was Ammons's idea of poetry, and weather offered him both. The natural forces in his poetry, which exert a kind of control, contribute much to the structural peculiarities of his writing. Simultaneously they allow great suggestiveness such that wind, rain, snow, and rapid fluctuations in temperature assume great significance in his writing.

The title of the study "The Corners of the Wind" needs some elaboration. The idea is from " Grassy Sound" an early poem of Ammons and suggests the impossibility of wind having corners. It suggests a tendency of Ammons to define something undefinable. Further, it points to the need to make experience 'palpable' which is an aspect of realism. The title indicates the rejection of the romantic connotations of wind in particular, and experience in general, and the desire for exactitude that runs through Ammons with its desire for precision. The image of the corners points to a sense of place and a feeling of concreteness which are connotations normally not associated with the notion of wind. The rejection of wind as a romantic symbol of inspiration, as a spirit, is also implicitly critiqued in assigning to wind a place rather than a space. The "corners of the wind" further become suggestive of the boundaries of Ammons's landscape both physical and conceptual.

I begin by looking at the image of wind in his early poetry, a powerful, more than human, less realistically approached experience, which is symptomatic of Ammons's early, though transient romantic disposition. This image of wind, I suggest, is a passing phenomenon, which is replaced by an image more realistically situated in a more contemporary experience and a less mystical phenomenon. Such a transition becomes a rejection of the romantic assumptions of wind and is increasingly defined as part of process, change and motion, all conveyed by the association of wind with weather.

From the image of wind, I proceed to look at the image of the animal world that Ammons builds up in his poetry, the progression defended on the grounds that both are part of the landscape in which Ammons finds himself. Ammons sees the motions in the animal world as deeply influenced by weather and I propose that the world of animals is constantly defined by the influences of weather and the seasons. His poetry underscores the deep dependency of the activities of the animal life around on the rapid unpredictable transitions of weather.

Writing is the object of study in the third chapter. From the logic of the external world the focus is shifted to the aspects of writing with its connotations of varying degrees of interiority. Ammons's self-conscious poetry, I maintain, is always placed in the context of the descriptions of the landscape where weather is a significant presence, which comes to control and modify the

overall impression of self-reflexivity that his poetry creates. Weather turns out to be the dominant experience in which the dynamics of writing is discussed. Weather thus becomes a counterweight to the abstract passages and theoretical speculations, and Ammons conveys the impression of the reality of weather as defining the scope of his self -conscious writing. Writing about weather becomes as much an activity of weather itself.

Ammons, who was obsessed so much with the sense of time and who rejected the Christian notion of the body, and who attempted a reversal of the western tradition, projects a notion of the body and consciousness as defined by the sense of the landscape in which it is situated. The biological condition of the body, sensations and thought are the foci of the fourth chapter, the argument being, the sense of the body appears inextricably connected to weather and the seasons and consequently in his writing, the sense of the body is largely the sense of weather.

Death, the disappearance of the body, is the focus of the last chapter. For Ammons who rejected the religious consolations of death, the treatment of death is firmly placed within a notion of time that avoids the transcendental and the eternal. Consequently, transcendental conclusions on the experience of death are absent in his writing. The experience of temporality that Ammons conveys, this chapter proposes, is an experience of weather. The processes of the body in its various

stages of disintegration, and thoughts of death are placed in the processes of weather and the seasons. The temporality of day/night, mostly a consciousness of weather, decides the temporality of the body. Ammons's refusal to suggest a notion of the body as more a seat of the soul than a complex of sensations is the result of his rejection of Christianity, and the foregrounding of the experience of death is the foregrounding of weather. The experience of death is an experience of weather.

The study thus proposes that weather is the most persistent theme in Ammons's poetry. It is the context and the text in which other experiences are realized. Wind, animal world, human body, and death come to be mediated by it. Further, the notions of writing, which Ammons as a poet harbours and endorses, are deeply embedded in an experience of weather. Weather is the most significant context in Ammons, which comes to modify other perceptions and experiences that he discusses in his poetry. A closer look at Ammons's preoccupation with weather helps to reject some of the dominant readings of Ammons, which have persisted with tenacity of which the Emersonian transcendental bias in Ammons as propounded by Harold Bloom being the most powerful. Following this transcendental bias Ammons has been seen as being charmed by transcendentalism a conclusion obvious in a statement like that of Robert Hills when he sees Ammons as "enamored of transcendence."[46] Associated with

this is the idea of the romantic Ammons, which is equally strong, which too gets qualified by a closer look at the significance of weather. The image of the scientific Ammons, which Calvin Bedient, Richard Howard and Willard Spiegelman highlight too needs some revision. The abstract Ammons which Willard Spiegelman, and Hyatt Waggoner have proposed, necessarily an offshoot of the scientist Ammons, gets seriously qualified on a closer look at the landscape in his poetry. The landscapes in his poetry turn out to be mostly landscapes of weather. The acknowledgement of the presence of such landscapes helps to question the conclusion of a well known poet like Robert Pinsky who sees Ammons as a poet "who has a bent toward abstraction, toward authenticating abstraction as an activity."[47] The preoccupation with the abstract, a tendency of Ammons's poetry, often exaggerated in most of the critical readings of Ammons, is constantly qualified by the images of the natural world in which weather turns out to be the most significant presence. The dialectic that John Lang sees in Ammons's poetry "between the concrete particulars of sensory experience and the linguistic abstractions"[48] often results in the predominance of the former where weather is most often the concrete and the particular. The arc of Ammons's poetry turns out to be an arc of weather.

Chapter 2

A Variable Wind

> Turning this around do you have a least favorite childhood memory?
>
> The most powerful image of my emotional life is something I had repressed and one of my sisters lately reminded me of. It was when my little brother, who was two and a half years younger than me, died at eighteen months. My mother some days later found his footprint in the yard and tried to build something over it to prevent the wind from blowing it away. That's the most powerful image I've ever known.
>
> A. R. Ammons in conversation with William Walsh [1]

Ammons's enchantment with the experience of wind is indicative of the growth of his poetry; it shows the gradual growing out of the romantic disposition and the rejection of transcendental attitudes. The treatment of wind as Ammons's poetry matures becomes more contemporary and more realistic, and he outgrows the proneness to emotional outbursts that is typical of the romantic response. The weakening of the romantic response is progressively reflected in his attitude to wind.

The first of the Ezra poems "So I Said I Am Ezra" of *Collected Poems1951-1971* introduces the theme of wind:

So I said I am Ezra

and the wind whipped my throat

gaming for the sounds of my voice

I listened to the wind (CP, 1)

Wind, an elemental force, is treated here in anthropomorphic terms. It signifies Ammons's romantic temperament which characterizes his early poems on nature where he imagines intense personal correspondence and communication with the elemental forces and consequently builds up in his poetry a presence of the self based on these interactions which are seldom objectively viewed. The romantic temperament of Ammons is most obvious in his treatment of wind in his early writings. Wind becomes a vehicle of a set of ideas, and the physical reality of the wind is glossed over by the emotional response it elicits.

The sense of the self in his early poetry is greatly the result of his responses to wind, which are seldom disinterested pictures. Wind is not seen as just a natural phenomenon. It comes to stand for the emotional reality that the poet experiences so that the attention is effectively shifted from the external world to the mind. Wind is admitted in so far as it is relevant to the image of the self that the poet is trying to build up. The physical reality of wind is seen as an emotional reality, which does not conform to the experience of wind, which is available to minds less prone to romantic disposition. Wind here is primarily a very personal, subjective experience that the poet refuses to treat in a realistic fashion, and he assigns to it values

and meanings taken not from the sphere of commonly shared reality. What Ammons tries to present in this poem on wind, as in many other poems of his early period, is to assign to wind a reality that is nearer to the highly subjective romantic notion of reality, where the significance of the external reality turns out to be solely dependent upon the emotional impact it produces. The priority of emotion over fact is what decides the drift of these poems. Wind here appears not as part of weather since the connotations of the term weather point to a more objective reality. The significance of wind as an objective reality is only marginally important in this poem, which makes the treatment of wind romantic. The intense experience that wind occasions is related to the body and can be related to weather when Ammons writes, "wind whipped my throat", but the anthropomorphic quality of the experience pulls it away from a commonly shared experience to which a term like weather would be more appropriate, where the logic of a greater social reality is implied.

Wind at this stage of Ammons's writing points to a more personal experience and a feeling contrary to the one evoked by factual presentation pervades "So I Said I Am Ezra" which continues in the next poem "The Sap Is Gone Out Of The Trees", where a strain of realism is briefly introduced when he writes: "rye is rusty in the fields / and the oat grains are light in the wind" (CP, 1). This attempt to build up a sense of the seasons in a realistic fashion is immediately put aside by an

experience, purely imaginary: "The wind whipped at my carcass saying / How shall I coming from these fields / water the fields of earth" (CP, 2). Here, as in "So I Said I Am Ezra", the strain of realism, which is faint in the images of "the fields of earth" with its association of the world outside, is effaced by Ammons's personification of wind. The device of the persona in dialogue with the forces of nature is very much in keeping with the romantic ideology.

Ammons traced the overt presence of the dialogue mode in his early poems to the peculiar circumstances of his childhood. Ammons told Shelby Stevenson in his *Pembroke Magazine* interview:

> 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 recognized them as presences and wondered, if they spoke what nature they would speak out of. [2]

The ties of wind with the external world weaken as a result of this "rhetorical device" and the poem ends with a dialogue of the self with wind, in a mood of intense emotion, where the sense of the 'I' becomes fused with the image of wind and Ammons writes: "I said oh / and fell down in the dust" (CP, 2).

The image of wind continues in "I Went Out To The Sun", a poem where Ammons follows his anthropomorphic imagination in greater detail and builds up the image of the self through the responses to the forces of nature where the sun and

the moon figure. The notion of wind conceived as something real is stronger here, compared to the poems discussed earlier but the strain of realism, nevertheless, occupies only a very small portion of the poem. The presence of the wind as an external reality marking physical space and time does not become significant enough to reverse the impression of a romantic sensibility at work that the poem projects with its extended dialogues of the persona with the "angry sun" and the "glad moon". The impression of a romantic note that Ammons conveys here is found to be largely the result of the use of pathetic fallacy. His observations to David I. Grossvogel on the problem of pathetic fallacy are worthy of attention here:

> I use the pathetic fallacy quite a bit, but always quite deliberately, with full knowledge of what I am doing. It's much cooler to find the objective correlative that which does not answer back - nature rather than the furies and anxieties and jealousies, envies and whatever else a human correlative would contain.3

In Ammons, nature talks back, but only as he wishes it to be and this poem marks the beginning of a transition in Ammons's writing, where the romantic associations with wind get slowly sidetracked by the sense of realism that comes to dominate his later writings.

Ammons continues the same anthropomorphic tendency in "The Whale Boat Struck", where the dialogue between the self and wind continues:

I went away

and when a heavy wind caught me I said

My body lies south

given over to vultures . . . (CP, 9)

Ammons here does not stress the reality of wind as an experience limited to the elements. Its referents point not to the world or landscape but to the landscape of the mind thus making wind more a reality of the mind. For him, wind is an experience of great subjectivity. These poems, where wind is a dominant theme, intensify the sense of the self and convey a highly self-centered subject where no thought about other forms of life is entertained. The romantic ego seems to be fully satisfied in this treatment of wind, where the thrust is on examining the range of emotions that the wind creates. Ammons admits into his writing, the wind that plays on the landscape but does not elaborate its effect enough to attribute to it, an existence other than the one subjectively constructed and endorsed.

Romantic empathy marks his early writing and is most powerful in his poems where wind is a significant theme. The idea of a submission of one's self to a larger and a more powerful force is an integral part of romantic thought which implicitly admits a comparison between these forces and human existence. "Doxology", Ammons's first long poem exhibits

empathy and uses a language not unlike that of romantic poetry:

> Transplanted my soul to the wind, wound
> my days around the alga of rapid streams.
> wedded my bones to the throat of flame
> spirited. (CP, 15)

Typical romantic empathy which one witnesses here is a passing phenomenon in Ammons, which he discarded for reasons he made clear to Jim Stahl:

> It seems to me that if you have endured the uncertainty, the anxiety and so on that Keats identifies as a negative capability, then you would not very likely love that very much: you might want to get away from it and much prefer to go to the beach and have a popsickle.[4]

In "Doxology", such a total merging with wind becomes the occasion to discuss the problems of transience, a very powerful theme of romantic poetry. Wind thus is a vehicle of his thoughts and a context for taking up larger issues, but these issues do not at this phase of his writing imply the existence of a self-conscious, critically oriented and distanced subject, which is ruled by intellect and reason rather than emotion, which romantic poetry rejects. "Doxology", like the early poems, is romantic in that, it stresses the presence of a larger force, which is often wind and the tone is one of awe. A feeling of the insignificance of the human subject confronted with such a

reality, runs through these poems and the immediacy of the experience of the idea of the wind is largely due to the focus on the subjective interactions that Ammons foregrounds in these poems.

The romantic treatment of wind reaches a high point in "In The Wind My Rescue Is", where the echoes of Shelley are not distant. Wind here becomes a symbol of freedom from all conventional ways of seeing and being, and Ammons sees wind not as part of the reality of the landscape, which could be verified objectively. Traces of realism are carefully eliminated and the entire poem presents intense emotion where wind becomes an overwhelming experience possible only to what one usually terms the romantic sensibility that declares very much like Shelley:

> In the wind my rescue is
> in whorls of it
> like winged tufts of dreams
> bearing
> through the forms of nothingness (CP, 23)

Ammons, like Shelley, here desires for an existence other than the one troubled by the constraints of human life. For Ammons, as for Shelley, wind opens up the realization of such a desire and it is the height of romanticism that one confronts when Ammons writes:

But the wind has sown loose dreams
in my eyes
and telling unknown tongues
drawn me out beyond the land's end (CP, 23 - 24)

Wind thus becomes a symbol of certain experiences that are not known to man. It points to the unknown, the mysterious, and even the esoteric as feelings and experiences that lie far away from the common sphere of experience and existence. Wind here loses the familiar features that it has in the external world, and it becomes more an experience of a very sensitive and an impressionable mind subject to emotionalism, which the concluding lines substantiate:

. . . rising in long
parabolas of bliss
borne me safety
from all those ungathered stones (CP, 24)

The responses are thoroughly romantic and the image of wind and the dynamics of the poem rely on the logic of certain convictions, highly private and subjective, which the romantic ideology has always acknowledged. Wind in this poem does not create a sense of the time and place in which the poet is situated; rather it only induces a condition of the mind, which is consciously disengaged from the reality of the actual time and place. The sense of an unfamiliar landscape which the reader finds difficult to relate himself to is largely due to the image of

wind and Alan Holder is certainly right when he observes: "The poetry is personal but abstract intense but distanced. Taken as whole, the volume is attenuated and unduly strange, coming to us from far too away." [5]

Robert Morgan later touched upon the unfamiliarity, which was first sensed by Alan Holder: "The poems occur in remote points of desert and mind, which is their difficulty and purity."[6] The impression of strangeness and remoteness that Alan Holder and Robert Morgan detect in early Ammons conveys what Gilbert Allen would call the "poet's radical isolation"[7] which is also a central idea in romantic thought.

The sense of the romantic self continues to be deeply dependent upon his responses to the wind in "A Treeful of Cleavage Flared Branching", where the lonely figure of the poet in the landscape, a landscape of desert, is accompanied by an image of wind:

> The wind
> chantless of rain
> in the open place
> spun a sifting hum
> in slow circles . . . (CP, 24)

The image of wind almost as a human presence is a continuation of the attitude that Ammons constructs in his earlier poems, and wind ceases to be wind but becomes a

presence in a moment where he envisages his death. Ammons builds up in this poem his solitary sense of the self, which is an integral part of romantic thought. The figure in the landscape is subjected to a unique experience wherein the elemental forces play a vital role not as just forces felt and experienced by everyone but as something unique which for the poet is crucial in the experience of his own identity. Ammons places his persona in a solitary space away from humanity. Wind is often the only presence that heightens the solitariness of the poet by intensifying the sense of introspection in the poem.

Ammons is fascinated by wind, which has often been part of the romantic notions of composition and creation. In "One Composing" he presents the theme of creation in the form of a dialogue where wind is present in the background, though not seen as a symbol of inspiration. The poet is oblivious to the changes that wind effects in the landscape and the focus is on himself:

> . . . mounting pubic realms
> he rode galloping through the night
> sweet sap and rain playing marbles
> on the wind's speed of his outstretched shirt. (CP, 29)

What is attempted in this poem is a look at the unique moment of composition, which becomes a sense experience expressed in metaphoric terms. The moment of composition in this poem

becomes equally an experience of wind, though it is not a source of inspiration or stimulus to writing as it often is in romantic poetry.

Wind continues to be significant in the construction of the self in the landscape in "Sumerian", where Ammons writes of himself as a lonely figure, almost a recluse, who is exposed to the ravages of nature: "I have grown a marsh dweller / subject to floods and high winds" (CP, 32). This sense of the lonely self in the landscape appears again in "The Wide Land", which repeats the technique of a dialogue between the wind and the poet. But this poem is different from the early poems in that it introduces a scientific tone that reminds one, of the technique of Shelley in "The Cloud", where an imaginative reconstruction of scientific fact is attempted by the poet without making the experience of wind strange. The presence of wind is tremendous, it disturbs the poet, and Ammons recounts the experience in a manner that echoes his first poem "So I Said I Am Ezra":

> Having split up the chaparral
> blasting my sight
> the wind said
> You know . . . (CP, 48)

From this awesome experience, Ammons proceeds to record the dialogue that he had with the wind, which is supported by the scientific definitions of wind:

Actually the wind said I'm

if anything beneficial

resolving extremes

filling up lows with highs

No I said . . . (CP, 49)

Ammons here incorporates a scientific reality; wind is the result of the flow of air from a space of high pressure to a place of low pressure. Ammons himself traced such a scientific attitude to his education:

> Most of my studies was in science and after I was out of school I read some sort of ordinary things ...such as Scientific American, I was pretty much aware of what was taking place as of late in science. It was perfectly natural for me to speak that way and write that way.[8]

But the scientific mood in the poem does not last long and, Ammons suddenly turns personal in the concluding lines with an image of himself standing blind in the wide land with the wind intensifying his loneliness. In this poem, in the final evaluation of experience, he prefers to see wind in terms of the emotions that it evokes. What is valued is not some scientific knowledge but knowledge subjectively arrived at where emotion, rather than reason, comes to hold sway. The thought of surrendering oneself completely to the experience of wind, an obsession of early Ammons, underlies "Spring Song", where he writes of a field in spring:

. . . I went in

slipping arms high through bleaches

of golden broom grass

and whirled with the wind sizzling there (CP, 49)

The sense of the self that Ammons speaks of here, as in other early poems is deeply linked to the intimacy and intensity with which he surrenders to the experience of wind, and Harold Bloom's observation regarding wind in Ammons's poetry that "it is certainly the most active wind in American poetry"[9] is true though he errs in his general conclusion of Ammons as a transcendentalist. No distance is felt between the subject and the experience with which it is confronted. Fully endorsing the romantic ideology, Ammons strives here for an effect of empathy. The early poetry of Ammons is largely what Richard Howard calls "individual drama"[10] where wind is the major role player, a point Richard Howard takes up when he writes: " Here is a man obsessed by pure being who must put up with a human incarnation when he would prefer to embody only the wind, the *anima* of pure existence itself."[11] Reason, at this stage of the treatment of wind is alien to the sensibility of Ammons. Instead what is supreme in these poems is a disregard for the factual, and though Ammons places the experience of wind in the context of the seasons he does not attempt to present wind as part of the processes of nature.

"Jersey Cedars" which belongs to the 1956 - 1960 period marks a deviation, though slight, since Ammons starts examining the idea of wind as a source for exploring the inexhaustible variety of forms that the landscape offers. Ammons begins the poem with such a picture of the landscape, which is largely defined by the presence of wind in a very objective manner:

> The wind inclines the cedars and lets
> snow riding in
> bow them
>
> swaying weepers
>
> on the hedgerows of
>
> open fields (CP, 57)

One recognizes here the idea that wind is a source of innumerable activities in the landscape. It is a thought that is present even in Ammons's later poetry. The idea of landscape as motion is largely conveyed in his poetry through the image of wind. As Ammons's poetry matures the intense relation between the persona and wind loses its force and changes its character, and Denis Donoghue's impression of Ammons as "chiefly a wind and mountain man"[12] is myopic as well as unsympathetic. The sense of time and change becomes increasingly significant from this poem onwards; Ammons does not try to point to a reality beyond the one conveyed through the senses, rather his preference for the significance of the senses and a reality that is

available to others, is a reality of weather of which he writes: "black green branches stubby fans under snow / bent spires dipping at the ground" (CP, 57). This objective picture is suddenly hindered by the intrusion of the poet's voice, which though it continues with the thoughts of seasonal change and weather, the objectivity attained is drastically marred by the same voice which continues to the end of the poem where the focus is shifted away from the objective experience of weather and the poet undergoes a condition of empathy:

> . . . I bent
>
> over arms
>
> dangling loose to wind and snow to be
>
> with them assailing the earth with moans (CP, 58)

The poem ends on a romantic note but it marks the beginning of a very faint deviation. Passages of considerable length and detail, which see the landscape as being influenced by weather, start appearing in his poetry making emotional outbursts minimal.

The preoccupation with the process in a context of wind appears in "The Wind Coming Down From", a poem in which Ezra appears. Ammons admits thoughts of changes, thoughts that pass through his mind absorbed in romantic obsessions:

> the wind went off
>
> carving

monuments through a field of stone
monuments whose shape
wind cannot arrest but
taking hold on
changes (CP, 62)

Even in Ammons's early poetry there is a search for a correspondence between his self and the world outside; such a search leads him to the idea of wind as the perfect symbol of his own condition which he voices in "Grassy Sound", another of the dialogue poems of Ammons. Here he writes of the similarity between himself and wind in a passage where wind has not become part of the poem as an experience but remains an idea:

I had so close
a neighbour
to my thoughts but decided to
sleep before
inquiring (CP, 70)

From this idea, Ammons proceeds to an experience of wind in the landscape with whom he enters into a dialogue and the poem concludes with the image of the poet alone in the landscape without any reply from the wind:

. . . came home dissatisfied there
had been no
direct reply

but rubbed with my soul an

apple to eat

till it shone (CP, 71)

The conclusion is significant in that it marks another phase in his writing since the poem ends with a realization that the wind has not replied and will not. The image of wind which Harold Bloom calls "Ammons's way to knowledge"[13] disappears and it suggests the weakening and the consequent rejection of the romantic disposition of Ammons. The humorous tone in which Ammons presents this realization at the end of the poem, is a humour alien to the romantic ideology that would demand a serious treatment. This realization, strictly speaking, has no place in romantic poetry. The humorous treatment that Ammons employs in this poem marks the beginning of a post romantic phase or at least a distancing from the romantic devices, which he employed in his early poems.

The post-romantic mood does not last long and in "Mansion", which he wrote not long after "Grassy Sound", Ammons reverts to a romantic treatment of wind where he uses an anthropomorphic technique to present the image of wind. "Mansion" is a dialogue poem and Ammons writes of his total surrender of the self:

The wind was glad

and said it needed all

the body

it could get

to show its motion with (CP, 75 - 76)

The romantic quality of seeing wind as a superior force that offers insights into The Truth which Ammons expressly stated returns in "Guide." Here the problems of process, the idea of being and the significance of the idea of becoming which become a powerful presence in his later writing are hinted at when Ammons advises that "you have to stop not being and break / off from is to flowing"(CP, 79). This notion of the self as subject to constant change situated in the world of transience is part of the romantic agony, which Ammons presents as the thoughts on wind, which he calls his guide. Associated with this, he looks into the problems of the one and the many and the poem concludes with an image of wind which has disappeared bringing with it a painful realization that "the wind was gone and there was no more knowledge then"(CP, 80). David Kalstone's observation that "Robert Frost's country speakers are sociable in comparison with Ammons"[14] is true. But when it comes to Ammons's interactions with wind he is most sociable and the disappearance of the dialogues with wind marks the distance from the romantic drift of his early poems by resisting the temptation to anthropomorphize wind.

Wind in the early poems, stands for knowledge and the disappearance of wind signifies the rejection of the idea of seeing wind as a source of knowledge. As his career advances, the significance of wind as a medium of knowledge becomes less

and less relevant and the possibility of communication becomes increasingly faint, suggesting a change in the romantic attitude. Wind in the early poems differs from the later ones in that in the later poetry the conversations are almost always disrupted, and the instances where wind does not answer the doubts of the poet become more frequent and dominant that the impression of a hallucinatory experience becomes powerful enough to discredit the romantic impression of the poem.

"Raft", a dialogue poem, continues the personification of wind where the sense of the unreal persists throughout the entire length of the poem. Ammons's encounter with wind as in the earlier poems is imaginary, suggesting an experience, the validity of which never points beyond the personal. Wind as a natural phenomenon is not the effect that Ammons tries to build up in this poem. The lonely figure in the landscape which begins with "So I Said I Am Ezra" returns here for whom wind is the only company. Ammons entertains a romantic thought in the first line itself of "Raft": "I called the wind and it went over with me", and later in the poem he further elaborates the idea of wind as human, without any sense of ambiguity:

> it was almost dark when the wind
> breathless from playing
> with water
> came over
> and stopped

resting in the bare trees . . . (CP, 92)

The sense of the lonely figure in the landscape is built up carefully by Ammons where the experience becomes deeply rooted in the landscape and the experience lasts into the night and the theme of wind 'disappears' in the middle of the poem:

the wind slept through my leaving
I did not wake it to say goodbye.
The raft swirled before day
And the choppy , tugging bay (CP, 93)

The 'disappearance' is in keeping with the technique that Ammons adopted in the opening lines of the poem, the disappearance of the wind itself is in an anthropomorphic fashion.

"Expressions Of Sea Level", a major poem of the 1961-1965 period has an image of wind that Ammons partially explored in "Jersey Cedars." Wind is an agent of change in the landscape, and the poet's interest is in the landscape rather than in himself and this defines the overall effect of the "Expressions Of Sea Level." This shift in the interest from a mind constantly watching the changes that happen to one's self, to the world outside and the status of the ego becoming less significant are part of the broadening vision that Ammons undergoes. The fascination with the minute details becomes very significant here which characterizes his later writing, and

the microscopic vision of Ammons much in the manner of Thoreau is perceptible in the lines on wind:

> . . . marsh grasses stem logged
>
> combine wind and water motions
>
> slow from dry trembling
>
> to heavier motions of wind translated through cushioned stems, tide held slant of grasses
>
> bent into the wind (CP, 136)

The language has become more realistic, factual, controlled, disinterested, and objective and the emotional intensity is decreased to the point of eliminating all emotions and the passage looks more like a piece of report. The 'I' which had a central role in the early poems has vanished and Ammons has travelled a long way from the personifications of wind and becomes more earthly in his attitude to it and tries to focus on the impact of wind on the landscape thus making wind a much more tangible reality. Wind is made more real by the set of concrete images that Ammons uses to conjure it up. The sense of the concrete which is slight if not absent, in the early notions of wind that Ammons entertained in his early poems makes a powerful appearance in this poem.

The minute observation of wind and the impact of wind on the landscape form the central thought of "Saliences." Ammons here traces the endless variety of patterns of the landscape to the presence of wind, an important force that influences even

the smallest object. For Ammons, the rapidly changing landscape is deeply fused with the motions of wind:

> . . . wind
> among the dunes,
> making variables
> of position and direction and sound
> of every red leaf
> and bloom,
> running streams of sand
> winding rising at a depression
> falling out into deltas . . . (CP, 152)

From the very elaborate image of wind which justifies Emerson's observation of the American mind as having a more than "an average delight in accurate perception"[15], Ammons proceeds to entertain thoughts on the various types of wind which would be unimaginable in his early writing where wind is never treated in a realistic manner:

> wind , a variable, soft wind ,hard
> steady wind, wind
> shaped and kept in the
> bent of trees . . . (CP, 152)

Ammons here sees wind as a force that affects all forms of life, animate and inanimate. He sees wind as part of weather, and

the first of the direct connections that he makes, appears here, which forms the central thought of all his later poems:

> wind ,from the sea ,high surf
> and cool weather;
> from the land a lessened breakage
> and the land's heat: (CP, 153)

Ammons's interest in processes and changes is associated with weather and wind, and he reflects on the significance of wind and its relation to reality, which he sees as inexhaustible in its variety:

> wind alone as a variable
> as a factor in millions of events,
> leaves no two moments
> on the dunes the same. . . (CP, 153)

A deepening awareness that acknowledges the interrelatedness of the various forces in nature is felt here. Such awareness can be traced to his Navy days. Ammons realized it while he was sitting on a destroyer. The significance of the water level occurred to him:

> It was the line inscribed across the variable land mass, 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 - run off, 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 still 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. [16]

This realization underlies all the images of wind where wind is seen as an integral part of the endless and innumerable processes. The idea of process as always beyond intellect and out of the reach of preconceived forms is bodied forth in a passage where wind comes to stand for process and agent of change:

> wind alone as a variable
> takes this neck of dunes
> out of calculations reach:
> come out of the hard
> routes and ruts . . . (CP, 153)

A closer look at this passage shows that wind here offers knowledge different from the one which it offered in the early poems, where it stood for an experience often mystical in nature, where empathy was the most often sought after condition of such existence. In "Saliences", Ammons uses wind as a presence, which he uses to articulate his preoccupation with process and change which allows some abstract thought, though, reality is firmly rooted in the image of wind in the sand dunes which becomes process in action.

"Loss" continues the same pattern where Ammons writes of the wind playing on the daisies. The picture that Ammons creates here does not have the speaking voice and consequently, the impact of wind on the self is missing in the poem. The eye is fixed on the landscape trying to recreate in the poem all the changes brought about by wind. The "Loss" continues the idea of landscape in motion when he writes of the daisies:

> turn
> any way the wind does
> and lift their
> petals up
> to float off their stems
> and go (CP, 182)

Ammons does not allow the intrusion of the persona of the poet into the poem even in the closing lines. The sense of objective reality persists to the end of it. This is a deviation from his early poems where the pattern is a return to a mood where he looks at the impact of the external landscape on himself. The 'I', engrossed in a deep and intimate relation with wind, a characteristic romantic trait of his early poems, is absent here.

The preoccupation with process and transience which appears in the context of wind is seen in "Mission' which employs the dialogue mode. It indicates Ammons's interest in the nature of reality; the feeling of the transience of reality is articulated in great distress.

oh I said I

can't seem to make

anything

around enough to last . . . (CP, 190)

He is consoled by a philosophy put into the mouth of the wind:

but why

the wind

said

should you be so distressed

as if anything here belonged to you

as if anything here were your concern. (CP, 190)

The use of the dialogue is in the manner of his early poems and is a regression in terms of technique but it carries forward the preoccupation with the idea of process of "Saliences" and "Expressions Of Sea Level". Wind is seen as an agent of change where Ammons strictly adheres to the objective mode of presentation whereas in "Mission" observations on the fluid nature of reality, which is always transient, are projected on to the wind thus making the poem nearer to a subjective mood.

"Admission" returns to the objective presentation of wind where Ammons writes of the forms of life that he observes on the landscape placed in the context of wind. It is against the picture of wind "high along the headland where the mosquitoes keep low" that Ammons looks at the life around:

gulls stroll

long strides down the shore wind;

every tree shudders utterance

motions for sun water wind light

intersect merge . . . (CP, 205)

For Ammons, the coming together of things is possible and most obvious in the presence of wind.

"Snow Whirl" continues the objective tone of "Admission", where Ammons tries to record the changes of the landscape in snow through which wind passes. The image of the landscape in motion is the impression that Ammons creates:

since snow

began to fall,

the wind has

managed to turn

snow into

squares of emptiness: (CP, 211)

Wind, for Ammons, is the force that makes so many patterns of reality possible; it intensifies the sense of the changes that comes to dominate all his later writings. Wind becomes a part of a larger and more common reality and not an experience unique to the poet and subjective interpretations become least relevant; what is attempted is a photographic reality, a moving

picture of the landscape from which emotions are skilfully evacuated.

The transition from a celebration of the self to a self-conscious and self-reflexive mood makes its first appearance in "Project". The idea of writing is admitted in the opening lines where wind is the theme:

> My subject is
> still the wind still
> difficult to
> present being
> invisible :
> nevertheless should I
> presume . . . (CP, 214)

The self-conscious mood does not last long and Ammons looks at the world outside where the presence of the wind in the landscape is sensed and articulated:

> I'd be compelled
> to say
> how the honeysuckle bushlimbs
> wave themselves
> difficult
> beyond presumption (CP, 214)

A movement from the abstract and the self-conscious to the concrete and the particular is accomplished by a return to the real time and space where wind, like the weather in later poetry, becomes, a counterpoint to the philosophical discussions.

Interest in the visibility of wind is part of Ammons's explorations of the possibilities for the patterns of reality which manifest in "Small Song", a poem short enough to be quoted in full:

> The reeds give
> way to the
> wind and give
> the wind away (CP, 222)

The theme of interrelatedness becomes physically visible in this poem. The need for rendering thought into a sensory frame, a persistent motif in Ammons's poetry, is part of the desire for the concrete. The sense of the unreal that accompanies the visibility of wind in the earlier poems where it is treated in anthropomorphic terms gives way to a mode of representing wind and other elemental forces in a manner where it is a part of the world of a common enough reality.

"Script", which belongs to the same period has no objectives beyond the ones immediately visible and is an attempt to record the visual patterns made possible by wind with which the poem concludes:

over the house

some circling leaves waving

record

size, direction and speed. (CP, 227)

This image of wind, full of details, is different from that of his early writing, where the impact of wind on the landscape is sacrificed for an introspective mood and vision where the stakes in the emotional drama are limited to the self of the poet. Wind in this poem has an independent existence, is more than the projection of a subjective consciousness distinguished by hypersensitiveness, which is a feature of romantic ideology.

The post-romantic tendency continues in "Making Waves", where the link between wind and weather with its romantic connotations shorn off, decides the drift and the final impression that the poem gives off. The physical condition of the poet is expressly linked to the weather:

Some mornings of maximal

frustrations wind

rain four days old

your hate wave rises &

slap around the walls: (CP, 241)

Ammons here underscores the link between states of mind and states of weather for which science has offered ample proof. In his interview with Schneider Ammons touched upon this relation:

> Actually, you know, the weather is an atmospheric equivalent of our moods and impressions of things .In writing about the weather, you just about hit the emotional tone of the time. There's [sic] storms there're blank highs, there are troublesome lows, there's precipitation. If you look at the way human beings feel, it will analogize into states of the weather with out any trouble. In fact, so much so that one wonders if we don't get our changes of mood some how from that very source.[17]

Ammons here suggests a dependency of both mind and body on weather. "Making Waves" becomes thus another important poem in that wind here becomes very much part of weather. There is nothing romantic about it, and it is seen as a reality as unpleasant as rain and as something which has lost the status of a desirable experience. The psychological connotations of wind become more associated with weather and the romantic connotations are removed.

"Clearing", yet another a poem on weather, which follows "Making Waves", thus can be seen as a continuation of the post-romantic image of wind. Ammons writes of the fourth consecutive overcast day:

> . . . the wind has stopped
> the trees and bushes in
> profound rest
> hold beads. (CP, 242)

The focus here is on the changes brought about by weather on the landscape, and the reality the poem foregrounds is the

reality of weather where the wind is quite significant. The poem ends with an image of the sun and not with a romantic image of wind when Ammons observes: "If the sun breaks out an / amazing number of things will change" (CP, 242).

"Here And Now" also belongs to the same category of poems where wind plays a very decisive role in the realistic picture that Ammons builds of the seasons. Ammons is writing on the month of October:

> it's October
>
> the leaves are going fast
>
> rain weighted
>
> them and then
>
> a breeze
>
> send them in shoals clear across
>
> the street (CP, 264 -265)

The landscape in this poem is greatly determined by the image of wind and its impact on trees, which Ammons elaborates to create a sense of motion and process. He describes the existence and experience of wind solely in terms of its impact, and it does not have a separate existence apart from the landscape in which he confronts it. The sense of time and place comes to be determined by wind, which along with rain becomes part of the experience of weather, and consequently becomes an experience, which one can assign to the sphere of realism. Wind and rain have now become important for Ammons for the visual

patterns that they offer in the landscape, whereas in the early poems they were significant for the subjective impulses they evoked.

"Pluralist", a poem of the same period is written in the same vein, and it explores the possibilities of visual images that the impact of wind throws up. For Ammons, motion in the landscape is greatly the presence of wind:

> Winds light & variable break
> upward out
> of cones or drop cones down
> that turn up
> umbrellalike from the
> ground (CP, 289)

This picture of the maple cones flying in the wind with which the poem begins is taken up later and elaborated in the next stanza where Ammons presents a graphic picture of the maple tree in the wind:

> one side going west & the
> other east or northeast or one
> up & other
> down . . . (CP, 289)

Wind, here for Ammons, is a source of fresh patterns of reality, which adds to the complex notion of process. It is a concrete

reality as in "Essay on Poetics" where amidst the discussions of reality and self-conscious manner of writing, Ammons turns to wind not as a possible source of inspiration but as a reality that is out there which has nothing unusual about it. He realizes that one has to acknowledge it as part of the experience of being trapped in time and space:

> elm seed, maple
>
> seed shower
>
> loose when the wind
>
> stirs a spring wind harvesting
>
> .....
>
> everything so
>
> gentle . . . (CP, 306 - 307)

The landscape with its images of maple and elm seed is also one where wind is present and he elaborates:

> then there's the maple seed's oar wing
>
> it spins too
>
> [simply on an ordinary day]
>
> but in a gust can glide broadside . . . (CP, 307)

"Essay On Poetics" thus continues the theme of "Here And Now" and "Pluralist" since in these poems Ammons is obsessed with patterns predominantly appealing to the sight that the wind offers, which consequently modifies his experience of the landscape and there is not even a trace of an attempt to partake

of the romantic legacy of constructing a personal relationship and dialogue, a temptation to which Ammons succumbed very easily and joyfully in his early poems.

Realism is the prevailing tone of "Rectitude", and Ammons is preoccupied here with a picture of weather where the sense of time is a sense of weather. He writes:

> Last night's thunderstorm's
> glancing quick shifts of strong wind and
> heavy sheets of tensed up
> beating down rain
> have left the snapdragons
> velvet hung in red bead (CP, 325)

Ammons returns from this image of yesterday to the present, a present marked again by changes in weather:

> but this morning
> the clouds clearing ,the sun
> breaking its one source out ,
> light is working in the stem cells (CP, 325)

Wind here is part of weather which offers a framework for Ammons to look at and be sensitive to the changes of the world around him, and the observation of these changes in an exhaustive and elaborative fashion, one witnesses in "Translating", where Ammons begins with an image of afternoon:

> This afternoon thunderstorms were separate and tall, the intervals blue with clearing and white with icy summits moiling upward till height could accept no more and the vast glides called out . . . (CP, 327)

It is with this acute sense of change occurring every moment that Ammons looks at the effects brought about by rain. The poem concludes not with an image or an idea to disturb the sensory experience that Ammons has built up but with an image of the water drops dripping from the leaves.

The same theme is central to "Phase", where, bound by a sense of the real time and space, Ammons creates a picture of weather and landscape in which wind is felt as a major presence:

> These still days after frost have let down
> the maple leaves in a straight compression
> to the grass ,a slight wobble from circular to
> the East as if sometime probably at night, the
> wind has moved that way -surely nothing else
> could have done it . . . (CP, 350)

Once again wind is an agent of change, and it defines the shape of the landscape and "Phase" shows the distance that Ammons has travelled from the romantic connotations of the wind, which he insisted on in the early poems of *Collected Poems.*

Tape for the Turn of the Year written on an adding machine tape continues the attitude towards wind that Ammons exhibited in the last poems of *Collected Poems*. It remains linked to weather and goes well along with the diary mode of writing where Ammons is preoccupied with recording the changes of a particular period beginning in December which extends to January thus making the image of wind bound up with the sense of time and the seasons. All the sections of *Tape* begin with references to the calendar date, which firmly fixes the experience of wind in a particular time and space.

Tape, which was originally given the title 'Today', conveys a temporality of day-to-day experience. Alex Albright calls it "the neat and orderly march through time, a notion as comfortable to western mind as stanzas."[18] Wind is prominent in the section on December 8 and Ammons begins it with an image of weather, where wind suggests winter experience:

> the morning was warm and
>
> winter- bright:
>
> .....
>
> the shores fled
>
> under the wind's weight: (T, 13)

The association of wind as part of the weather in which the poet is trapped, conveys a sense of the passage of time, later in the same section where Ammons mentions warm weather, windy

rain, and smells of fruitcakes baking. Wind is part of household experience greatly modified by the presence of weather. It is an aspect of daily life and comes to stand for change. Ammons experiences time in relation to weather where wind plays a significant role. Wind becomes a concrete experience, a return to the present and a physical reality, which are juxtaposed to the intellectual discussions on the nature of reality. A "sense of a space more accessible and easier to recognize"[19], which Robert Morgan senses in Ammons's later poetry though he does not account for it, is a landscape largely made concrete by the observation of the changes on it, changes made by wind. Wind signals a return to the present, often sudden, disrupting the exercises of the mind, conveying the impression of a reality that cannot be kept at bay for long. It acts as a check and later in the same section of the poem, where, after reflections on the cycles of the seasons and the germination of seeds, Ammons returns to the present defined by weather when he refers to thunder as a "gigantic period" and the section ends with an image of rain:

> . . . a plane is in
> this. It rumbles in the
> distance a chord through
> my circular knowledge: it
> is out in the rain: (T ,16)

Ammons maintains here the significance of the impression of weather in the image of wind, which he uses in the build up of the present that he attempts, a present, which the image of wind introduces into the poem.

Wind as a natural phenomenon appears in the section on December 9 where Ammons talks of the pilot of a plane that crashed in bad weather:

> he thinks it was
>
> turbulence, wind
>
> turbulence -can take a
>
> plane apart . . . (T, 22)

The experience of wind, which Ammons takes pains to particularize is made a part of contemporary experience, and an acute consciousness of time where even minutes are significant, prevails when Ammons writes of the crash in bad weather:

> 4: 50 p .m: the checker at
>
> the A & P said
>
> he was returning from
>
> Philly about 9:15 last night
>
> and saw it . . . (T ,22)

Wind is integrated to weather and there is nothing mysterious or personal about wind, an impression, which Ammons conveys

in the section on December 14, where it is a part of the experience of the present:

> . . . goodnight: it was past
> twelve and a
> cold , freezing, windy
> night: (T, 70)

Wind here does not come to stand for a unique personal experience nor is it seen in anthropomorphic terms. It is present there as a reminder of time and place and contributes to much of the realism of the poem, by its focus on the particular, the local, and the concrete.

The preoccupation with the impact of wind on the landscape reappears in the section titled December 17 where Ammons observes the impressions of the landscape where wind dominates the poem within the poem, which has an image of wind falling on a solitary tree on a hillside. Wind here adds to his idea of the landscape as motion where wind is inextricably linked to the changes of the seasons and one witnesses what Frederick Buell calls "the close observation of disorderly natural processes together with a detailed scientific knowledge about the processes involved."[20] The image of wind as part of weather is a major thought of the section on December 20 where an experience of the day and a sense of time are constantly measured as rising and falling temperature, which Ammons admits:

7:19pm: Oh it was a cold

windy day , jaw tight ,

ear -numb ,nose -runny, cold

windy day . . . (T, 92)

For Ammons, wind often heightens the reality of the landscape as it does in the section on December 26 where the sense of motion that Ammons detects in the landscape is traceable to wind. The minute-by-minute changes that wind occasions in the landscape underscore the fluidity of reality, a dominant idea in Ammons's writing:

firs

stood

sprung into freedom,

snowless:

the windy morning

moved a trillion

waves . . . (T, 110)

The preoccupation with the impact of wind on the landscape is at times extended to incorporate the images of animal life as it is seen under the influence of the rapid changes brought about by weather. Wind is a part of the natural forces; the complexity and richness of animal life, for Ammons is largely a dependence on the weather. The impression of motion as the dominant reality that the landscape offers is further accentuated by the image of

the animal life surviving the severity of the climate. The visual patterns of animal life in the landscape are for Ammons greatly determined by the presence of wind, a thought which he acknowledges:

> (the gulls are safe:
> on the ground they stand
> erect into the wind
> that divides from
> the beak around them:
> in the air . . . (T, 150)

Ammons's poetry here becomes the poetry of minute observations and impressions. This is to a great extent due to his interest in the subtle changes that wind brings about in the world around him.

Wind is a physical reality both for Ammons and for the life around him creating a feeling of being trapped in a particular time and space. Ammons returns to the physical reality of the storm, at the end of the section on January 2, where he repeats the image of the plane crash where wind is part of bad weather which becomes responsible for the tragedy. Ammons uses a dramatic mode but the impression of realism is not lost:

> 11:10 p.m.
> the eleven o'clock news
> says

the plane that went down

in the early December

storm *was* hit by lightning: (T, 163)

Wind and weather bring in the image of death and catastrophe and wind remains a part of this realistic treatment where Ammons takes recourse to a technique of understatement. The skeletal presentation and the factual tone that Ammons employs here do not agree with romantic ideology and no excessive emotion is allowed into the poem. The section reads more like a newspaper item and less like romantic poetry.

In most of the sections of *Tape* wind is a major presence. Ammons does not overstate the presence, and he tries to create the impression that he has tried to record it and to assign to it the status of a photograph. Wind, along with snow, ice, frost, and fluctuating temperature creates a general impression of weather, and no undue significance is attached to wind, a flaw of his early poems especially the early dialogue poems of *Collected Poems* where he was driven by the romantic temperament. Wind is again the theme in the section on January 6 where Ammons writes of a leaf caught in the wind:

. . . falls back-

oops, caught

still at a

45 degree angle

by a sheet of steady

higher wind . . . (T, 172)

Wind is again an experience of weather in January 10 section which begins with a clear reference to the present. Ammons elaborates the image of the landscape that conveys the impression of wind as a conspicuous presence:

> wind's muffled weight
> falls against the end of
> the house
> whipping branches
> in whistling trees:
> we turn away . . . (T, 198)

The impression of wind as motion on the landscape, which Ammons conveys here is repeated in the closing lines of *Tape* with its images of wind among the trees.

Tape thus continues an attitude towards wind, objective and realistic, that Ammons started entertaining from the last poems of *Collected Poems*. Hyatt Waggoner sees *Tape* as a "poetic journal which keeps turning into a poetic meditation."[21] But *Tape* turns out equally to be a meditation on the implications and impact of wind, and the shift from "meta to physics"[22] that Hyatt Waggoner sees in *Tape,* is well reflected in the image of wind. The interior landscapes of the mind seldom figure here and Ammons makes no attempt to explore the correspondences between the mind and the landscape;

landscape remains a landscape to the end of this diary poem the dictates of which define the attitude to wind.

Sphere: *The Form of a Motion*, a poem written taking inspiration from the photos of the earth taken from outer space, is an extended search for a balance between the concrete and the abstract, between the one and the many, between the universal and the particular. Wind appears as a physical reality, a quality not lost though he uses it to take up the question of reality, which he poses, but not before the physical reality is conveyed in the image of the leaves falling "in shoals of variable intensities" (SP, 21). Wind here becomes a context to take up the discussion of the nature of reality and the significance of wind is crucial, since for Ammons reality is motion. In the early dialogue poems of *Collected Poems* wind is not a mere context, it is often the most important experience and enjoys a major role. It does not raise questions on the nature of reality that *Sphere* invokes. Ammons raises the question regarding the perception of the landscape in which wind plays the dominant role when he asks: "When does the wind have them and the tree give / them up? (SP, 21). Such questions are absent in the early poems of *Collected Poems* where romantic feelings determine the content of the poems. Even the conscious idea of using wind as a context was alien to the Ammons of early poems where the thrust was on a complete surrender to the experience in a romantic manner where, the critical distance which would

give space for questions on the nature of reality in a clinical and disinterested way was totally discouraged.

Ammons employs in sections 94 and 95 of *Sphere* the idea of seeing wind as a condition similar to the activity of writing, where the reality of the mind writing a poem is seen in terms of weather. Wind here is similar to the wind of romantic imagination and Ammons imagines a correspondence between the activities of a creative mind and the elemental forces in a set of concrete images. The reality of wind is directly acknowledged as an external phenomenon that does not come to stand for something mysterious and irrational, but as something that remains as a palpable experience mainly due to the pile up of the details that Ammons very consciously projects. This wind which is a physical reality acts as a counterpoint to the abstract thought processes that find a place in his poetry which in turn creates the impression of a pull away from the sense experience as it is greatly mitigated by this counterweight that the experience of wind offers.

The technique of using wind as a concrete experience that interrupts the train of philosophic preoccupations occurs in section 131 where his discussion of the problems of perception related to the question of the one and the many is interrupted by the physical reality of the "week of the windy cold [which] comes and removes the last hangers on / the trees and heaps them against hedge fence" (SP, 69). This sudden return to the

present abruptly breaking intellectual discussions becomes a return to the weather where wind is part of the experience of the landscape. It suggests a dialectics of the concrete and the abstract, the universal and the particular and of the mind and the senses, which is a major technique of his later writing especially in *The Snow Poems*. Wind, in *Sphere*, does not partake of the romantic qualities of the early poems of Ammons, it is more a physical reality that is nearer to the experience of weather and it does not become a being nor is there any sense of confronting a superior presence which evokes a sense of awe.

The presence of wind continues in *Diversifications*. It modifies the perception of the landscape in which Ammons finds himself. Wind adds to the sense of motion and change that contributes to the day-to-day experience that he conveys in his poetry. As in the final poems of *Collected Poems*, Ammons tries to see this as objectively as possible without allowing any of his emotional impressions to interfere with it.

Wind as motion, finds fine expression in "Meeting The Opposition", where the subject is the wind passing through a spirea bush. Ammons observes the details of the wind on the leaves:

> but the leaves have
> so many edges, angles
> varying to loom curvatures that
> the wind on the other side

seeps out in a

gentle management. (D, 16)

Wind here for Ammons does not have any personal significance, it is viewed in a very clinical manner and it offers the poet a sense of reality where the very minute objects of the landscape are seen to be significantly influenced by the presence of wind. Wind in this poem is not a part of weather, the obvious markers of climate and weather are not a part of the poem and in that sense this poem deviates from the poems of the later Ammons, where wind is almost inalienably linked to weather and the seasons. The microscopic vision of Ammons which is extended to the treatment of wind in his later poems which began during the 1961-1971 period of his writing, though not fully elaborated, finds realization in this poem. Unlike the early dialogue poems on wind, where wind is significant for the emotional value that it might impart to the poet, in the later poems, it stands for the patterns of reality that it offers.

"Pray Without Ceasing", the long poem which Stephen Cushman calls "a poem with no Eliotic notes to lead or mislead"[23] with which *Diversifications* ends follows the earlier poems, for Ammons sticks to the realistic mode. Ammons does not attribute to wind the status of a character and he desists from offering a 'picture' of the wind. Though wind here remains sketchily treated compared to "Meeting the Opposition", it can be grouped with the earlier poem since Ammons refuses to romanticize the experience of wind.

Allusions to history are very rare in Ammons, which makes Kevin Mcguirk call Ammons "anti historical."[24] "Pray Without Ceasing", however, is an exception since some of the most powerful references to history in Ammons are to be found in it with its allusions to Vietnam war and incidents consequent upon it. The presence of wind in such historical moments of violence and death does not overstep the bounds of realism. It is there as motion and change and seldom is it associated with any emotion. Wind is an objective reality when Ammons writes about the death of a village woman's husband and son:

> wind burrs
> a leaf : the woman flutters,
> her grief, absolute
> and not a mystery:
> how can I know . . . (D, 95)

Ammons is writing about the landscape in which the woman is placed trying to come to terms with the grief and shock, and wind does not interfere, as it used to in his early poems, where an anthropomorphic treatment of wind logically led to such interferences, which received sanction from the same anthropomorphic quality. "Pray without Ceasing" the last poem in *Diversifications* thus emphatically continues the progressive demystification of wind, a symptom of the growing revisionary stance of Ammons.

The Snow Poems [1977], which Ammons considered his "favorite"[25] had to suffer much unsympathetic criticism. There is ample proof in it that he is still preoccupied with weather. With a lineage that Helen Vendler traced to "Williams's experiments in disjunction" [26], *The Snow Poems* opens with an image of weather and persists in indulging in the landscapes bound by weather to the end of it.

"Words of Comfort" has an image of wind, which offers a clear indication of the progress of the idea of wind in his writing. Wind, in *The Snow Poems*, is part of weather, part of the larger narrative of weather, which pervades all the poems of *The Snow poems*. In *The Snow Poems* Ammons continues to distance himself from romantic ideology. Wind is very much a local experience, and it is sufficiently particularized that it remains very much specific and its associations are clearly geographical and does not become a spirit. Wind for Ammons has become a contemporary experience, a point well substantiated by the language that Ammons employs to describe the wind in "Words Of Comfort". The sense of time that wind conveys is also contemporary in that what is focused is not the broader segments of time which point to a romantic disposition and to a more 'primitive' sense of time but to the idea of minutes suggesting a more sophisticated sense of time. Time and wind come together when Ammons writes: "bt mts / wind runs" (SNP, 1). Wind thus becomes part of the modern consciousness of

time, which for Ammons, is linked to the idea of process, which is inalienably fused with the sense of time. The sense of time and transience that Ammons associates with wind in "Words Of Comfort" is elaborated in "Things Change The Shit Shifts", only a poem away from "Words Of Comfort" where it becomes a reminder of impermanence. Ammons entertains the idea of wind sweeping everything away, a conventional idea:

> . . . what does
> he have: the
> wind blows it
> away and your friend
> also . . . (SNP, 5)

From this keen sense of transience, which ironically becomes a sense of wind in the landscape where winter is approaching, Ammons concludes the poem with an image of the ephemeral and the insubstantial nature of life:

> we are abandoned
> here to found
> our lives on gossamer
> distinctions
> where steel rusts
> and rock cannot hold (SNP, 5)

Wind is often part of the weather forecast. There is nothing romantic about it. It is part of the landscape in which Ammons lives. Wind comes to be associated with the seasons without accepting any of their romantic implications. The objective tone is maintained in "Analysis Mines and Leaves to Heal" where Ammons looks into the problems of reality, a thought which is interrupted by an image of weather in which wind figures again:

> temperature goes up, snow falls:
>
> breakout the stars,
>
> cold shines them: stir up a southern breeze,
>
> here come the wind chill index
>
> here indeed . . . (SNP, 86)

The image of wind has changed considerably from the early poems of Ammons. The change marked by the use of "wind chill index' which points to a very scientific approach to wind with its emphasis on precision, is an approach antithetical to the one proposed by romantic thought. The precision of science held fascination for Ammons, which he saw as having "a sense of objective enquiry into objective subject matters."[27]

Wind, as in *Sphere* connotes a reality that is difficult to ignore. The abstract thoughts in the poem are disrupted continually by wind. The sense of the realistic treatment of wind makes a brief but strong appearance in "But If The Way Will", a poem with strong Zen undercurrents, where Ammons makes a

passing reference to "acid wind and leady sleet" which exhibits a concern with environmental problems which becomes prominent in *Garbage*. The sense of the interrelatedness which Ammons experiences determines the treatment of wind in "A Seventeen Morning" where he notes:

> . . . every fringe
> bank grass alters the
> wind's rill
> spill the way
> thunderstorms roil white ice
> high with stricken majesty . . . (SNP, 99)

The passion for objectivity and precision with which Ammons approaches wind is reflected in a later section of the poem where it is treated in a cold clinical manner. No emotion is admitted there when he observes the impact of wind. Wind does not have any existence other than the one it conveys through its influences on the landscape, an impression retained by Ammons:

> . . . I
> know how the big wind falls,
> the winds of the hollows,
> thickets, ponds
> adding or subtracting huff
> or lag, easing or blocking,
> lofting or snatching down:

clear progressions and puzzling

intermixtures . . . (SNP, 99)

The same scientific temper is at work in the concluding lines of the stanza where Ammons mentions wind, vane, rain gauge and barometer. Wind here ceases to be a subjective experience, and he tries to link it to the sphere of scientific activity where wind is measured and placed along with other elemental forces. Wind becomes an object of study, which suggests the degree of realism and disinterested tone that Ammons applies to it and the clinical interest underscores the rejection of the romantic experience that Ammons so often projected in his early poems.

A realistic strain governs "The Wind Picks Up Slick" where Ammons writes of the wind that "picks up slick / bounding upslope / on the slippery freeze" (SNP, 122). This image of wind and weather is followed by an image of the construction activities at home, which are a part of the mundane aspects of life. Wind does not suggest a romantic experience; rather it becomes an experience very much like the plumbing activities at home with no mystery or emotional value. Wind is part of weather amid images of pollution as in "But If the Way Will" and "Cold Didn't Keep the Stuff' where it is present as a part of the landscape but does not take up the entire attention of the poet:

I drove John to school, so

cold and windy,

and it took me twenty minutes

to get my pollution-control

equipment overload to let up

on the choke and smoke . . . (SNP, 126)

Wind has become more contemporary and it belongs more to the twentieth century with its images of pollution and consciousness of time in its more minute aspects. It is a significant presence in the landscape that bears the marks of industrialization. The reader easily recognizes the land here; it is not a far-off and distant place and wind by being placed in a recognizable landscape has become more familiar. Wind in this poem is the creation of a man whom Helen Vendler calls "a poet marvelously gifted at summoning up a known environment."[28]

"Tell What Will Not Tell Direct" which begins with problems of articulation and language, is interrupted by an image of weather which is predominantly an experience of wind:

since before day

and all-day

the wind's rolled billows across

us, the soundlessness,

rising roar, crash,

muffling ,sucking

against the house . . . (SNP, 152)

Wind modifies the landscape that Ammons draws here and he focuses on the minor details of the impact of wind, which are central to the sense impressions that dominate the poem. These

details act as a counterweight to the 'questions' that Ammons raises in the poem about the nature of language and truth. Wind offers a sense of the present and of the change life in the landscape is subjected to. For Ammons, wind decides the impression of the outdoors. But he seldom makes the connection explicit and "Spread It Thin" is an exception where Ammons is preoccupied with the changes in the landscape. A deep sense of the season runs through the poem and the poem concludes with a realization directly stated, something rare in his later writing:

> . . . when the wind
> does not arrange to have
> tongue, much is tongueless,
> as great distance (SNP,154)

Activity in the landscape for Ammons is made more readily available to the senses by the presence of wind. Wind here underscores the idea of process as motion, an association that Ammons continues to the last poem *Glare*. For him, wind is part of the reality of the landscape as is evident from the final poems of *Collected Poems*. It is the same vision which appears in the next poem "Dark Day Warm and Windy", where, as the title itself indicates the reality of the day becomes the reality of wind, a reality which opens the poem. Wind is part of the clouds and the process of thawing and he sees "the wind stirring / time up to a rush" (SNP, 155). Wind and its bearing on time are stated

here; in these final lines of the poem where Ammons admits that time makes possible all changes which for him are predominantly changes in the landscape.

In "Temperature Rose 15 Degrees Over", Ammons presents an elaborate picture of wind and weather in the landscape. Wind modifies and controls the experience and the impressions of weather:

> . . .high
> winds today will change the
> pacings and placings, only to add heat
> to heat . . . (SNP, 174)

Wind is linked to the temperature of the day and thus is part of weather and a more objective experience, undoubtedly more prosaic, highlighting the scientific and realistic tone that belongs more to the post-romantic position which is more significant in his later poems. Once this tone is established Ammons proceeds to look at the landscape defined by wind:

> winds shake out from scruffy
> snow -disorganized bushes
> cross limbs, tangles, and
> dead twigs and comb every
> long branch out into its
> separate space and possibility,
> a ruffling and swaying

that brings cleansed motions

to high alignment! (SNP, 174)

Wind as motion fascinates Ammons here, and what is hinted at is the possibility of seeing wind as offering a very complex and rapidly changing experience. Such an image of wind supports Helen Vendler's observation that "Ammons's newness lies in the finely calibrated sense of the actual, nontranscedental motions of the natural world"[29], and highlights the indifference of Harold Bloom who insists on seeing wind as a transcendental experience. The experience of wind is a sense impression, and for Ammons the sense of time, is largely the sense of weather and wind, which for him stands for a powerful concrete experience.

The idea of wind as part of the landscape underlies "Clouds Strays Rounded Up", which begins with an image of the sky where clouds are rounded up by the wind. From this image of change and motion in the landscape, Ammons proceeds to take up a series of images of life in the society, images cut short abruptly by a return to the reality of the present where weather becomes an experience of wind:

(at night on to three the wind

has died down but the

temperature has gone right on up to

sixty) (SNP, 185)

As in "Temperature Rose 15 Degrees over", wind comes to be associated with temperature and the objective presentation and the presence of a scientific discourse are hard to miss.

The image of wind as weather takes up a large portion of "I Woke Up at 6 and It Was", where the activities of the poet, which he discusses, are occasionally troubled by a return to the present, which for Ammons means acknowledging the presence of wind:

> the sun
> came up
> in light,
> to warm to thirty : that will do
> in the garage snow (an inch
> on the windy side one to three
> inches on the hemlock . . . (SNP, 196)

Wind is an agent of change and motion in the landscape and it signifies the present to which the poet has to return from which he cannot stay away for long. The acute consciousness of time is linked to the impact of wind on the landscape, which defines it. The sense of the passage of time, for Ammons, is linked to weather, and the poem concludes with the poet speaking on the experience of weather, again an experience of wind:

> Tuesday night had been windy
> I thought, my word, icicles

summarize the rate of melt

and wind direction, are a glacio spiral

version of a wind - rose . . . (SNP, 196)

Ammons here uses a number of words that do not belong to the conventional vocabulary of poetry suggesting the rejection of the romantic responses, and wind here is part of weather understood in the scientific sense of the term. Questions related to the nature of reality and the problems of using the language of the senses are raised, but these questions do not destroy the physical experience of weather that Ammōns builds up in the poem.

The minute observation that he brings to bear on the landscape is extended to the image of wind in "A Flock of My Days" where Ammons places his observations in the context of changing weather:

yesterday when melt was

commencing late

in the afternoon

one icicle with a fringehold

on the eaves

waved back-and-forth

windily

as if hinged,

its hold become so light (SNP, 197)

This image substantiates his interest in the idea of wind as the best possible source of motion which comes to be linked to process and change, a thought that Ammons takes up in "The Temperature Fell" where he stresses the idea of wind as part of the reality of the day and its weather.

> . . . the wind, steady,
> has lessened,
> the temperature is staying
> where it fell,
> snow flakes feeling
> their way [more
> numerous than far off legions]
> through the air
> in fabrics too fine for move "snowing". . . (SNP, 203)

The impression of the landscape as these lines testify is for Ammons bound by temperature, snow, and wind. It contributes to a sense of time, space, transience, and change, a point taken up later towards the end of the poem where he writes of the ways of experiencing wind in a very objective manner, so different from the easy subjective impressions that marked his early writing when he mentions the hemlocks as sensitive wind instruments which pick up the frailest motions of wind. Wind often underscores the unpredictability of weather, and the

manner in which the impact of wind acts on the poet too has changed as in "You Can":

> You can
> walking with the wind
> think yourself
> becalmed
> but turning to return
> find yourself
> in a ten- mile -an- hour gale. . . (SNP, 208)

The wind here does not claim any mystical quality. The capricious quality of the wind of the early poetry was largely due to the anthropomorphic tendency that Ammons had to project since he was under the influence of a romantic ideology that demanded a foregrounding of such anthropomorphic presentations, which explored the possibilities of the relation between the self of the poet and the wind.

Often, the acute sense of time in Ammons's poetry is linked to weather, wind and change. The presence or absence of wind often determines weather. One finds in "It Is April 1", the image of wind as part of the minute-by-minute changing reality, as part of the larger reality of nature, where the wind that Ammons describes is more a product of a post-romantic consciousness rather than a romantic one. He uses the style of weather forecast clearly indicating his intention of making wind

a part of contemporary experience, often scientifically determined:

> Canadian air 30 below above
> the clouds has
> settled into the midlands
> and is moving eastward
> this will bring
> ground temperatures
> within range
> of the structural
> flare out snow (SNP,217)

Wind modifies the reality of the experience, and the reality of the experience that the outdoor world offers is defined by weather where wind is a significant presence. The mood of the poet is not greatly modified; it does not occupy a large portion of his writing and it is not even admitted into his later poems. Even in poems where personal emotions and memories are allowed, wind does not become personal; it remains rather part of weather in "My Father Used to Tell of an" where Ammons shifts his attention to an image of wind after some emotional thoughts on his father:

> . . . as the
> flakes melt on touch the sun
> gives the moisture back to

the wind . . . (SNP, 231)

This precise image of wind is a counterpoint to the emotionally high-strung passages about his father in the same poem setting up a balance between the subjective and the objective, the personal and the impersonal, which has always been a fascination for Ammons. He treats the wind on the snowflakes in a clinical fashion and no attempt is made to personalize the wind or the landscape or the poem by incorporating feelings associated with it.

For Ammons, the experience of the landscape has always been an experience of sense impressions. Such a feeling is conveyed by the poem "No Matter" where the poem opens with images of snow and wind:

so it snowed and snowed
the wind blew and the
flakes flew
and it added up to a
passing
the lilly shoots
hold scoops . . . (SNP, 238)

Wind here is part of the changes in weather, and Ammons resists the tendency to see it as the product of a unique poetic self and the romantic notions of epiphany and pathetic fallacy are rejected. William Doreski's observation on *The Snow Poems* is helpful here:

> The mature poetry of A.R. Ammons avoids the characteristic giganticism of romantic /transcendental poetics by refusing the predictable epiphany and the conventions that engender it. The impulse to giganticism shapes the neo-romantic lyric most commonly by means of epiphany as the poet attempts through climax and closure to reconcile quotidian seeing with the intuitive vision of the imagination, predicating and perpetuating a dualism of the senses and the visionary faculty.[30]

Ammons, as it can be seen in this poem as well as in his later poems, refuses to posit a dualism and rejects visionary enterprises.

For Ammons the intensity of weather and the experience of it, come to be increasingly associated with wind. Existence itself in the landscape is deeply rooted in a sense of the day and night, which in turn is governed by weather. "It Snowed All Night" is again a piece on weather, where from the reality of the night, "a night full of snow", Ammons registers a progress towards the morning. He further elaborates the experience of weather treating wind as a significant aspect of it:

> the clouds, just discernibly
>
> clouds from the general gray,
>
> move on in a brisk
>
> wind . . . (SNP, 268)

In Ammons, the vision of wind as part of the landscape and weather, and as a reminder of time, very rarely provides an

occasion to discuss the various stages of his life. "Variable Cloudiness Windy" is similar to "When One Is A Child One Lives" where Ammons uses wind and weather as part of the present, which he uses as springboard to return to the past in a reflective mood. It is with a picture of the present that the poem begins:

> Variable cloudiness windy
> and cooler this afternoon
> with showers occasionally
> mixed with snow flurries
> when I was young . . . (SNP, 282)

Weather becomes a context of the present where Ammons reflects on his growth. This elaborate reflection ends with a return to the present where once again the reader is made conscious of his awareness of weather.

> a blue cloud went over and ice
> poured down like hail for a minute
>
> this combo day mixed January
> and May , sleet and tulips (SNP, 283)

Wind here is part of that reality which is to a great extent objectively verifiable. It does not become a person nor is there any dialogue between the poet and the wind, which typifies his

early writings. The poem "Variable Cloudiness Windy" in which wind figures is just three poems away from the last page of *The Snow Poems* and it retains a strong sense of objectivity, realism, and a rejection of the romantic connotations which Ammons has insisted from the beginning of *The Snow Poems*. It consolidates the distance that Ammons has travelled and indicates the growing out of the romantic mindset, which has not come to a stop. Ammons continues his rejection of the romantic ideology in *The Snow Poems*; the irony is not to be missed; Ammons is still bound by the thoughts of romantic ideology.

Wind, objectively treated as a part of weather continues in *A Coast of Trees,* which Hyatt Wagoner considered "a volume of recovery" [31] and Ammons maintains the tone of realism, and the physical reality of weather for him is largely an experience of the landscape exposed to the winds. Wind offers Ammons a context to study forms of life. From the early poems of *Collected Poems* where Ammons is mostly worried about himself he has enlarged his vision to include the world outside.

The opening lines of "Weather Bound" establish the tone that he will adopt in the poem and in *A Coast of Trees* at large.

> A strong southwester
> brings up the south
> and our moths have been
> already on the snow

and freezing air

waken and search for

prominences . . . (COT, 8)

Wind as part of contemporary experience is obvious in the reference to it as "southwester" and the term clearly indicates the change that has come over in his attitude towards wind. Wind has lost the intensely personal edge, and it belongs to the outside world, it is more a part of the natural phenomena, and becomes for Ammons, a mode of experience through which the landscape can be approached. The notions of reality and process that Ammons holds are defined by an awareness of rapid change which makes the image and experience of wind an ideal context. Wind, for Ammons, becomes an intensifying experience that enhances the sense of change and visibility of process, and reality for Ammons is largely dependent on wind that he writes of the moths:

but they want to go where

the wind is coming from

they lift off and the

wind blusters them high . . . (COT, 8)

The objective attitude towards the wind continues to the end of the poem where the subjective element is completely kept off. It remains to the end merely wind that belongs more to the sphere of meteorology than to romantic ideology.

The image of wind as part of weather and the seasons intensifies the sense of change and process in "Rapids", where the interest in wind as a source of the variety of visual patterns of reality of the landscape underlies the poem, which opens with a clear reference to the seasons:

> Fall's leaves are redder than
> spring flowers, have no pollen,
> and also sometimes fly, as the wind
> schools them out or down in shoals
> or droves . . . (COT, 26)

Ammons links the changes in the landscape to the seasons. Wind, like snow, modifies the perceptions of the landscape in which one is bound. Ammons, here, as in the other poems of *A Coast of Trees* does not allow the personal thoughts and emotions to disturb the impression of photographic reality that he aims to construct. In "Rapids", Ammons however, allows a personal thought which has a touch of sadness, but the experience is not something unique or unnatural to disrupt the tone of objectivity maintained up to the introduction of the personal strain, which he conveys in the thought that "the universe will probably not find / a way to vanish nor I/ in all that time reappear" (COT, 26). Process, as it manifests in the landscape of Ammons's poetry, becomes an experience of the presence of wind.

The objective and realistic treatment of wind that the reader frequently encounters in his writing, especially in the later phase, is authenticated by the persona that he employs in the poem. It is a persona so different from the one that he presented in his early poems which is defined by excessive emotionalism. Here, the reader is surprised by an encounter with a calm, cool, controlled and disinterested subject, which voices certain realizations that clearly point to the post-romantic attitudes. "Neighbours" begins with Ammons admitting, "I always / thought the woods idyllic and let it go at that" (COT, 27). From this, Ammons proceeds to build up an elaborate picture of the impact of the wind on the pine tree:

> . . . but
> look one tree the near pine cracked off in high wind
> dry rot at the ground, and coming down sheared every
> branch off one side of the sweet gum . . . (COT, 27).

It is within this framework of the experience of wind that Ammons concludes the poem. He realizes that he cannot regain the lost idyllic world though the woods are here with him. The realization is cool and collected, and the highly emotionally impressionistic subject prone to outbursts of sorrow, anger, and ecstasy has disappeared; in its place the reader senses a persona free from all these. That he toyed with the idea of a better place is clear from his reply to Cynthia Haythe to a question of the best time in history to live: "I think of America

when it was rural the village rural community without cars or that kind of transportation. With horses and streams and a nearly pure environment of streams and sky. It must have been very beautiful."[32]

Ammons in this statement and in the poem under discussion touches on an environmental problem. He knew the irreparable damage being done to the landscape as part of human "progress" but refuses to lament it or suggest a return to the past as a solution. Ammons confessed to Schneider in his last interview:

> No. I think, we've gone into the artificial and there is no return I really feel that the only hope we have now is to continue to try to educate ourselves from the natural processes that remain available to so that we can duplicate these artificially and sustain ourselves wherever we are on Mars or outer space or wherever we go, that just about have done in the earth.[33]

Ammons here exhibits a very sophisticated awareness which is central to *Garbage*. It precludes the possibility of nostalgia, which would very much be in keeping with romantic ideology.

Wind as a part of weather against which the animal life is observed, appears again in "An Improvisation For A Stately Dwelling" where wind has no personal meanings attached to it but is presented in a terminology related to the science of weather. Ammons writes of wind in the language of weather forecast:

> . . . tops of beeches

leafless

a wind NNW

has relifted the geese

and sent them southerly (COT, 47)

The objective and precise terminology that Ammons employs is a direct rejection of the technique that he used in the early poems of *Collected Poems.*

Ammons pursues the sense of change that wind affects, to "Persistences", the last poem of *A Coast of Trees.* The persistence of the wind creates a sense of impermanence that defines the nature of the landscape of which he writes in the concluding lines of the poem: "in debris we make a holding as / insubstantial and permanent as mirage" (COT, 52). *A Coast Of Trees* does not deviate from the tone of realism that Ammons introduced into his writing in the final poems of *Collected Poems,* which he further elaborated in his subsequent works especially *The Snow poems.* Wind, for Ammons has lost the romantic aura; it is more a part of the reality of weather and contemporary experience, and it fascinates the poet for the possibility of an enlarging of consciousness that it holds, for the sense of time that it offers, which further advances the pull away from the romantic patterns that wind has always offered.

"Extravaganza", the second poem of *Worldly Hopes* (1982) introduces the theme of wind, but the reality of the wind, Ammons says, can be as physical as the experience of leaves

floating in the wind and it can also be a reality seen through an intellectual exercise for which he shows his distaste in the title, which he uses to define the intellectual activity. Simple concrete experience of the wind suffices for Ammons; the abstract philosophizing of such a simple experience is part of the unreality, which, Ammons suspects, pulls one away from the immediacy of experience. He uses wind, which for him, stands for concrete experience that disqualifies weighty thoughtful ventures to mystify wind. Wind becomes a context in "Extravaganza" to discuss not only the possible attitudes to reality but also his preferences for the sense experience over abstract thought.

The preference for the concrete experience of wind as part of weather appears in "Righting Wrongs", where he builds an image of a landscape bound by the seasons, where wind along with the sun modifies the impressions that the landscape projects. The "dull wind" and the "slow sun" are part of this landscape in which Ammons finds himself. The sense of process in this poem as in the poems of *A Coast of Trees* is defined by wind too, which remains a sense experience and a reminder of time and place. Ammons articulates in the context of the image of wind, the priority for the concrete experience, and the suspicion of a tendency to impose scientific and aesthetic preoccupations on simple experiences. He feels that the abstraction and equivocation that intellect assigns to the simple

experience of witnessing a leaf floating in the wind is purely illusory:

> blow
> a leaf off a
> branch
> without
> ambiguity or equivocation. . . (WH, 4)

Ammons here raises a question similar to the one Helen Vendler raises when she asks: "Is nature hospitable of itself to meaning by its rhythms and its orders, its catastrophes and its variety or are our symbolic uses of it truly abuses a foisting of our sentiment onto an inert and indifferent scenery?"[34] Ammons here uses wind as a context to make clear his preferences for sense experience and wind remains physical and concrete enough not to undermine the argument of the poem. Wind belongs to the landscape and is the cause for changes in it caused by the weather. One finds in "Bride", the sharp and precise observation of the minute objects in the landscape, where Ammons describes a maple seed floating in the wind. A short poem,"Bride" is a close look at the subtle changes that happen to the maple seed and the poem is short enough to be quoted in full:

> Sometimes a maple seed
> can hold on so

tight it spins

way out on the wind is strong

enough to snap it free ! (WH, 33)

The same objective treatment is the strength of "The Scour", where Ammons looks at the weather at night. The presence of wind and snow is observed in the four-line poem without incorporating any comment or impression:

It was so windy

last night the snow

got down nowhere

except against something. (WH,35)

The experience is rendered as strongly as possible. It does not become a thought. Ammons takes care to make it a sense experience of weather, an experience of wind in the landscape. This idea of reality as motion is aggravated by the presence of wind, which offers patterns of constantly changing reality. Such a thought underlies "Immortality" where Ammons observes a leaf caught in a bit of old worm silk which dangles in the wind. It is wind that intensifies the perception of minute objects in the landscape. It heightens the sense of transience. Wind along with snow creates a sense of powerful change, a change occurring every moment.

Close observation of the impact of wind on the landscape continues in "Going Without Saying", one of the last poems of *Worldly Hopes*, where some anthropomorphism and pathetic

fallacy are admitted when he writes of the "poplars shivering" and "spruce bough nodding"; but this anthropomorphism is directed to the landscape and though it points to some of the early poems of *Collected Poems*, Ammons does not see the wind in anthropomorphic terms nor does he try to explore a 'relation' between the wind and the poet , an obsession which tenaciously clung to him in his early poetry .

Ammons's preoccupation with the experience of wind continues to be associated with and substantiated by the forces of nature in *Lake Effect Country*. The sense of change is heightened by the presence of wind in 'Laces", an early poem, where the reality of the seasons becomes the reality of wind when he observes:

> . . . spring, elation's
> bump has come
> more than once:
> seed
> cut loose from the elm's
> windy height have grown
> elms elsewhere : (LEC,32)

The idea of the cycles of the seasons and the sense of the change here merge in the image of wind, which effects such returns and beginnings.

As in "Laces", the sense of wind is part of weather and the landscape in "Exchangers", where Ammons pictures the

reality of the violent wind on the landscape in a set of concrete images, suggesting the motion of reality and the reality of motion:

> The spruce boughs look so cold
> and stiff and then the creaking
> wind picks up as if to dash
> motion into splinters and
> smithereens . . . (LEC, 36)

It is against this landscape where the wind is a major presence, which modifies its reality that Ammons looks at animal life, which is bound by the sense of motion. The reality of weather, for Ammons, here, is primarily the reality of wind, which forces the poet to constantly redefine the experience of the landscape. The idea of wind as a concrete experience is very much behind "Singing And Doubling Together", a dialogue poem. Wind is not an abstract thought here, but a solid presence felt and conveyed through concrete images that are linked to the landscape around. Wind for Ammons becomes "leafspeech" and is part of the grass and elms. The romantic tone of "Singing And Doubling Together" vaguely echoes the early poems but the language that Ammons employs does not belong to romantic poetry, a point made clear when Ammons writes: " I catch the impact and turn / it back : cut the grass and pick up branches / under the elm" (LEC,42).

Wind is integral to the weather-bound landscape in "Downlow", where animal life too, is seen as part of it exposed to the severity of weather. In a "zero air" landscape Ammons is faced with a wind that changes the landscape:

> wind steams (or
> smokes) fine snow
> off the eaves, settled ghosts
> trailing up . . . (LEC, 53)

The images of weather in the landscape and animal life in it come to be determined by the reality of wind. As in earlier poems, the powerful sense of motion and change is the dominant effect of reality that Ammons conveys through the image of wind, which remains part of weather. Wind has lost its human dimension, it has become a natural phenomenon; wind which is a natural phenomenon becomes rarely a context to discuss the attitudes towards reality that are possible. As in "Extravaganza" after an objective look at the impact of wind on water Ammons proceeds to look into the problem of definitions:

> . . . but have I
> fouled their real nature for myself
> by wrenching their
> meaning . . . (LEC, 60)

The self-critical attitude itself is a post-romantic quality and thus "Meeting Place", the last poem exhibits self-

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consciousness, which pushes further the post-romantic trait in Ammons, traceable to the later poems of *Collected Poems.*

Ammons's fascination with Sumeria, which is evident in the earliest of the poems returns in *Sumerian Vistas.* The image of wind which opens *Sumerian Vistas* with what Schneider calls "a shift to a geological perspective" [35], is part of the landscape and wind is part of weather, an experience which is responsible for change and time. In *Sumerian Vistas,* wind is not personified. It is the reality that comes to signify process in "Ridge Farm", the first section where Ammons writes of the wind: "the wind rifles, a small shower will erupt / and rustle" (SV, 40). Wind is part of weather here, and Ammons records the minute changes caused by wind:

> . . . but
> on the first breeze that stirs
> under a lifted fog weavements and
> shimmerings of pollen unlace
> a light catches somewhere . . . (SV, 40)

This idea of change and process is taken up in "Tombstones", the second section of *Sumerian Vistas* where Ammons writes:

> wind can't blow away
> it breaks the heart
> that stone holds

NB 297H

what time let go

but the stones are

the time left . . . (SV, 45)

Change, rapid and slow, caused by wind, creates a sense of transience, which forms the background of "Tombstones" where stones signify some kind of permanence. Such symbolic notes are very faint and rare in Ammons and wind remains a reality, which is experienced as part of the physical existence in the landscape. Whatever symbolic overtones may be read into "Tombstones", they are not significant enough to disrupt the predominant strain of realism which Ammons attempts to portray. His constant attempt to portray the reality of the landscape is manifest in "Motions Holdings", the final section of *Sumerian Vistas* where wind is still the most powerful image of motion and change which Ammons presents as objectively as possible in "Frost's Retellings", and "20 January" where wind is a significant image of the visible change and is the reality of the seasons. In "Frost Retellings", the first poem of the third section Ammons writes:

After fall, winds

rousing Halloween rains will

sometimes persist into

November . . . (SV, 60)

Ammons sees wind as part of the seasons and the landscape inducing a sense of time and change, and steers clear of the

personal drama, which he so often stressed in his early poems. The reality of the landscape in the seasons is closely linked to wind, an impression that Ammons develops in "20 January", where too, wind is part of weather which he conveys in the opening lines: "Another day promised for forty / come and gone and we're / still below freezing" (SV, 61). The sense of change as an experience of the reality of the landscape, Ammons sees as an experience of weather where wind is part of the experience of "the gray deep/ afternoon turning windy" when "the thickets snap like fire"(SV, 61). Wind here is part of the seasons, and Ammons does not attribute to it any subjective value as he did in his early poems and the poem concludes with an oblique reference to wind and weather when Ammons admits, " We / have nothing to go on but continuance" (SV, 61).

Wind appears again in "Earliest Recollections." Ammons records his earliest impressions of winter, where wind modifies the impression of the landscape:

> Thaws snow-clear the fields
> and woods, and leaves
> snow's small weight
> touched down last fall
> crinkle to the breezes
> and rise gathering dry
> to dash about . . . (SV, 109)

Landscape for Ammons, as the passage very clearly indicates, is an experience of motion where wind is motion, a thought he takes up in "Liquidities" with its images of the leaves, flies, and flakes, which move uphill against the wind.

The close observation that Ammons brings to bear on wind in the landscape is taken up again in "Surgeons" where he writes of the wind striking an elm in the closing lines of the poem:

> . . .but yesterday's
> damaging winds and
> downpour scrubbed the wound
> scum-clean, and now
> the old news
> of its
> growth shines in staffs
> of round music
> bright to exact count's
> interval and ring. (SV, 112)

The rejection of the romantic associations of wind is obvious in "Memory" where Ammons refuses to attribute an emotional response to wind in his discussions of transience, loss, and process and the rejection of empathy is clear in the last lines of the poem:

. . . we

put together enough

yearning

to gouge the dark loose: or when

when sand skins the ground

will no knowledge of loss be in it

and in the wind no wailing . (SV,123)

This conclusion underscores the progression from his early days when he could not conceive of wind as anything short of a human being. The final poems of *Sumerian Vistas* thus continue the emphatic rejection of the romantic connotations of wind, which Ammons declared in the last poems of *Collected Poems.* The poems of *The Snow Poems, Lake Effect Country, Worldly Hopes,* and *A Coast Of Trees* were also written in the same strain.

The Really Short Poems pursues the strain of realism in its treatment of wind and no attempt is made by Ammons to revert to any anthropomorphic exercises and wind remains a physical experience, part of the landscape, part of the seasons, and stands for motion, change and process. Poems short in length, all below twelve lines, Ammons called them his favourite. He admitted he felt comfortable with those "smaller more concrete, sort of delightful poems."[36] Subjective interpretations are completely eliminated and wind becomes the sense of time and place in these concrete poems.

"Spring Tornado" presents the violent changes in the landscape, but Ammons does not attribute a personality to wind; it remains an elemental phenomenon. The poem opens with an image of motion in the landscape attributed to the wind which is powerful in its impact:

> Trees lash, warp:
> the low-down
> drops over the ridge
> valley-deep through here :
> terror pops out
> like shoots or buds
> just the sky to be
> left whole. (RSP, 64)

The sense of the place in this poem is due to the wind and the poem concludes with an image of the sky. The same sense of realism and absence of the romantic connotations of wind Ammons neatly conveys in "Calling", a three line poem in which Ammons writes: " Wind rocks / the porch chairs /somebody home" (RSP, 69). Wind has become a common experience here, an experience as common and as familiar as the porch chairs. The unusual, far away impression of wind that Ammons conveys in his early poetry is missing here, suggesting the post romantic disposition that has come to be the dominant mode of experiencing reality.

Motion in the landscape, as motion of wind is again the impression of the poem "White Lash Of Air Rapids". The poem opens with an image of weather:

> This bright morning, the
> leaves hardly dipping,
> its okay to be out
> under trees, the elms
> and sugar maples . . . (RSP, 80)

From this image of today, Ammons proceeds to the previous day where the experience was an experience of the motion of the landscape, a motion of wind:

> . . . deadwood
> cleared by yesterday's sucking
> thundergusts when the leaves
> turned on, lifting,
> the high branches and maple
> and elm logs
> floated plunging in
> the lofts on sleeves and roils of air. (RSP, 80)

Wind stands for process and Ammons stresses the changes in the landscape, which are the changes of the season deeply bound by the presence of wind, which he takes up again in "Leaning Up":

The storm that downed
the living pine
left the dead hickory
standing:
barkless . . . (RSP, 84)

Reality is directly apprehended and Schneider is right when he writes: "These poems are really short in the sense of dealing with reality in the concrete way Ammons describes. Their concern is the real, so they are really short. The volume is perfect for those who claim [they have] no time for poetry."[37]

Ammons in these short poems does not use the concrete instances and situations to start a discussion. His concerns never go beyond the situation that he presents. He does not use it as a context to enquire into the problems of reality that the particular situation might pose.

Wind is again part of the seasons and of the landscape and in "Resurrections", Ammons takes up the experience of wind but refuses to use the idea of resurrection in the normal sense of the term. He is satisfied with a visual pattern of the leaves rising in the wind:

In spring
a
bluster
busting up

against a

wall will

lift last

year's leaves

higher than

trees did. (RSP, 121)

Wind as a constant cause of the rapidly changing reality of the landscape is behind "Reorganization" where Ammons writes:

High wind yesterday

snapped the top

off the big

pine by the

golf course, leaving

a single bough ,

once lowest , highest . (RSP, 148)

Ammons here presents the technique of merely presenting the reality of the landscape without allowing the personal voice to intrude. What is attempted is a motion picture kind of realty with maximum objectivity.

Ammons's idea of process is deeply linked to wind, a point that he takes up in "Communication", where he observes an orange tree all day. The change, for Ammons, is a change accompanied by the image of wind:

All day - I'm

surprised - the

orange tree ,windy, sunny ,

has said nothing:

nevertheless,

four ripe oranges have

dropped and several

dozen

given up a ghost of green. (RSP, 157)

This final image of wind in *The Really Short Poems*, though merely touched upon, is an integral part of the landscape in which Ammons lives and of which he writes. Process essentially for Ammons is most easily manifested in wind, which remains a natural phenomenon and not a person, which it was in the beginning of his career.

The image of wind in *Brink Road* published in 1996, continues the strain of realism of *The Really Short Poems* which is obvious from the very definite sense of the locale which Ammons stressed in his prefatory note where he writes: "Brink Road exists south of Ithaca, off NY 96 between Candor and Catatonk about halfway between Ithaca and Route 17." Ammons treats wind as part of weather and motion that permeate the landscape of *Brink Road.* Ammons does not resort to anthropomorphic imagination. Wind remains a significant

natural phenomenon, and it is part of the landscape, it intensifies the sense of being rooted in the landscape and is indicative of the preoccupation of Ammons with a particular locale, the sense of which is greatly determined by the landscape, which for him is largely a sense of wind, ice, and snow.

Wind is essentially motion in "Picking Up Equations", the second poem of *Brink Road*, which begins with an image of wind among the trees:

> Not smart to be out under trees with the wind still this
> high: billowing & breaking bring down stob ends
> of last year's drought-wood that died way up in the
> branches
> and a nick on the noggin could drop you. . .

Wind here is an aspect of the seasons and Ammons's close observation continues to the end of the poem and the poem becomes an extended study of the impact of wind on the leaves and trees when Ammons concludes:

> . . . swatches of leaves snapped
> off, bark rippings ,to weight the wind's reach each
> thing
> gave to, how high it held or hung, what angle brought
> it down; one thing is certain falls shadow the wind,

> ellipses ,sprung nodding downwind to the arc including everything. (BR, 4)

The sense of wind is inextricably linked here to the sense of weather and the impression of the seasons itself becomes coloured by the image of motion that wind brings to it, making wind, for Ammons, an experience where a sense of the particular and the local is dominant.

The effect of using wind as an experience that points to a local time and place is obvious in "Fascicle" where Ammons writes of the fairly common experience of raking the leaves which he sees as part of weather where wind figures. As in "Picking Up Equations", Ammons begins the poem with an image of wind, which conveys the impression of wind as part of weather, which mediates the reality of time:

> There's a rift of day's sunny [not too windy not too cold]
> between leaf and snowfall when
>
> raking works: away on a weekend, you could
>
> miss it and rain could sog everything slick flat . . . (BR, 10)

From this very specific point in time, Ammons further elaborates the particulars of raking which take up the major portion of the poem and returns to the image of wind to conclude the poem:

> . . . that's likely
>
> to be before some cold front frost furring
>
> the saw edged leaves glistened brittle ,clouds

tightening the horizon, then the white leaves fly. (BR, 10)

In "Getting About", the experience of the present is an experience of weather and the seasons where wind is the agent of change and motion. Ammons employs the images of wind and weather to create a sense of time and place where the primacy of sense experience is uppermost, an impression that the poem communicates which he builds up in the opening line itself:

The windiest morning this
year [the second month] bringing
the first warm
heave of rain . . . (BR, 42)

Ammons approaches wind in a very realistic fashion; it is an integral part of weather and often the change of the seasons manifests as the presence or absence of wind, as a part of process, and is responsible for the sense of rapid change and an acute consciousness of time which characterize Ammons's later poems.

The sense of change, often seasonal in Ammons, is taken up in "Middling Seasons" where he again offers a graphic picture of the landscape in weather. He creates an image of weather that constantly effects changes on the landscape:

. . . this morning ninety mile an hour gusts strip live
wood from the maple crowns and on the ground
bend whatever bends over ,root eruptions

scatterings , whole

activations of leaves ,bark, twigs,

plastic foams . . . (BR, 47)

This wind is part of winter and is placed in a context where the experience of wind mingles with the experience of the image of the previous year which Ammons sees as experience associated with weather:

. . .this winter stalled to

the deepest chill ever : last winter was the

coldest span: the year before ,the most snow :

then the highest temperature, and the highest

ever sustained ,in a blocked inversion

two weeks long . . . (BR, 47)

The minute observation that Ammons brings to bear on the landscape is often evident in the treatment of wind in the single images, which are seldom elaborated, and one such image is to be found in "The Clenched Jaw School" where Ammons writes of "the hold out of brook-glitter in a drought / the skittery edginess of leaves against a windy hedgerow" (BR, 60). The reader witnesses here an instance of the Ammons's penetrating vision that picks up very small objects from the landscape where the presence of wind is evident. This interest in the insignificant objects of the landscape which becomes a strength of his writing is seldom justified directly by Ammons and "Reasoning Power" is a rare case where the preference for the

concrete is obvious in the concluding lines where Ammons writes of the importance of wind:

> . . . any bit of
> action, a leaf turning
> over in the wind
> can become what is. (BR, 77)

The image of the leaf turning in the wind accounts for many of the poems where the persistent image of the leaves in the wind in a weather-bound landscape contributes to the idea of motion. The small and the insignificant for Ammons as for Thoreau offer very meaningful insights into his perception of the place where he lives and it widens the scope of his experience in the very idea of wind as motion affecting the landscape. Though Ammons expressed the feeling that there is something distressing about writing a poem about a place which he considered similar to writing a poem about picture Ammons does here exactly that with great flourish and the concrete experience of the landscape becomes largely an experience of wind.

Ammons takes up the minute aspects of wind in "God Is The Sense The World Makes Without God", where he writes of the hydrangea. The images of wind and rain that he uses create an impression of weather and the seasons. The plant is placed in the reality of the "first storm burst" and rain. Wind here is a very objective presence, and wind for Ammons, is what it means in terms of the impact that it causes on the surroundings in

which he lives. It is this interest that makes the poem "Swimming Night" possible where Ammons writes of the wind at night, the experience of which mingles with the whistle of the train passing by:

> . . . I try to pick out
> roars, the wind's from the train's, but they
> interchange or gusts tear up with a blanking
> loudness I can feel the cedars tugging and
> whipping in (BR,123)

Wind here is part of contemporary experience, and it is not conceived of in romantic terms nor does Ammons try to juxtapose a relationship of antipathy between the wind and the train which could be expected of an Ammons of early writings where he foregrounded his romantic preoccupations. Both are part of this landscape and are accepted as part of a reality, which one has to acknowledge without emotionalism. Wind as change and as an experience of the seasons, which Ammons stressed in "Getting About" and "Middling Seasons" reappears in "Hard And Fast" which begins with an image of wind in October:

> A clarifying, high
> wind in October's
> shanky last days

maple luminous . . . (BR,139)

Ammons is trying to fix the wind in the landscape in a particular time, and once this is established, he concludes with the effect of wind on the landscape:

. . . October

winds redress summer
tendencies from
the litter of

scorched branches
to whistling gray
limb and clatter -

plenty of
clarification coming
ice can seal tight. (BR, 139)

The image of the leaves floating in the wind reappears in "Magic" where, time, though not as specific as in "Hard And Fast" has enough markers of the seasons. Ammons's eye is trained on a leaf taken away by the wind, which he describes in a way that partakes of the qualities of a commentary:

The wind across
the street blusters

a leaf over

snow till it

scampers up a

tree . . . (BR, 156)

Wind again becomes part of motion and Ammons stresses the idea that the impression of the landscape is predominantly an impression of motion, which in turn is largely the presence of wind. The season is only hinted at in the word 'snow' but in such a short poem it assumes a significant role in the final impression of seeing wind as part of weather.

Brink Road closes with two images of wind in the last poem "Summer Place", where, as the title indicates, a coming together of both time and place is achieved in the image of wind that Ammons employs at the beginning of poem:

. . . a windstorm just struck up

a sandstorm here, the winds going quite precisely from

easy-going to whistling ,a sharp change, hard enough

to walk off with a tin shack and the storm so

fast, it seems to have no lightning in it- and

no rain . . . (BR, 189)

The sense of inescapable weather in the landscape to which Ammons is exposed which heightens the sense of the real time and real place is the final impression that wind conveys, and in the closing pages of *Brink Road* Ammons writes in a tone, matter of fact and impersonal:

. . . every

parking place car solid but early afternoon has

turned cloudy ,windy, cooler ,few raindrops and the

shoobies are packing up their boxes, beach chairs,

umbrellas . . . (BR, 224)

This final image of wind in *Brink Road* is significant in that it continues with the strain of realism that has come to define Ammons's attitude to wind in particular and his writing at large. Wind has become as real as beach chairs and the umbrellas, as real as the weather that takes away the beach chairs and umbrellas.

Glare, the last book length poem of Ammons continues his preoccupation with wind and wind remains an image of change and process and the sense of realism that Ammons accepts is extended to the experience of wind, and wind does not show any anthropomorphic qualities and remains a part of the landscape. Wind remains very much a physical experience and is a sense experience and no attempt is made by Ammons to attribute to this natural phenomenon any symbolic value. Section 17 offers a picture of the landscape full of details, where the vegetation around is treated in a realistic manner:

. . . the giant poplar will

give up more than its leaves, the

lady bugs all frigging this morning

on the green plant or weed will have

to shop this strange place for

the needed damp . . . (GL, 35)

The section concludes with an image of wind and Ammons realizes that wind is almost absent in the landscape:

. . . the wind almost

totally missing will show up somewhere

else and sing a different song or

maybe the one known here heretofore (GL, 35)

Ammons realizes that wind is absent in the landscape, but this landscape for him remains defined by the presence or absence of wind, and the focus is especially on the landscape, and not on the self, or on the impact that wind has on the subjective consciousness of the poet. Ammons takes up again in section 28 the experience of wind as constantly one of changing patterns in the landscape where the wind on the birch trees is closely recorded. The signs of weather equally contribute to the image of wind. Ammons here creates the impression of photographic reality from which the persona is fully withdrawn. The subjective peculiarities and positions of a highly emotional temperament, which his early poetry foregrounded, are absent here. Ammons is deeply absorbed in recapturing the influences that wind has on the landscape. After conveying the impression of the impact of weather, Ammons looks at the changes possible in the landscape with the wind among the birches:

. . . they lean

and reach for higher air: if a front

comes and the wind jacks them up, then

they may be restored to a new

tranquility of poise . . . (GL, 82).

Wind here is an aspect of the landscape bound by the seasons, an experience significant to one's experience of weather, a thought again of Section 34 where the image of wind, though not elaborately developed, appears in the context of an attempt to describe the weather though in oblique terms. The image of wind appears along with the image of the "shoes for ice". Both wind and weather are sketchily treated but is significant in that wind again is a part of weather.

Wind offers Ammons innumerable patterns of reality; it results in a widening scope of experience. It becomes an agent of process and his later poetry does not exhibit the emotionalism or intense subjective feelings, which characterize his earlier poetry. Wind is a personality in the early poetry of Ammons, a presence hard to ignore which qualifies the stature of man. In his later poetry it is there as seen through the register available to a more objective consciousness.

In his early poetry, the significance of wind is central to the poet who is often a lonely figure. The impact of the wind in his early poetry is limited to the eccentricity and "uniqueness"

attributed to the poet. To be more precise, the early image of wind is more romantic and the later more realistic. The flights of imagination that the wind occasions in the early poetry disappear in his later writings. Wind in his later poetry is part of weather and correspondences between the mind and the landscape in terms of wind, which abound in his early writings become rare in his later poetry. This is not to say that it has disappeared. The breeze within, the impression that the early poetry communicates, fades into the "light of common day" to become the "breeze without" which does not seek or does not need the endorsement from the breeze within.

The experience of a unique epiphanic dimension of wind, part of the romantic legacy, comes to be discarded by a more sober temper, which rejects anything that is too subjective, which might mar the tone of objectivity. The images too change accordingly; personal associations of images become less significant and the poet takes recourse to a set of images which are more open to a larger and wider public sphere of experience that poetry becomes reportage, a problem partly solved by the excursions to various fields. Ammons's early poetry had such digressions, which are directed towards the poet but the later poetry directs itself to a set of thoughts related to reality and language that does not limit itself to the poet's own activity or unique poetic peculiarity but as a problem kept alive and discussed by various philosophical schools. The 'I' in his poetry

changes its character and becomes a space that would allow various discourses to operate and interact. Consequently, the self becomes more complex. What was lost in emotional involvement and romantic excess comes to be replaced by a subject more defined by knowledge and a science and a philosophy always in control. The self in his early poetry responds intensely to wind. The response is one of submission to the idea of wind as a superior embodiment of greater things. This attitude precludes the possibility of a relaxed mood, which allows the possibility of a wider frame of reference.

Thus society is almost impossible in Ammons's early writing; the emotional intensity is so strong that it blots out all references to a larger world in which the poet is placed. The indifference to society is the result of a condensation of emotion, which receives sanction from romantic ideology. The drama of wind and the self in his early poetry is not that of the social drama; it is the drama of an ode written in a lyrical disposition with its emphasis on the moment occurring out of time flouting continuity both social and personal that epiphany is the underlying logic of such a position. In his later poetry epiphany is replaced by the unveiling of less personal patterns. The 'discovery' of the early wind poems points to the poetic persona as the cause, source and logic of such poems whereas the 'discovery' of the later poems points more to a temperament at odds with the romantic temperament. The person as the source

of knowledge disappears in his later poetry, which signifies the shift away from the romantic definitions of experience.

Wind in his later poetry is a reminder of the body and process. In section 46 of *Glare*, where, after the reality of wind is elaborately rendered, Ammons brings in an image of old age. The personal side of experience is hinted at, but it is not a singular personal experience that strikes him as part of a unique experience of the motion of wind in the landscape. The knowledge is neither unique nor is the language. Wind is part of the landscape where the impression of the seasons is predominant, which is partly due to the image of wind and wind is deeply integrated into the experience of the seasons when Ammons observes: "fall is here: wind loosens crows and leaves" (GL,152).

Occasionally, as in *Sphere,* wind becomes a context to discuss the questions of reality, and the problems of representing it in language. Such questions are always allowed into the poem only after a sufficiently strong physical image of the experience of wind is conveyed to the reader. Section 65 opens with the image of wind and Ammons looks into very serious problems such as that of pluralism and the question of interrelatedness but not before he fixes the discussion in a sense experience of wind, which he does at the beginning of the section:

when the trees tug trying to hold

the wind back [or more accurately,
when the wind nearly sweeps the
trees away) do you suppose the
resistance of each leaf ,twig, branch ,
trunk puts up and communicates to the
roots thrust earth forward into
faster rotation . . . (GL, 177)

The minute observation of the impact of wind, that Ammons offers here, is part of his desire to be precise and exhaustive as possible; the details convey a sense of precision and a tone of objectivity. The same objectivity and a sense of contemporary experience are repeated when Ammons writes of Easter day where the experience of wind is part of weather:

. . . it's Easter
morning right now, with a nor'easter
Out- of -whack, whipper jawed, eight -inch dump
load of snow on the ground, and it, as they
say, agoing to snow . . . (GL, 193)

Ammons does not romanticize wind, he does not individualize it, and it remains part of the larger reality of weather and the seasons where some degree of realism and objectivity is always possible. This experience of wind as an integral part of weather with no attempt to mystify or to project the subjective qualities onto it making it unreal, outlandish, strange and distanced from the immediate sphere of life, one witnesses, when Ammons

writes of his love for the land which is also a love for the weather in it:

> . . . I love the
>
> dibble of the beginning rain, the blue storm
> off in a rumbling locus and coming here ,the
>
> wind holding the humidity high . . . (GL, 280)

This image of wind with its references to humidity clearly points to the attitude that Ammons takes towards wind; it is more realistic and is less a part of a romantic experience and more a part of a post-romantic temperament where one never allows oneself to be carried away by the elemental forces. Wind is again motion in the landscape in the concluding lines of the section where Ammons writes: "when / the wind strikes, every thing will bend over: / the brunt will break, ease will rise again" (GL, 281). This sense of wind as a powerful manifestation of constant change and process in the landscape, as an experience of a fluid reality, persists to the end of *Glare.* In the penultimate section of *Glare* the final image of wind that he presents is one of wind as an experience deeply associated with and embedded in a powerful obsessive sense of weather and the seasons that characterize most of his writing:

> . . . summer, along with

> even moderate winds , the roots of tall spruce
> wobble in their sockets ,the grasp so light,
> and the trees lean toward the roofs, a pity,
> the electrical wires could come down with the
> trees and shingles and timbers could fly . . . (GL, 292)

The language has changed considerably from the early Ezra poems, which were highly emotionally charged as Ammons was too transcendentally involved to have transactions with other people. Ammons has got over the tendency to mystify wind and he writes of it as being part of day-to-day reality. The change was explained by Ammons in his last interview, which he gave to Steven P. Schneider:

> It seems to me that there has been a tendency in my work that chief presence in the early poems is the wind. First it was wind - very substanceless. The poems are far projected, highly assimilated, mythological, distanced and in the wind. And then very gradually it comes closer and closer to where we are.[38]

The wind has become very earthy. In a way, it has returned to the first and most powerful image that Ammons ever experienced in his life.

Chapter 3

The Wide Band of Acceptance

> Schneider: And your poetry is in a sense a record of the myriad displays of intelligence and creativity in the natural world.
>
> Ammons: Some of them so small and insignificant, apparently insignificant, and yet inquired into they have their place.
>
> A. R. Ammons in conversation with Steven P. Schneider [1]

Ammons grew up on a farm southwest of Whiteville, North Carolina, "full of grapes, peaches, pears, pecans, guinea fowl, peacocks, geese, and of course cattle and pigs"[2] with "no family around except for one quarter mile down the road"[3], and his early poetry bears sufficient impress of these images of animal life, a presence which persisted to the end of his writing. His poetry is characterised by a vision of existence where the relative insignificance of the animal world is questioned. He exhibits a growing awareness that is post-Christian in that he refuses to assign primary importance to man's endeavours and refuses to accept the intentions of the various projects undertaken by man. Man's egotistic stances are looked upon with suspicion in his poetry, and one of the early poems of

Ammons to look into this aspect of existence is "I Broke A Sheaf Of Light" where he builds up a number of domestic images:

> The cow lowed from the pasture and I answered
> yes, I am late
> already the evening star
> The pigs heard me coming and squealed
> From the stables a neigh reminded me
> yes I am late . . . (CP, 3)

Ammons writes of animal life around but the focus is on the speaking subject, on the persona that he employs in the poem and the obsessive appearance of the 'I' is more in keeping with the romantic ego that Ammons's early poetry so consciously foregrounds. "Some Months Ago" which immediately follows "I Broke A Sheaf Of Light", sees animal life in the context of weather:

> Hill rain
> pouring from a rock pierced cloud
> hill rain from the wounds of mist
> farewell . . . (CP, 4)

In this landscape bound by weather Ammons writes of the bird:

> To a bird only this
> farewell
> and he hoped away to peck dew

from a ground web

spider running out of her tunnel to see. . . (CP, 4)

One encounters here the beginning of Ammons's lifelong preoccupation with the relation between animal life and a landscape defined by the seasons, which he repeats in "Doxology":

I hear an organ playing through the morning rain,

.....

in the light and silent rain.

A robin peeks up from the grass

and rattles a lady bug in his beak . (CP, 17)

The focus is again on the 'I', and the ego is constantly at the center of attention, an impression retained in an earlier poem like "I Went Out To The Sun", where though Ammons does not elaborate the details of the seasons or weather, he leaves sufficient signs about the nature of the landscape when he observes "it's very hot in this country / The sun said nothing" (CP, 7). Though Ammons here is indulging in anthropomorphic imagination by attributing human abilities and conditions to the sun, the landscape with signs of life is very much there, which he notes:

A night lizard rattled stems behind me

and the moon said

I see over the mountain

the sun is angry. . . (CP, 7)

Ammons here tries to locate the persona in the landscape, a landscape bound by time and the seasons but the attention is always trained on the speaking voice whose stature in the landscape is often more than human, a tendency that his later poetry outgrows. What Ammons suggests here is a worldview, which is essentially anthropocentric which his later poetry discards.

The reader feels the sense of the importance of the ego in " I Came Upon A Plateau" where anthropomorphic imagination is still at work:

Quivering with courtesy
a snake drew thrust in sines
and circles from his length
rearing coils of warning white (CP, 31)

And Ammons concludes the poem with an image of the snake in the landscape:

The peaks coughing bouldered
laughter shook to pieces
and the snake shed himself in ripples
across a lake of sand (CP, 32)

Ammons here takes pains to describe the life around, and it is admitted in so far as it has some relevance to the persona, and anthropocentric ideology remains powerful in the early poems of Ammons which one senses again in "Sumerian", an intensely emotional poem where he looks at the emotional impact that the world of animals creates and a passage as the one that follows is rare in his poetry even in his early writings:

> on the southern salty
> banks near the gulf the ducks
> and flying vees of geese have
> shunned me: the bouncing spider's net,
> strung wet over narrows of reeds, has
> broken terror dawn cold across my face:
> rising . . . (CP, 32)

Ammons here speaks of the emotional impact that the world of animals has on him. As his poetry matures, the subjective element comes to be more and more insignificant and the impression of a cool, naturalist mind recording as faithfully as possible the external world of life, becomes prominent in the later poems.

Animal life is again the theme in "Hymn1V" where Ammons writes of the responsibility of God for the animal world around:

> . . . ducks on the bay
> barking like hounds

all night

their wintering dreams (CP, 41)

Weather is the most significant experience for Ammons and in "Return" he stresses the life that he sees around. The poem opens with an image of weather:

drought continuing

the stems

drop their leaves

healing hard the pulvinal

scars . . . (CP, 62)

From this setting, Ammons turns to describe the life around:

dangling buzzards

drop to sleeps

in ledge and

cactus shade to rockheld

reservoirs of night (CP, 62)

Life, Ammons here underscores, is trapped in the forces and rhythms of nature and "Hardweed Path Going," a more personal poem of the same period, exhibits a similar technique. Ammons is writing about a Jo-reet and the sense of the seasons is obvious when Ammons warns that, "winter is coming" and advises the bird to "disappear in the bushes" (CP, 67).

Death too, is part of this experience and later in the closing lines of the poem, Ammons writes of Sparkle, the hog that will be killed the next day, and the experience is an integral part of weather and the seasons. He imagines Sparkle's carcass "hanging upside down / hardening through the mind and night of the first freeze" (CP, 68). For Ammons, the death of the domestic animals is a part of agrarian reality, and is linked to weather. In "Prodigal", Ammons writes of a lonely figure in the landscape, a figure sensitive to the signs of animal life which sees "flotillas of wintering ducks weathering the night"(CP, 76). In these landscapes, where signs of human life are rare, Ammons allows signs of other forms of life to intensify the sense of loneliness. Josephine Miles's observation that "the peopled world or constructed world are not his chief substance"[4] is relevant here and this particular quality of his writing Ammons himself traced to his life on the farm. Ammons told Nancy Koeber:

> It was a time of tremendous economic and spiritual privation, even loneliness. But all this privation was compensated for by a sense of the eternal freshness of the land itself. So I substituted for normal human experience, which was unavailable to me much of the time, this sense of identity with the things around me.[5]

The sense of loneliness in the landscape results in an egocentric poetry, which does not care to be concerned with the subtle relations and interdependence between life forms.

Occasionally Ammons ventures to discuss the problems of reality in the context of weather as in "Risks And Possibilities" where he begins the poem with references to weather and after a detailed analysis of the problems of identity, returns to the present which is a return to the landscape, where life observed is a life in the context of weather:

> dry thunder in the locust weed!
>
> the supple willow -slip leafless in winter!
>
> the chill gibber of the frog
>
> stilled in nightsnake's foraging thrust!
>
> .....
>
> repeating midnight these songs for these divisions.
>
> (CP, 83 - 84)

The idea of a return to the present amidst intellectual discussions suggests a return to the concrete and the particular and clearly conveys Ammons's preferences and priorities though the preferences are not as obvious as in his later writings where the frequency of such returns is forcefully presented by him that the ideology behind such a technique is less veiled.

The human figure in the landscape is seen in the company of snakes, frogs and birds, and it is the naturalist that is projected in most of the poems. The personal mode is sparingly used and often a review of the landscape is undertaken without any display of emotion as in "I Came Upon

The Plateau". The eye is deeply absorbed in the landscape trying to recapture all the possible experiences and the details and the finer points never cease to fascinate the poet.

Initially the animal world is evoked for the purpose of creating a subject in ways that may be related and defined in terms of those aspects of nature and life at large. This is one way of approaching the subject as understood by Ammons, but his later poetry is, in a way, the poetry of non subject, and the subject is less and less dependent on the impressions that the world of animals creates in him. He records the animal life around, with minimal interruptions of the influence that this world brings about in his mind.

Ammons's interest in the minute and the insignificant begins early in his writing and the world of the smaller forms of life is a powerful presence in his early poetry. He believes that process, as he sees it, is more available to human figures surrounded by these small insects, and he entertains this thought in "Requiem". The figure that Ammons creates is keenly receptive to changes, that every attempt is made by Ammons to absorb these into his writing and the involvement that his poetry conveys and demands is very high in a poem like "Sumerian". The insect world is observed mainly as a search into the process of life as how it is reflected in spheres other than the one of human beings. This interest in the smaller forms of life Ammons traced to some incidents in his life in his

conversation with Nancy Koeber where he spoke of the shift from North Carolina to Millville, which precluded the possibility of distance vision. Of this shift Ammons says: "After readjusting my vision to look for small things, I found[Millville] very beautiful indeed and became very much attached to the shore and land there." [6]

The insect world offers the context for another more serious purpose, that is, the articulation of the themes of interrelatedness and a consequent idea of the perspective as a vital factor in the understanding of all reality. The theme of interrelatedness in his early poetry does not present itself as a fantasy or as an abstraction. The interrelatedness is suggested but never elaborated to convey the impression of a poem of interrelatedness in action at the widest possible sense. The scope is only suggested, the possibilities are never fully or even partially realized, the scope is hinted at in the most skeletal form and the animal world as a part of the environment, attracts and affects Ammons strongly in his later writing that it becomes an obsessive theme only towards the later poems of *Collected Poems.*

Ammons often stretches the theme of interrelatedness to the selection of imagery with the result that one species of life is seen in terms of another. Interchangeability and interdependence are the watchwords in his writing and often land is defined as an animal and vice versa, and this rapid

switching creates a fluid concept of reality which undermines the traditional quality central to the older notions of reality. Both "Risks And Possibilities" and "Interval" are based on the belief of the interchangeability of images, an idea that Ammons derives from the notion of sameness that is possible and logically defendable at the level of perception. Mere observation of the phenomenon itself is sometimes the theme of the poems of Ammons where the judgment is withheld, and a condition with almost no trace of the poet's judgment and subjective impressions exists, a technique, which in itself becomes an implicit judgment of the landscape.

The poet's response to this world is relevant in that there is development or change in the attitude of the poet. Ammons's early poetry is marked by a tendency to present the self as greatly troubled at the personal level by the world of the smaller life. A more sensitive self is the impression Ammons communicates in the early poems. He acknowledges its emotional value and it is rendered as a very powerful experience having some lasting and transformative qualities. Ammons's interest in the animal world is also partly due to the innumerable patterns of reality that an observation of the animal world offers. These patterns are often visual patterns of change that the landscape accommodates due to the flight of birds from trees, of rabbits on the grass, squirrels swinging from branch to branch and the flight of bees from flowers in bloom.

Motion fascinates Ammons, motion as transience, motion as form, motion as the manifestation of time and he uses these images of birds and insects sometimes as a context to discuss the forms of reality as in "Epiphany" which begins with a very concrete image:

> Like a single drop of rain
>
> the wasp strikes
>
> the window pane: buzzes
>
> rapidly,
>
> away, disguising
>
> error . . . (CP, 98)

From this very common and real experience Ammons moves to certain questions on the nature of reality:

> some talk that
>
> there is safety in the visible
>
> the definite ,the heard and felt,
>
> pre-stressing the rational . . . (CP, 98)

Ammons concludes the poem with thoughts of "hard realizations, opaque as death" (CP, 98). The poem is significant in the general pattern of Ammons's poetry since Ammons here sees the wasp as a drop of rain suggesting the association between the life of animals and natural phenomena. Ammons

here uses a simile but this interest in similes disappears almost completely from his later poetry.

Ammons's poetry records and exploits the dialectics of tension between experience and abstraction, between that which is immediately visible and the abstract thoughts which are more clinical and disinterested, and the bifocal vision that Ammons so often displays, extends to the attitude towards the experience of the animal world, an experience comparable to the attitudes to weather that he entertains. Poems on weather fall into two categories, poems where weather is a reality felt through the senses and poems where weather is a reality placed against the notions of reality. "Motion For Motion", a case in point, begins with an image of the water beetle in the sandy stony bottom of the stream. This precise description is not in terms of scientific vocabulary but successfully conveys the experience of seeing. This interest in the small and insignificant is part of Ammons's willingness to entertain the small and even the microscopic, and from this simple seeing Ammons proceeds to a more complex seeing that is possible with a greater knowledge of the scientific reality of which he writes:

> If I knew the diameters
> of oval and beetle the
> depth of the stream ,several
> indices of refraction

and so forth

I might say why

the shadow outsizes the

beetle. (CP, 127)

Ammons proceeds from this 'lecture' to look into the possibilities of the reality presented and he expresses his preference of experience over abstraction. A self-reflexive tone is heard when Ammons declares, "I admit to mystery / in the obvious" (CP, 128). Ammons seems to convey his priorities in writing by placing a hierarchy. This hierarchy is one with a clear priority to experience. From this self-conscious mood Ammons returns to the concrete when he writes:

. . . but a blurred mind over exposed:

caught the sudden gust of a cat bird, selfshot

under the bridge and out into my sight: he splashed

into the air near a briervine . . . (CP, 128)

Once again a disruption of the description of the theoretical possibilities takes place, and Ammons who calls himself "a person who would run to the defense of the particular practically as fast as his legs could go"[7] effects a return which is essentially to an experience, powerfully concrete.

Ammons's poetry conveys the impression of an eye rapidly moving, picking up an image, discussing a thought associated with it for a while and then moving on to the initial or related

image approached at the level of the senses and of resuming the thought over it. The final return is to the concrete experience of animal life around with oblique references to weather as in the concluding lines:

> . . . it was clear sailing
> on down the stream
> .....
> and then there were two beetles, and later three at
> once swimming in the sun . . . (CP, 128)

"Four Motions For The Pea Vines" which follows "Motion For Motion" has more obvious references to weather within which Ammons places the animal life that he encounters in the landscape. The sense of the seasons runs unmistakably through the poem when Ammons notes:

> The raucous crows
> along the wood's edge
> trouble the tops of
> yellowing pines
> with points of dipping back. (CP, 132)

The entire experience of animal life, as he sees it, is within the frame of the seasons, a point he repeats in the fourth movement of the poem, when he writes of the birds in a landscape bound by weather:

. . .winter talk ,

remembrances of summer and separations,

agree

or disagree

on a roost

the old birds more often silent

calmer . . . (CP, 133 - 134)

This prioritizing of the concrete experience is evidenced in "W C W", a poem dedicated to William Carlos Williams. The preference for the concrete manifests in the poem, and animal world is vividly described and no attempt is made to transcend this experience. The technique adopted by Ammons is very much similar to that of William Carlos Williams since the scope of the poem is consciously limited to the concrete sense of the landscape bound by elemental forces. Ammons sets the atmosphere of the poem in a "crosswind that hit him", a context in which he fixes the experience of the poem:

. . .till

a woman came

and turned

her red dog loose

to sniff

(and piss

on)

the dead horseshoe

crabs. (CP, 147)

Ammons locates the experience in a time and place and no attempt is made by him to resort to intellectual acrobatics. The "outward continuities"[8] that Harold Bloom laments in Ammons are the continuities of the forms of life around and induce a deep sense of the place. Eudora Welty's definition of place is significant to Ammons: "Place is where he has roots, place where he stands; in his experience out of which he writes, it provides the base of reference, the point of view."[9] This place for Ammons is very much defined by the presence of animal life in it. What is focused is the experience as predominantly based on the senses resulting in a very concrete poetry in the manner of William Carlos Williams and the sense of the real, which runs through the poem, is partially the result of references to weather.

"Corsons Inlet", a major poem of the 1961 - 1965 period, continues the tendency of placing the animal life in the landscape in a context of weather:

thousands of tree swallows

gathering for flight:

.....

preparations for

flight from winter

cheet, cheet, cheet, cheet, wings rifling the green clumps,

beaks

at the bay berries . (CP, 150)

Such passages as these point to a world of physical experience and they function as a counterpoint to certain questions of reality that Ammons poses in the same poem:

The possibility of a rule as the sum of rulelessness:

the "field" of action

with moving incalculable center:

in the smaller view , order tight with shape . . . (CP, 150)

Thus the preoccupation with the transience of reality that one confronts in his poetry, is often placed amidst images of animal life.

For Ammons, animal life is deeply bound by weather and this is a persistent thought of the poet, and it resurfaces in "Configurations", where he writes again of birds. The sense of time and place is linked to the sense of weather and the seasons as the opening lines suggest:

when November stripped

the shrub

what stood

out

in revealed space was

a nest

hung

in essential limbs (CP, 163)

The reality of this experience is not separate from the "cold weather", Ammons admits, and death in the animal world too is an integral part of weather, a conviction that Ammons displays in the same poem:

dry wings

lie abandoned,

bodiless

this

November :

leaves . . . (CP, 165)

The physical experience of death that Ammons conveys here, as in most of the poems where he looks at animal life, is thus fixed on a landscape defined by weather and the seasons.

Ammons's poetry treats the minute aspects of the larger landscape with great precision. Small incidents are treated with seriousness, and extended dialogues and descriptions are attempted by the poet, so that the subject under discussion becomes a huge world which definition cannot exhaust. The close observation that Ammons brings to bear upon even insignificant things creates the impression of a mind in search

of changes, a mind constantly recording the events, all of which are relevant to the poet for the complex connotations of process that they carry. It is this close observation that Ammons brings to bear on the minute that the reader experiences in "Mark", a poem short enough to be reproduced in full where Ammons writes of a butterfly:

> I hope I'm
> not right
> where the frost
> strikes the butterfly:
> in the back
> between
> the wings. (CP, 200)

What one encounters here is the pattern of approaching animal life around, in a context of weather, recording the changes in climate. Ammons's strong interest in weather defines the way the animal world is treated and the moments of observation are linked to weather and animal behaviour is a part of the process that he is trying to analyze, and weather is the lens that filters the experience of life around.

Animal behaviour as a time-defined phenomenon is driven home by the idea of weather in "Trouble Making Trouble" which opens with an image of the hornet, an image that clearly refers to the climate:

The hornet as if
stung twists
in the first cold,
buzzes wings
that wrench him
across the ground . . . (CP, 221)

The image of the hornet is mediated for the poet by weather, and Ammons graphically presents the reality of the insect and weather and Paul Zweig is right when he sees in the poetry of Ammons "a flood of perceptions which is visionary not because of any metaphysics, but because of sheer clarity of the poet's ability to recreate what he sees."[10] This ability to recreate what he sees is largely accomplished by a strict adherence to the concrete which produces a poetry, in Eudora Welty's words, bound up with the "local, the 'real', the present, the ordinary day-to day of human experience."[11]

Very rarely does Ammons write of animals in captivity. Most of the poems on animals center on cats, dogs, bees, robins, crows, squirrels and "Rome Zoo" is an exception not in terms of technique, but in terms of theme. Ammons here writes of rhinoceroses and rabbits and he repeats the technique of placing them in a context of weather:

Subtract from that shower

each leaves take

and the oak's

shadow is bright dust. . . (CP, 222)

It is with this sense reality of weather that he looks at the animals in the zoo:

Rabbits with blue tipped ears

stick mist- weight

rain and, from high

tussling, yield

all the way to the ground:

the rhinoceros back darkens. (CP, 222)

Animal life everywhere, for Ammons, is inalienably fused with the influences of weather.

Animal life in the landscape continues to be influenced by weather, and in "Making", the sense of the seasons is introduced right at the beginning of the poem where the locale of the mockingbird is conveyed subtly:

Mocking bird takes the day into

making

takes the clouds still

shipping stars

takes the spring tree's

and black small leaves. (CP, 232)

For Ammons, the motions of the landscape are always motions influenced by weather, and the animal life trapped in it is no exception. The poet's interest in the small world, as a possibility of realigning the larger world by attributing to the former, a definitive role in his vision of the world can be seen in "Making". The role of perspective is very vital and the attempt to translate this perspective into action is seen in these two poems. Such changes in the perspective suggest a significant shift in the attitude of Ammons. From the anthropocentric view Ammons has matured to look at life from what Donald Reiman calls "the imagined vantage point of other creatures and processes of life"[12] rejecting the centrality of the ego which he foregrounded in his early poetry.

For Ammons, process cannot be separated from weather; it is the most concrete manifestation of the process inducing a sharp sense of the particular. The animal world presented by Ammons is seen in the context of changing seasons and the energy of these poems is the energy of the animal world in a scene of rapid changes, and the attempt is to record how animals cope with the pressure of existence. The animal world, which is seen as motion and not as stasis, informs a poem like "Summer Session" with its focus on the changes and the irreversible nature of reality.

Often Ammons's interest in the animal world influenced by weather and the seasons offers launch pads to explore the theories of reality and the problems of self-reflexivity. "Summer Session", a long poem, offers Ammons the scope for such discussions. The impression of the animal world that he builds up in the poem is a counterpoint to the abstract thoughts in the same poem, a technique repeated by placing them in a context of weather:

> a baby robin's been out on the
> lawn all-day, all-day wet and for
> many days wet though only one
> day out . . . (CP, 260)

This technique of placing the animal world in a context of weather, which induces a sense of the real and a sense of change, creates an impression of a concrete experience at the same time remaining a counterweight to the questions of reality that Ammons raises.

Ammons often incorporates animal world into his poems to convey the severity of weather. Severity of weather is often conveyed as a response of the animal life that Ammons sees around him as in "September Drift" where he directly plunges into the experience of weather which for him is a submission to the animal life around under the pressure of rapid changes of

climate. The reality of the landscape is the reality of animal life in it, a thought stressed by Ammons:

> Hardly anything flies north these days
> a jay occasionally makes the bleak
> decision: the robin, sitting on a high
> dead elm limb, looks melancholy with
> leisure . . . (CP, 262)

Ammons here falls into pathetic fallacy, one has to concede, but life in the landscape, life of the birds and other forms of life remain bound to weather. John Elder's observation that "for Ammons world order is dynamic, with process rather than things providing primary reality"[13] is true and such an impression is largely conveyed by constant changes in the animal world caused by weather. The close observation is made possible in the context of weather and the sharpness of vision is not limited just to the animal life around but is extended to weather, which modifies and controls one's perception of the animal life in it.

The small and the insignificant figure in his poetry, and they come to be observed along with the changes that the seasons bring about on them and in "Spiel" Ammons writes:

> . . .I try to think
> of what he eats

so winter skinny ,such a bugless

winter . . . (CP, 270)

One finds here an interest in the insignificant and a concern for its well-being and one senses here the widening vision of Ammons which comes to accept the concerns of life other than that of human beings. Such a concern is a part of an ecological consciousness which Glen Love sees as having the capacity to challenge "the notion that human beings are so special that the earth exists for our comfort and disposal alone."[14] Though not directly stated, Ammons here presents an image of man who is more sensitive to the issues of other forms of life and he satisfies one of the important qualities of ecological consciousness which Robert Pack terms "a capacity for empathy towards nonhuman nature."[15] Later in the same poem Ammons constructs a landscape where weather is significant in a subtle way where the presence of the animal life is powerful:

the pheasant's tail, long

perfect for disappearance in

winter weeds ,clumpy printwork

of rabbits

over hedge kept floats of snow. . . (CP, 271)

The experience of the animal life around is once again part of weather. This placing of the animal life in the context of weather, one witnesses, again in "Life in the Bundenbrooks".

Though Ammons admits human figures, it is primarily a poem about animal life in a particular place:

> . . .frost blurs
> the morning elk there and squirrels
> chitter with the dawn, numb seed: clarity,
> the eagle dips into scary nothingness,
> off a bluff . . . (CP, 282)

Ammons here presents images of animal life defined by weather. Not life alone, but death too, is part of this world as Ammons presents in "Drought". The drama of death that he witnesses is firmly placed in an experience of weather. Death, too, is part of the process that rules the world of insects and small animals. Ammons points to the dryness of the landscape, which suggests the nature of weather. The experience of witnessing the spider preying on the bee turns out to be largely modified by weather.

If "Drought" works on indirect references to weather, "Equinox" is replete with images of weather, which set the tone of the poem, and only later does Ammons introduce the presence of animal life into the landscape. The reference to weather is direct and begins in the opening lines of the poem where Ammons writes, "I went out to cut the last batch of zinnias this / morning from the back fencerow and got my shanks / chilled for sure" (CP, 294). From this indirect reference to weather, Ammons proceeds to a direct one when he turns to

observe the "furrowy dark gray clouds of blue sky- grass and dew / beaded up heavier than the left-overs of rain: / in the Zinnias" (CP, 294). After these elaborate references to weather Ammons turns to the world of insects in this landscape and acknowledges its presence:

> . . .a bumblebee
> stirring in slow -motion, trying to unwind
> the webbed drug of cold, buzzes occasionally but
> with a dry rattle:
> it is not summer now and the simmering buzz is out
> of heat . . . (CP, 295)

This dependency on weather that characterizes animal life underlies "Lollapalooza 22 February" which has an elaborate build up of landscape in weather before he introduces the theme of animal life in it. The poem is about the carcass of a pheasant that Ammons comes across when he removes the snow. The experience is also an experience of weather, a point that Ammons underscores when he writes:

> ten weeks turning casually to water :the afternoon
> was lovely and constant (except, wingfeathers in a
> ground melt,I shoved the mount aside to find, as if alive,
> a pheasant under snow) . . . (CP, 319 - 320)

And Ammons winds up the poem with a return to a record of the changes in the landscape occasioned by weather:

> . . . at dusk, a patch of white
> still centered on the roof, I went out to check
> and sure enough the motions had lessened: spicule icicles
> lengthened into a lessening overflow. . . (CP, 320)

The reader here witnesses what John Elder sees as a major characteristic of Ammons, "the fuller integration of the particular terrain with underlying processes of creation that also includes mankind."[16]

The theme of death continues in "Lonesome Valley" which is nearer to "Drought" in its technique since overt references to weather are absent in the poem. Ammons writes of the end of a bumblebee where the only solution, which he writes of, is far away. The solution is the solution of weather, which he makes obvious when he writes that "frost's the solution still / distant"(CP, 345). From this oblique reference to weather, from which the present can be surmised, Ammons turns to present the touching image – the image of the carcass of the bee in this 'reality' of weather:

> . . . being dragged down by ants,
> the sucked dryness,
> the glassy wings perfectly remnant

in their raggedness,

the body shell shellacked and complete,

the excessive hollowness and lightness. (CP, 346)

The dryness of the body, Ammons relates to the dryness of the landscape, which refers to the weather and the season. "Lonesome Valley" is the last poem in *Collected Poems* in which Ammons looks into animal life in a landscape defined by weather and the seasons and the poem foreshadows Ammons's later poems on animal life in that life and death here, as in later poems, are so thoroughly fused with the cycles of the seasons. Life and death become expressions and experiences mediated by weather.

Tape written in the diary mode which tries to record a particular time and place in Ammon's life is also a record of the scenes of animal life that he comes across in Ithaca. The preoccupation with animal world in the poetry of Ammons is significant for the complexity that it adds to the idea of process. As in *Collected Poems* weather is the context in which the world of animals is observed. The animal world becomes an indication of the severity of weather in which the poet is forced to live. The passage of time, the peculiar qualities of a season, weather as a concrete reality all these notions are furthered by the poet by the use of images and symbols from the animal world.

Tape is essentially an extended discussion of winter and the winter that he constructs is one, which is marked by the presence and absence of birds and the continuities that he tries to establish are the continuities along these lines .The cyclical notion that Ammons establishes in his writing with regard to the seasons is partly made possible by these references to the birds and animals and birds figure more prominently in the design that Ammons attempts .The sense of loss or sorrow that usually accompanies these absences rarely figures in Ammons ; what is offered is a factual rendering of the landscape without much display of emotion that these absences should normally elicit.

The winter landscape in *Tape* is rich in detail owing to the inexhaustible configurations that are effected by the seasons; the experiences of winter are definitely richer due to the patterns of animal life and the section on December 8 establishes the pattern of passage of time constantly felt as changes in the landscape which are essentially the changes of the presence and the absence of animal life. Ammons demarcates yesterday from today in the context of winter landscape, where an image of yesterday varies from that of today in a significant way:

> yesterday's gone
>
> yesterday and

bird are gone:

I know there's no use

to look

for either of them . . . (T, 11)

Ammons here proceeds to drive home the idea that this change is not just a change, but also a change of weather, a change that is to be seen as an integral part of the changing seasons, changing landscape:

. . .bird

running from the winter,

yesterday

running down stream

to some ocean pocket of

rest (T, 11)

His poetry is thus a meeting ground for change to be understood both as something to be felt on a day-to-day basis and also as a part of a larger period of time. The treatment of weather in Ammons, closely related to the animal world, is a part of the migratory process. Winter thus comes to be seen in this light, and birds and animals are reminders of the seasons. Process, thus comes to be understood by such a pattern as extending beyond the immediate day and consequently, there is a focus on weather, understood both as an activity which is a minute by minute account and also as a part of a larger order of

time and place. The technique that emerges in such situations is one of trying to present a reality as concretely as possible. This becomes more significant when one considers the fact that such passages often appear between passages about poetry, or theories of formulations of reality that it acts as a balance to the tendency to distance the immediate reality.

The world of animals, which he develops, is firmly placed within a landscape that is predominantly explained in terms of weather. Ammons undertakes the exploration of these smaller forms of life and develops a complex and concrete image of weather that will not be treated as an abstract experience difficult to identify or undergo. It is this same intention that forces the poet to present a sense of the animal body when weather is discussed. Weather becomes a felt experience because Ammons tries to endow this landscape with images of process and these images are images of disintegration and decomposition of carcasses and the predatory aspect of the animal world is not ignored, it too is seen as a part of the processes that rule the landscape.

Death and decay are very much seen in this framework of weather that one realizes that weather is the experience that regulates the sense impressions that this animal world offers. Winter thus makes experience of even death in the animal world an experience of decay, firmly placed within the framework of weather. For Ammons, experience is not free from the context of

weather. Death in winter is an experience solely regulated by it and even winter comes to be felt in terms of the changes that it brings about and death comes to be represented in these small and minute changes that it is sufficiently concretized and consequently weather becomes an experience of the small and minute changes. Events come to have meanings, meanings controlled by the weather, understood as a combination of these minute changes. Death has occurred in this landscape and it comes to the poet only as a late knowledge and the persistence of death is often seen, as the result of a natural phenomenon of weather. The carcass of a cat lying under the blue spruce becomes a reality only after the weather changes. Thus weather is the reality that intensifies the experience of death. Death is shorn off all kinds of philosophical positions. It is a stark experience, that resists all explanations and he writes of the flies:

they remember or
still have the scent
of the cat that was
rotting behind my
blue spruce :it's
been below freezing
I don't know . . . (T, 33)

Ammons observes later in the poem that the explanations of death do not last. They would hang around only as long as the flies would hang around the carcass. The explanations have validity only till the sense experience is there to support them.

In the section on December 11 Ammons attempts an extended discussion of birds like mallards and Canada geese that are migrating since winter is approaching. This image of the winter life is placed in a frame of weather, which was initiated by the opening line of the section, "They changed the forecast today" (T, 41).

Most of the sections of the *Tape* begin with a clear reference to weather and are often immediately followed by the images of birds. The intensity of the weather and the rapid changes happening in the landscape are often conveyed by a set of images that portray the behaviour of these birds in this extreme climate. Ammons here indulges in what Leonard Scigaj terms "the celebration of everyday beingness" [17], which Scigaj sees as essential to an environmental consciousness. The sudden changes in the weather are reflected on by Ammons at the beginning of the record of the events of December 12:

> clouds came in soon after
> dark last night, and today
> broke fact & prophecy
> as snow turning into rain . . . (T, 48)

This creates the notion of a landscape, which is constantly beyond any attempt to define. Such an impression of the landscape is further accentuated by description of the birds and animals in it. The element of surprise that Ammons experiences and reiterates, whenever an attempt is made to describe the landscape, is largely due to the unpredictability of any fixed form and this unpredictability is largely traceable to the idea of motion in the landscape which in fact is the result of an observation of the birds and small animals in it. The impression of the rapid succession of events taking place in the landscape bound by weather that Ammons records in his poetry is greatly owing to a record of motion that he sees in it, which turns out to be the motion of the birds. Ammons records:

> the starlings sit
>
> like rain sheds ,
>
> vertical in the gray
>
> trees :two jays
>
> search the ground :
>
> as it neared midnight . . . (T, 48)

Weather offers Ammons heightened consciousness, a consciousness, which results in a minute description of the details of the animal world placed in the context of weather. The events of weather, Ammons seems to suggest, are also the events of the animal world. Process comes to be understood as

an idea that connects these two spheres of experience. Event, for Ammons, includes the happenings of weather and these happenings are also the happenings in the world of animals. In *Tape* Ammons is concerned with recording the immediate landscape around and does not allow a sense of history into it. Of the priorities and the compositional tendencies Ammons told Jon Gertner:

> See, I start over with stumps and birds and streams and brooks and the sky. I may be seeking the purity that was there first, but I don't think that's it. I take some kind of comfort in the inexhaustibility of the devisings of nature, that it can keep coming up with new things.[18]

Process, thus is understood, both as a natural phenomenon, or to be more precise, as an experience to be understood at the level of elements and also as an event related to the world of animals and any attempt to describe the weather is immediately followed by an image of the world around:

> . . .the jay
> jumps around in the naked
> sumac thicket, squalls,
> complains , stares at a
> head of sumac seed . . . (T, 51)

This observation of the animal world comes immediately after the discussion of the day where a sense of weather determines the experience of the day:

> designs!
> close suspension of
> cloud: not a break or
> beam . . . (T, 51)

Thus Ammons's poetry expresses the conviction that a discussion of weather, and an experience of it are inextricably connected to an experience of the life of animals. Motion comes to be understood as a complex experience and the motion Ammons discerns in this landscape, is primarily the motion of the small birds, insects, and animals, which bear the severity of winter. This underscores the idea that Ammons has always stressed, that landscape is motion, process is motion, and life is motion. Once process is understood as pervasive, Ammons finds in it a justification to devote more attention to the minute forms of life. Amidst descriptions of snow or rain in winter, Ammons turns to describe a clear pond in the landscape where he sees signs of life:

> you could read the grain
> in the bottom mud,
> kind of fluffy:

frogs laid eggs in it:

messy eggs in it

with little black eyes:

beautiful & sticky: (T, 83)

Such a keen interest in the trivial forms of life is a part of Ammons's growing ecological consciousness which Ammons himself traced to his life on the farm where he was a farmer where, as he told Alex Albright, he got "attached to ponds and mudbanks and ditchbanks, brierberries and things of that kind."[19] Leonard Scigaj's definition of an ecological text as one which exhibits "the joy of dwelling within a distinct biological locale"[20] becomes stronger in Ammons from *Tape* onwards.

A picture of the landscape such as the one discussed above, is immediately followed by references to weather and the reader gets the impression that these are part of the reality that Ammons is trying to portray:

they say the night will be

cold

with increasing cloudiness

probably: snow tomorrow (T, 83)

The same interest in the smaller forms of life is always placed in the context of weather so that the reader is given to believe that it is weather that builds up such a heightened impression. Often Ammons begins such sections with explicit references to

weather and immediately moves on to the discussion of flies and insects that one is tempted to retain the impression that the preoccupation with such smaller forms of life is triggered by the mood induced by weather. It also creates the feeling that processes of life are more visible and available to experience and observation in such moods created by weather.

The pattern is seen in the section on December17. It begins with a description of the weather of the day as one which broke "as if underwater"(T, 84). The experience of today is the experience of weather and it is compounded with the sharp images that it offers of the way the birds are trapped in it. Most of these images are images glimpsed in a moment of time that the sense of the passage of time and motion is too powerful to be missed. Sometimes these observations are strategically placed between images of weather and this section offers such a typical example, which begins with the day as built of "horizons and dome diffused / with completely / increased cloudiness (T, 84). This is immediately followed by an image of the life in it:

> a set of four thumb- size
>
> birds
>
> flicker in the sumac
>
> grove: (T, 84)

An image of weather follows when Ammons writes "the sun is a silver bead / behind the clouds" (T, 84). These oscillations and rapid transitions create the impression of a landscape undergoing rapid changes and these changes, Ammons insists, are the changes induced by weather. This supports his argument that weather is the most significant experience which offers the poet a context and mood to study the variety of life and the processes that makes life so complex and resistant to a reductionist reading of the same.

The reality of the landscape and of the animal world is found to be deeply interconnected in Ammons's poetry thus intensifying the feeling of the terrible dependency on weather that is not limited to the world of human beings. In such passages human interest is of least importance and the focus is essentially on the animal life around and Ammons's poetry exhibits a deepening interest in other forms of life and admits that "human interest is not the only legitimate interest."[21]

Certain sections in *Tape* reverse the process of presentation in that the animal world in the landscape is first presented and this is reinforced and justified by the signs in the landscape that are related to weather as in his observations of December 21, a section which begins with an image of a jay out in the yard before sunrise. The passage of time is recorded as the changes that he notes in the activities in the animal world,

the progression from "before sunrise to around noon" is expressed as an experience of animal life:

> a covey of quail
> enjoyed (apparently)
> the sunlit margin
> between the back lawn
> and the sumac grove: (T, 94)

The activity is concluded by Ammons with a reference to the time and weather when he ends the section with a reference to the passage of time and the movement of the sun:

> now, at 3:58 pm the
> sun is yellow,
> coming into its
> horizontal: about
> a half hour to go :
> they used to say
> "half hour sun": (T, 95)

The reference to the "half an hour sun" at 3:58 p.m. is a clear reference to the season and weather, thus linking the activities of the animal world to the elemental peculiarities of the season.

Apart from the observation of the animal life in a clinical manner in the context of a landscape bound by weather,

weather occurs rather obliquely in certain sections where the action is set in the past, with memory playing an important role. In such sections, the animals in the farm with which he had some attachment, are discussed. Such passages admit references to weather but are not elaborated since it might reduce the emotional intensity of such passages if too much objective presentation of weather is attempted. In these passages of loss as the one in the entry for December 22 where the loss of the mule Kate, an inevitability of the agrarian economic reality, creates some very fine and intense passages trying to record graphically the loss felt by Ammons as a boy, a loss which is also linked to weather, which the reader senses when Ammons begins the section with a clear reference to weather:

> we lost our mule Kate in
> the fall
> to a chattel mortgage:
> men backed the truck
> up into a shallow
> ditch ,dropped the ramp ,
> & with twitch & whip
> loaded her on:
> it seemed . . . (T, 95)

From this moment of loss Ammons proceeds to remember the presence of the mule on the farm and the reminders of her presence are related to weather:

> farm with no mule
> the corn she made
> to lie all winter
> in a barn's weevil - dust
> & rat droppings :
> in the spring . . . (T, 96)

The reality of loss for Ammons becomes an experience deeply linked to weather where the immediacy of weather adds to the immediacy of the experience of loss.

Ammons is preoccupied with the observation of the landscape, which he sees as constantly modified by the signs of animal life in it and weather. The sense of the place and the emotions attendant upon it are seen to be fused with it as in the section on December 30 where he writes of the empty cherry tree and a jay that he sees around. Ammons convinces the reader that this reality of the landscape and of the animal life in it are part of weather and the seasons when he notes:

> 5 pm:
> some rosy drifts
> still in

the west:

are the days

gathering moments at

the edges ? (T, 130)

The treatment of weather and animal world is significant for the way in which he uses these to further his preferences of the concrete over the abstract. Descriptions of a greater concern are often suddenly interrupted by the personal and concrete experience, which becomes an experience of the life of the animals against the backdrop of some season. Here too, the sense of the place and the value of the experience come to be linked to the technique of Ammons which brings together a sense of the place which is a sense of the landscape bound by the seasons in which life becomes possible and interesting.

Ammons's interest in ecology and environmental problems is also related to his idea of weather that is used as a context to bring into poetry the larger issues of the ecological problems, his attitude towards it, his interest in it and the justification for the techniques that he uses in his poetry. Ecology as a dominant theme with its most significant idea of interrelatedness is entertained by the poet not just for his interest in the earth but as a justification for bringing the so-called insignificant objects into his writing. For Ammons, ecology erases the differences between the high and the low, between the big and the small, which he accepts:

you will find yourself
in a firm less country:
centers & peripheries
in motion,
organic,
interrelations! (T, 111)

Ammons uses ecology as a context to discuss his preoccupations such as his thoughts on what poetry is, and what poetry should deal with. More than just being a theme for the poet, ecology offers an ideology, which allows Ammons to bring in diverse thoughts, once this interrelatedness is accepted either directly or by the introduction of some natural phenomenon. This interrelatedness is so pervasive that it is the logic that gives coherence to the disparate experiences of the poet. Further this relationship of interrelatedness, which he accepts, is extended to the aesthetics of poetry and is sometimes directly stated as in the section titled 27 December which records weather:

. . . speaking
now entirely of rain
may rain:
could turn cold
enough to snow again

(none of my business). (T, 111)

From this present, Ammons swiftly moves to problems of ecology first theorized and later observed in a specific context. The rules of ecology are extended to the rules of poetry and to the treatment of reality. The idea of interrelatedness defeats all attempts to use preconceived forms of the "boxes of preconceived possibility" as he calls them. Ammons believes in the need of a very flexible structure which

adapts, tests the
  peripheries, draws in,
finds a new factor,
.....
responds to inner & outer
change: (T, 117)

Once again self-consciousness and self-reflexivity come to be related to ecology and to poetry through the narrative path set by his preoccupation with weather which becomes an environmental experience though not sufficiently scientifically treated, perhaps a technique consciously adopted by Ammons to voice his distaste for the intellectual and the abstract. Ammons borrows from ecology the idea of the provisional, which changes the entire notion of existence. This idea undermines the concept of existence and identity as a constant that gives definitions a transcendental value. The comfort such definitions

offer is found to be illusory, and as a result, life becomes unsteady, fluid and resistant to the so-called 'eternal' definitions. Ammons understands ecology as

> thallophyte & green
> alga
> living together,
> with
> necessary exchanges . (T, 121)

These 'necessary exchanges' absorb the poet and are seen to be relevant to the world of poetry where the exchanges are between reason and feeling. He accepts the role of the beauty of abstraction, which is significant though marginally in his understanding of this earth in which the poet finds himself. Ammons discredits knowledge, stating knowledge is redundant when feelings are working right. In the later sections of the *Tape* there is this increasing evidence of a widening scope in which the earth and the world become the centre of his thought and it is ecology that signals and makes possible such a broadening of a vision from the individual, personal, and the local. Ecology redefines experience as a collective, more impersonal and a more global experience implying a sense of vastness of experience available to man and the consequent insignificance that happens to his own existence on this universe deflates many of the hyperbolic statements maintained by various

philosophies as an explanation of the measures undertaken in the name of progress.

The section devoted to the incidents of December 30 attempts a very elaborate discussion of the loss of the forest and the loss of the animal life in it and the progress that man has made, and finally comes to rest on an image and an event that by normal standards may be read as insignificant, an incident in which weather and the animal world come together when Ammons writes of a turtle he saw "last summer":

> I seen a sight: his back
>
> was hazy with
>
> mosquitoes, thick
>
> as they could
>
> stick,
>
> bumming a , now mind you,
>
> ride on a turtle's back ! . . . (T, 135)

Ammons then proceeds to explain this experience as impossible in New York and thus sets up a tension between the country and the city, which romantic ideology never outgrew. Though Ammons here sets up a tension between the city and the country he does not elaborate it. But Ammons had clear attitudes towards it, which he voiced to Schneider:

> As a country person I have always felt astonished by people in New York City living in all those glassy buildings with concrete and nothing else. The organic basis of life is missing there and human artifice has tried to replace everything, and it seems to me that a person who dwells in such a situation is bound to be crazy. I know that's not true, but it's just so far away from the natural origin of things.[22]

What Ammons voices here is a central thought of romantic ideology. But he does not, like Thoreau commit himself to what Duan Elgin calls a "life of voluntary simplicity"[23] in which "one turns away from material progress, move to a rural setting where one lives a life of isolated and austere self sufficiency."[24]

Ammons exhibits the sensibility of a person who is absorbed in 'minor' details and the insignificant for him becomes relevant as in his account of January 4 where the images and details of small insects and their activities are observed in the context of weather. And the vision that Ammons projects is again bifocal in that he records the changes in the larger landscape of which he is a part and simultaneously his attention falls on the landscape:

> warm spell first part
>
> of Dec:
>
> .....
>
> an ant reconnoitering
>
> the kitchen counter
>
> is't that hot?

& a squirrel out: (T, 167)

It is to be noted that this small world, which he develops, is firmly placed within a landscape that is predominantly explained in terms of weather. Ammons undertakes the exploration of these smaller forms of life and develops a complex and concrete image of weather that will not be treated as an abstract experience difficult to identify or undergo. It is this same intention that forces the poet to present a sense of the animal body when weather is discussed. Weather becomes a felt experience because Ammons tries to endow this landscape with images of process and these images are images of disintegration and decomposition of carcasses and the predatory aspect of the animal world is not ignored, it too is seen as a part of the processes that rule the landscape.

Violence of death appears in the section on January 9 where Ammons elaborately builds up the picture of a little bird dead and dismembered by a red hawk:

. . . cold air
rushing in
where a heart was
    rushing
    through
back muscle of wing bone (T, 192)

All this drama of life and death takes place in the background of the image of the Canada geese, a migratory bird. The morbid preoccupation with the dead and with the decaying carcass in the setting of weather which is very evident in this passage, a recurring theme in Ammons, which reappears in *Sumerian Vistas*, which is a part of his idea of process which remains significant to the end of his career.

Tape with its daily record of the events is what David Ray in a letter to Ammons called a "kind of electrocardiogram"[25] and it is a faithful and graphic rendering of both life and death in the world of animals that Ammons sees around. The final image that Ammons offers amply testifies the increasing dependency of the animal life on weather, which grows stronger as his poetry matures.

The animal world that Ammons builds up in *Sphere* does not appear in isolation, rather, it is deeply embedded in the landscape, a landscape almost exclusively determined by weather. Poem after poem, Ammons conveys the impression that life does not happen separate from the seasons. The terrible dependency that Ammons has often spoken of applies well to animal life. The presence of the animal life in a landscape influenced by weather is obvious in section 19 of *Sphere* where Ammons writes:

> oh, it's spring, and I'm more transparent than ever:

> I heard the white-breasted nuthatch garble over the trunk]
> bark today , and tonight everything is so clear it's
> going down to zero . . . (S, 19)

Life around comes to be mediated by the experience of weather. The sense of time and place and the strain of realism that Ammons achieves is the result of this attitude that relates all experience of the animal life to weather. Ammons does not mystify the animal world nor does he glorify it. His eyes are on the common experiences and Ammons is not on the lookout for unnatural experience nor does he try to see the world of animals as capable of offering an experience, which does not come within the sphere of daily life.

The impression of animal life that Ammons constructs in his writing is one where these images from animal life suggest a common enough experience that does not strike the reader as alien. Wilderness does not figure in his poetry and life observed is mostly one lived in the city. Animal world in *Sphere* observed in the context of weather has a function analogous to that of the body, in that, both create a sense of the concrete, the local and the particular, suggesting a contrast to the abstract discussions entertained in the poem. A return to the present is also a return to the landscape in weather, where Ammons takes notice of the signs of life, signs mostly from the world of animals and birds. Section 28 exhibits such a pattern, where, after an exhaustive analysis of the mental activities, the relation of the circle to the

pyramid, Ammons writes of the "round yew" which reacts to the "coolish" weather and he concludes the section with the image of the birds in the "windy air" in "a windy dusk" with "the clouds low and running" picking up "yellow glows" (S, 23).

The tension between the concrete and the abstract is obvious in section 33 where the discussion of the possibilities and preferences in the concrete/abstract dialectics concludes with images of snow and a startled squirrel:

> by the snow road the boulder floats afire: fir- bark ,
> skittering under startled squirrel, falls in flames
> rattling and flecks the burning snow: the moundhill
> wintered
> lean lifts a shackiling of cindery trees into the element
> unending . . . (S, 25)

Ammons here plays off passages of thought against passages of no thought in the traditional sense of the term, a technique very similar to the one Ammons employs in his treatment of the body.

The concrete and the abstract sometimes occur in Ammons in yet another structural peculiarity. Sections fully devoted to the intellectual problems of reality are followed by sections completely devoted to the rendering of domestic experiences which turn out to be observations of animal life where the presence of weather is significantly powerful. Sections

90 and 91 offer such a picture where the former section steeped in the discussions of identity is balanced by an impression of the later section which has homely images recollected from memory where the narrative is replete with the images of the seasons and the entire narrative is fixed on a time span of the seasons with its images of rain. It is within this reality that Ammons writes of "Yesterday, May 6 th" where the experiences of the day are recounted in a manner in which the impression of that day determines the images of the "three dogs, all different kinds." The experience is not anything unusual but such a passage with its emphasis on the common reality and Ammons's affinity towards it become more evident by the strategic location of the passage. In *Sphere* the references to animal world are a part of the experience of weather and such an association Ammons employs in his poetry which comes to stand for the concrete against which thoughts on the abstract are placed. The preoccupation with the high and the low, unity and differences, for Ammons, comes to be realized in these passages of *Sphere* which amply testify to the belief which underlies *Sphere* that Ammons voiced as the realization that "[w]e are on one earth which has a great many things of diverse actions going on. The planet we live on is the reconciliation of the one: many problem."[26.] These actions include, Ammons realizes, the life of the animal world and the final image of weather and animal world which appears in *Sphere* makes its

appearance in his attempt to describe his mind as "an area / where the robins nest in high wheels under the whole look / of heaven" (S, 69). The reference to the robin is a good example of how the animal world in association with weather fuses together the idea of landscape, mind, and animal life into an inextricable and interdependent reality.

The presence of the animal world in the context of weather is minimal in *Diversifications*. Still, when it appears, it displays Ammons's preoccupation to define the animal world in terms of the landscape and weather. "Flaw" tries to explore the relation between the landscape and animal world, and how it comes to modify the experience of weather. In Ammons there is always this awareness that the animal world is deeply linked to the landscape in which it is placed, and is profoundly influenced by the changes that take place in it. The poem tries to build up the reality of the landscape that he sees as modified by his awareness of the animal world that is part of it.

Ammons tries to present two types of reality one modifying the other as he does in the opening lines of the poem where he begins with the reality of a "coolish" day. This image of weather is suddenly interrupted and consequently modified by the presence of animal life in the landscape which appears as the song of the robin, the image of which concludes the poem:

. . . an hour before sundown

were it not for the robin's song

rippling out along the pear limb

everything would be glass . (D, 59)

"Pray Without Ceasing" the long poem with which *Diversifications* closes has a larger canvas with oblique references to certain historical situations, something that is rare in Ammons. The sense of the local and the particular is a powerful presence in the poem which for Ammons stands for the concrete impression that he wants to convey which is effected by his references to the presence of animal life in the context of weather and the seasons after some philosophic exercises further intensifying the reality of the experience of the landscape. After references to Hegel and winter Ammons suddenly plunges into the immediate reality, which for him is a reality of weather and life in it:

birds fail to fly:

some are spring harvests: today

April fool's, a squirrel in the leafless

elm and gathered tone bark and inner tissue

from dead branches, wadding them

into her mouth . . . (D, 85)

This reality of weather-bound animal world is far more powerful and is within the limits of sensory experience compared to the

reference to Hegel. Here, as elsewhere, it is the abstract placed against the concrete that determines the structure of the poem and the final impression unambiguously conveys Ammons's insistent preference for the concrete.

The animal world appears in *The Snow Poems* almost exclusively along with references to weather and the landscape. Helen Vendler's assessment of Ammons as "doggedly writing down the weather day after day Beckett-like, hard on himself as ice"[27] is apt and the reader senses this image of weather in the presence of animal life. The sense of the present in *The Snow Poems* is a sense greatly determined by the presence of animal life, which in turn is determined by the influences of weather. Thus the animal world conjoined with references to weather becomes a reminder of the reality of a physical place and time, as a physical reality existing in his poetry as a check on the abstract thoughts that often characterize Ammons's writing.

"Words of Comfort", the first poem of *The Snow Poems* unmistakably places the animal world in the reality of weather:

> today misty drizzling [around seventy]
> the pleasant pheasants
> disappear
> drippy -humble
> into the shrubs . . . (SNP, 1)

The techniques of bringing together weather and animal life and conveying a sense of the animal life being deeply bound by weather continue a little later in the poem where Ammons slowly builds up an image of the landscape in which he observes signs of animal life. Landscape too like the animal life in it has no existence apart from weather, a feeling he conveys:

> . . . crows emphatically find dead
> trees to sit in,
> skinned branches, lineup
> into the wind . . . (SNP, 1)

The landscape that one encounters in *The Snow Poems* is also a landscape of death. Death, like life in the animal world, is for Ammons an experience regulated by weather. Rather than the moment of death which Ammons does not envisage as part of weather, he focuses on the carcasses of animals around, which become a part of weather and the landscape as in "Here I Sit, Fifty in the", where very elaborate speculations on the questions of the gravity and the nature of reality are suddenly interrupted by images of animals:

> . . . I began to sweat and stink
> and there under the pear tree was a dead
> jay, poor thing, which stank in a stream of
> whiff which I hit eighty times . . . (SNP, 9)

The reality of death in the world of animals, as in the world of human beings, is a reality for Ammons too, and is heightened and bound by the sensitive climate that he admits into his poetry:

> the universal smell of rotten meat not
> really an attractive smell when you get
> right down to it
> I do not, can not, will not
> care for plain simple things
> with straight forward fences . . . (SNP, 9)

Thoughts on death persist in his writing in a number of ways, from detailed pictures of death to single images, which mention it in passing in a context of weather. In " The Hieroglyphic Gathered, the Books" death though sketchily treated, remains inextricably linked to the landscape and the seasons:

> it's pouring rain but I went walking
> the first rain on Dr.Ensworth's dog's
> grave, now mounted among the hedge shrubs :
> whiff of earthworm
> (I almost said earthroom) . . . (SNP, 22)

Observation of animal life in a landscape where weather is a significant presence continues in "When in Early" which opens with a graphic picture of a landscape minutely observed:

> When in early
>
> December everything should be
>
> naked .
>
> except spruce, cedar. . . (SNP, 30)

Having firmly located the experience in this frame of the landscape bound by the seasons, Ammons attempts a domestic picture of a mouse in winter. Janet Elizabeth DeRosa misses the point when she explains the presence of the obsession with weather in *The Snow Poems* as "a sign of having nothing to say." [28] Such a reading is possible only when one strictly defines the subject of poetry as one where man has to be the major theme. The absence of anthropocentric vision in Ammons's poetry makes Denis Donoghue uncomfortable and urges him to adopt a dismissive tone:

> Ammons starts by catching the universe wherever he can usually with a weather report, the day is cold or hot the temperature is so and so, the forecast is rain or sleet or snow. One talent this poet has [among other talents, that is]: he can get himself going with a very small push, anything will do, a bird hopping on the garden gate, rain or the lack of rain.[29]

Such a dismissive tone is the reaction of one who senses that he is confronted by a poetry, which does not cater to the status that man has assigned to himself. The description of the mouse in the winter is balanced by a constantly changing landscape

under the influence of the same season in which the activity of the mouse is placed:

> our door mouse
> houses between the concrete
> step and a bottom shingle:
> every now and
> then I catch him streaking . . . (SNP, 31)

And Ammons proceeds to create a sense of the time and place where change is predominantly perceived as the impact of weather, a powerful experience which modifies the sense of time and the experience of "yesterday" becomes an experience of the seasons:

> . . . yesterday
> morning, there was an inch of snow,
> [remember]
> just enough the mouse could nuzzle under: (SNP, 31)

The life of the mouse, for Ammons, here becomes linked to weather; the movement of the mouse through the landscape is also the progress of weather, a thought substantiated by the lines:

> . . . today, little snow left,
> there is the dribble of his feet

> over the white blacktop: if it doesn't
>
> warm up more . . . (SNP, 31)

Ammons does not wind up the image of the landscape but further elaborates the changes brought about by winter with images clear and cold nights.

The elaborate picture of weather on the landscape is seen again in "The Hen Pheasants Streak Out of the", a poem that belongs to the same period. It employs another technique of Ammons where the animal world is introduced with no reference to weather but the poem ends with the poet acknowledging the reality of weather. The animal world that Ammons presents is part of the backyard and Linda Orr's comment that "[n]ever before has the abundance of the backyard entered into such a mutually productive relationship with poetry"[30] is true of Ammons in general and *The Snow Poems* in particular. Of this perspective of the backyard and of the room where he wrote Ammons told Jim Stahl:

> It looks out on the backyard - there is a window that looks out over the backyard. That's why I've so much of backyard in my poetry. The room on the other side of the house, which I would have preferred, has more sun and looks out over the street. And if I had chosen that room I would be amore urbane and contemporary, sophisticated city-fied poet. But from the back room there's a thicket back there so all you see are wild things taking place, if anything takes place.[31]

It is this backyard that one finds in the poem, which opens with a domestic scene where Ammons looks at the life around:

> the hen pheasants streak out of the
> thicket
> down the hedgeline through the
> yard
> selfcentred . . .(SNP, 68)

From this rather very common experience Ammons proceeds to take up the problem of articulation and the quality of the philosophic brooding on life is conveyed in a question that Ammons asks:

> is life a
> show truth
> kills
> or is
> truth a
> show life
> kills (SNP, 68)

This movement from his personal and private experience to the larger questions is a very short-lived progression, immediately curtailed by a return to the particular and the local experience, an experience where weather plays a remarkable role.

Often in Ammons's poetry one encounters images, which do not attain the status of a narrative but remain as single isolated spots. In such isolated images the spot light falls on animal life in weather as in "Dawn Clear" which structurally conveys the impression of a disjunctive note where amidst descriptions of writing Ammons becomes conscious of the life around where he sees the big male pheasant which "sulls / low on one foot" (SNP, 71). This image of the male pheasant is rooted in a landscape, a landscape where the presence of weather is significant enough to modify the experience of the reality of the landscape itself of which Ammons writes:

> bitter winds
> clink the tinkle
> bell in the tree
> and find
> cold's exact key: (SNP, 71)

The experience of the day, for Ammons, is an experience of weather along with its images of animal life bound by it, an impression, a poem like "Forecast For Today" succeeds in evoking. As Leonard Scigaj has observed the "unreal buzzards and snakes in a nonspecific landscape have disappeared"[32] and in its place one has a landscape with familiar sights and sounds and Leonard Scigaj is right when he describes the post 1965 Ammons as a poet "who delights in writing about the backyard

squirrels and chipmunks that he sees from his second floor study of the Ithaca, New York home where he has dwelled for the past thirty years."[33] The poem begins with a reference to the unreliability of weather forecast. The nature of weather as a constant source of surprise frustrating the poet's attempts to hem in experience is highlighted when he notes:

> beefed up this morning by a promise of
> sunny spells
> but now at five minutes to one the drifty
> tinkle of snowflakes
> more continuous : a few minutes ago,
> in truth ,
> a blue patch appeared sky-high . . . (SNP, 76)

This rapidly changing reality, which for Ammons is an image of weather, becomes the framework in which he observes the birds and squirrels:

> at dusk a flock of pheasant
> will be-wing, shreaking rusty flanges, up
> and beheist themselves
> belabouring beswung boughs:
> the squirrels in the thicket
> had such a good time this fall
> up and down winding

chasing each other (SNP, 76)

The reality of weather continues to the end of the poem and he concludes it with a factual statement:

> the sun broke out before setting
> but set behind new clouds moving
> and the Christmas tree's up and
> John& I have bought presents (SNP, 77)

This is poetry rooted in "one dear perpetual place"[34] and one hears what Helen Vendler calls "the noise of every day mind."[35] Ammons writes powerfully concrete poetry that endorses Wendell Berry's statement on the relation between landscape and writing:

> It is only in a country that is well known, full of familiar names and places, full of life that is always changing, that the mind goes free of abstractions, and renews itself in the presence of the creation, that so persistently eludes human comprehension and human law. It is only in the place that one belongs to intimate and familiar, long watched over, that the details rise up out of the whole and become whole and become visible: the hawk stoops into the clearing before one's own eyes; the wood drake, aloof and serene and in his glorious plumage, swims out of his hiding place.[36]

Wendell Berry's observation explains well Ammons's poetry of animal world and its obsessive relation with the landscape. As in "Forecast For Today" the world of animals is a part of the landscape in weather in "I Come in from the Snowy World"

where Ammons writes of the bees attacking the "beswirling elm." The reality of weather and the animal life in it interrupt the poem at a crucial point where the poem borders on abstractions related to the problems of pluralism:

> last night after sunset the weather
> warmed up, night- snow- blue clouds
> heaped on the horizon,
> holding, glowing underneath in earthshine
> in winter . . . (SNP, 78)

The reality of weather adds to the earlier image of the bees attesting once more the significance of weather and its role in Ammons's perception of the world.

Occasionally Ammons indulges in a description of animal life in the landscape where human presence is acknowledged as a part of it, but the focus is not diverted from his preoccupation with the idea of animal life as mostly influenced by weather. Ammons's poetry exhibits a lessening of the importance of the persona which has ecological relevance and what Ammons attempts is in Lawrence Buell's words "a desubjectification that has the capacity to situate its personae, more ecocentrically than, say, the greater romantic lyric did."[37] "My Neighbor Shakes Feed Long" is a case in point where initially Ammons chalks out the presence and impact of man on animal life. The animal world that Ammons presents is not a wild one, what is

often observed in Ammons are pheasants, hens squirrels, dogs all a part of the domestic world where the poet has always lived:

> My neighbor shakes feed along
> the spruce thicket fringe and
> keeps the pheasant plopping on
> down . . . (SNP, 118)

Weather enters the poem along with the description of the pheasant in a subtle way when Ammons concludes the first stanza in a factual way describing the pheasant:

> lucky for the pheasant they
> have a big ass and long
> tail to sustain them above the
> snow when their legs blop through . . . (SNP, 118)

Weather, here introduced by a single word, snow, is taken up later with an eye for precise detail and Ammons's eye falls on the reality of the weather-beaten landscape:

> the limbs' topside catches the
> eye today
> high- lit with downsnow
> brighter than snow's
> underglow (SNP, 118)

The initial image of the pheasant gains a depth and complexity of meaning by this description of the landscape, which creates a sense of time and place greatly circumscribed by the seasons. The sense of time and place and the sense of realism in Ammons's poetry are largely due to the preoccupation with weather and animal life in it.

Ammons employs the technique of contrasting two levels of reality or two notions of reality in "You Can't Get It Right." He uses the technique of contrasting different notions of reality and the reality of the animal life in weather. Animal life as an indication of weather, conveyed in concrete terms suggesting a more powerful experience based on the senses further diminishes the sense of reality of 'thoughtful' experiences. Ammons reflects on the nature of language:

> separate as word is from
> thing, the motions of the language
> system correspond to
> the motions of the world system
> rather closely . . . (SNP, 134)

The discussion of a correspondence between reality and language and reality and its representation is suddenly interrupted by a passage, which mitigates the unreality of the discussion, which stems from a feeling that it is not directly available to experience. The sudden return to the images of

weather and animal life signals a return to the concrete and the more palpable:

> . . . I had
> not seen him and now
> with everything down white
> I see him flash across the
> snow
> into the big round yew . . . (SNP, 135)

Ammons is writing about the mockingbird of which he has childhood memories and the sense of the reality of weather that he has built up is further consolidated later when he sees the bird as subject to the rhythms of "the cold long nights." From this present reality of weather Ammons moves to a future, a future of weather:

> I wonder when in spring
> musing he will
> dropping burst the first note,
> sweep a cluster of shatters into song
> and then fire the air . . . (SNP, 135)

The experience of weather comes to be linked to the experience of life around, particularly the life of animals and birds and in the final analysis of the poem, Ammons makes it clear that the concrete experience is to be preferred over the abstract

ruminations, a point touched upon by him in his painstaking construction of the crows on the maple tree with which the poem ends.

Ammons's poetry finds place to discuss the violence in the animal world and this too is part of weather as in "Structureless Rage, Perhaps", where the image of violence is oblique and subtle, and Ammons writes of the sparrow which lights free from the "hawk's broad shoulder" which is part of the weather which he builds up in the closing lines of the poem:

> there is not
> at the moment
> one single flake
> of snow on
> the garage roof:
> a warm day again up to 45 . . . . (SNP, 151)

Ammons presents animal life against the background of the changes of weather and the seasons in "A Flock of My Days", where he writes of the arrival and disappearance of birds and animals. Ammons writes of the robin:

> . . . the behavior exact,
> year's first !
> pecking his breast, grooming,
> regarding the groundcover of

snow unsharply . . . (SNP, 197)

The bird is part of the landscape constantly changed by weather and weather intrudes into the poem and comes to settle in it when Ammons tries to see the passage of time in terms of weather. He proceeds to attempt a picture of the morning:

but now this morning
the temperature nearing fifty
the eaves rain with
melt, rooftiles starting to show
radiance's darkness . . . (SNP, 198)

The reality of the day in which the robin is observed is thus conveyed as one where it is greatly mediated through the images of the changes in temperature.

The world of small insects too forms a part of Ammons's microscopic vision and he does not limit the observation of animal world to birds. Images of insects and worms influenced by weather, which are integral to his vision, define the drift of most of his poems as in "The Temperature Fell":

the blacktipped brown
    caterpillars
    lured out
by yesterday's heat
circle crinkled in the grass . . . (SNP, 207)

This world is a part of the larger changes of weather, which he acknowledges in the closing lines of the poem:

> . . . spring steps up
> warmly saying
> but bloom sprout shoot
> and Arctic highs mow the answering down . . . (SNP, 207)

The powerful weather in which small animals and insects are trapped is obvious in "It's April 1" which concludes with the realization that "earthworms are only little long people" but not before an elaborate picture of weather is attempted by Ammons:

> It's April 1
> the willow's yellow's
> misting green
> adding white maybe
> tonight or tomorrow (SNP,217)

The Snow Poems thus continues the preoccupation with the animal life around, a preoccupation seldom appearing in a context outside of weather, thus reinforcing the growing significance of weather in the forms of the reality that Ammons encounters.

Ammons continues in A *Coast of Trees* his preoccupation with the relation between weather and the animal world. Occasionally, in *A Coast of Trees,* Ammons writes a poem where

the animal world is absorbed into his writing but is not an obtrusive presence. It is there just as a passing mention in the larger context of weather with which the poet is preoccupied. "Density" is a case in point where the opening line itself refers clearly to the bird in a bush and then proceeds to a detailed examination of the landscape and the changes that have happened to it. From winter to summer the impact of weather and the presence of the bird in the landscape are brought together in the opening lines: "A bluejay's the clarified / bush's only ornament" (COT,16). The image effectively brings together the bird and the landscape in weather. What is attempted at in the lines that ensue is an elaboration of the "clarified bush" to see it as a result of standing in a space where the "summer's hidden trickle from a corrugated pipe" made possible "the two or three/tan -fine leaves" (COT, 16). From this precise observation Ammons proceeds to look at the ravages of winter with an image where the lark, winter and the landscape come together:

> lark's song
> is a gang of wires, once
> woodvine: winter
> putting so much
> away leaves too
> much room to see. (COT, 16)

The same minute observation of the animal world in the context of weather continues in "Response" where the subject is a baby spider ball hanging in a spirea bush, an image deeply rooted in weather:

> the harder the wind blew the
> tighter
> it shrank, shaking and
> bobbing , but after the wind
> calmed widened . . . (COT, 18)

What is acknowledged in this poem, as is often found in Ammons's poetry, is the life of the animal world as inextricably linked to the life in the landscape, which is a life of weather. The reality of the landscape as changing every minute is an impression reinforced by his observation of the animals in it.

The idea of observing the animal world free from an experience of weather does not appear in Ammons. Such is the impression of "Night Finding" with its setting of a cemetery on a hill which is "open and naked under the big snow" which concludes with an image of "light fading and night falling" made suddenly vivid by the images of life in it:

> pheasant in the earliest pearl
> of dusk bluster in , so swirls of
> landing and looking, and settled

to the dusk mode , walk under

the snow slants and shelters easing

through brush fox would noticeably jar. (COT, 36)

The same pattern of concluding a poem with the final image of a landscape bound by weather occurs in "An Improvisation For Jerald Bullis" which begins with images of weather:

It's not much of a fall with

hemlocks

the new green already

advanced . . . (COT, 49)

Once this image of the season as a reference of the actual time and place is established, Ammons further intensifies the sense of the seasons and the changes in a very exhaustive fashion. The changes effected by weather on the vegetation attract the attention of the poet:

on the ground

a fairly unnoticeable ,diffuse

browning

comes over things,

particular needles subsumed and

nothing outlined . . . (COT, 50)

The precise observation of the landscape that one finds here is extended to the world of insects, which is very much a part of it, an impression with which Ammons concludes:

> shade clears
>
> the garden spider sits in air between
> the two hedge headlands and doesn't move
> enough to close down for dusk (COT, 50)

A Coast Of Trees thus continues Ammons's fascination with the animal world deeply set in the landscape, a landscape of weather.

Worldly Hopes published in 1982, signifies the return to the concept of the short poem. But thematically there is not much of a deviation; Ammons continues with most of his early preoccupations with weather, animal world and the seasons. The visual patterns that weather offers fascinate the poet. Weather is treated by the poet in most of these poems for the sheer variety of images that it offers. Most of these pictures created by the poet are like moving paintings without any attempt to smuggle in a conscious ideology; no attempt is made to make a poem carry the weight of ideological baggage. These poems create a strong sense of the process to which the poet is exposed and the seasons are incorporated into writings

especially in this collection as a record of the landscape in which the poet lives.

A large number of poems in *Worldly Hopes* show a clear preference for the concrete experience. The logic of these poems, without any sense of ambiguity, conveys a feeling of the sufficiency of mere experience without thought. These are all meditations on the landscape without any conscious attempt to impose a design by introducing a framework of some design arrived at, through ways other than the ones discussed in the poem. These poems do not point to a world beyond them and do not depend on a larger narrative, a technique applicable to the world of animals that Ammons builds up in *Worldly Hopes*.

"Spruce Woods", the first poem to look into the relation between the landscape and animal life, focuses on the obsession of Ammons with the motion on the landscape as a significant aspect of the animal life in it. The minute changes in the landscape are often related to this animal world. The changes in the landscape are viewed as part of the activities of squirrels and birds which he admits when he writes:

> It's so still
> today that a
> dipping bough means a
> squirrel
> has gone through. (WH, 8)

The reality of the animal world in weather is the theme of "Snow Roost" which presents a mind that just keeps itself open to impressions with minimal intervention of human responses. The subject in this poem is completely obliterated to create the impression of a moving photograph. Ammons who closely follows the reactions of the animals to the changes in weather observes that the passage of time is mediated through the responses of the animals in the landscape and he makes no attempt to see it in the light of human ideology or concepts.

In "Snow Roost" the transition from day to night is primarily a transition in weather and the impact of it on the animal world is recorded as graphically as possible. The poem begins with a picture of weather, which is also a picture of animal world:

> Last night the
> fluffiest inhabitant
> filled the cedars
> deep . . . (WH, 10)

From the picture of the night Ammons proceeds to write of the present, a present defined by the changes in weather, changes which Ammons sees as changes in the world of animals. Ammons concludes the poem with an image of weather:

. . .but this clear
morning windy,
blizzard thick
explode the flight
into local blindings (WH, 10)

Process in this landscape comes to mean weather, and its impact on animal world is rendered in concrete images, with no abstractions. Ammons manages to retain the sense of immediacy of experience of the landscape and of the life in it, which he treats as part of the changes of weather.

The activity in the animal world that Ammons portrays in his writings is deeply rooted in time, a time of weather, a conviction that underlies the poem "Oblivion's Bloom", a seven line poem which looks at the world of insects through the lens of weather:

Struck head to
ground in
the first cold
the bumble bee
turns
in the sweetest
nectar yet (WH, 37)

What Ammons suggests is an interest in the 'insignificant' forms of life considered insignificant by a view of life that considers

man's life as central and everything else peripheral. Ammons focuses on the intricate dependence of the animal life on the conditions of nature which man seldom takes into consideration in his homocentric assertions.

Life of animals in weather is again the theme in "Winter Sanctuaries", where the experience of weather for Ammons is an experience of the life of the animals in it. Winter becomes the reality that decides the movement of the life in the landscape around:

> The squirrel, bunching brunches,
> knits a billowing raft
> from twigends and, riding air ,lifts
> one paw to pull in a tip
> where shaken maple seed cling. (WH, 42)

This small poem quoted in full here shows the minute observation that Ammons brings to bear on the animal world, which he places in the landscape where all signs of life are closely related to the signs of weather. It is motion or the lack of it that dominates these images and the presence or absence of it is to be taken as a manifestation of weather. The landscape as envisaged by the poet constantly swings between motion and stasis; the landscape is not limited to day alone, night equally fascinates the poet not only for intensity of weather but also as

a contrast to the day or a similarity with it, which either way is decisive to the image that the poet builds up in his poetry.

The discussions of reality in *Worldly Hopes* in the context of concrete experience are most often rendered as a landscape experience with its favourite images of cedars, poplars, birches, and oaks and all the poems invariably tend to favour without any ambiguity, a concrete experience free of theoretical formulations. The insignificance of an abstract position, and the idiocy and the irrelevancy of an intellectual superimposition are repeatedly underscored in *Worldly Hopes*.

The pattern in *Worldly Hopes* is similar to the longer poems where a continual reappearance of the concrete and the abstract as two different modes of experience is presented and in the final analysis one is discarded for the sake of the other. The shorter poems duplicate the technique with great mastery over the subject, the same images that cluster in the longer poems, reappear in the shorter poems, though, the possibility of an extended narrative is ruled out. Concrete experience is expressed as sufficient, without the support of any philosophical position; in fact, philosophical enterprises are ridiculed as inflatory and even pretentious.

Ammons continues to explore the theme of weather and its relation to the world of animals in *Lake Effect Country*. Once again motion catches his eye and he tries to recapture it in his poems and no attempt is made to implement any theory of

reality and Ammons tries to stick to the experience to which he is exposed. He is deeply rooted in the weather, especially in winter, and the moods consequent upon the close observation of such a change ridden landscape are surprisingly eliminated from the poem to maintain in it a tone of objectivity that Ammons tries to convey. Be it the wind or the snow, or the huge trees, or the bewildered animals trapped in the landscape, the immediacy that he conveys is kept intact by a conscious bypassing and elimination of thought processes and notions of reality that might hinder a direct and more profound mode of experience. *Lake Effect Country* offers ample instances of what Helen Vendler calls the "fertile changingness of the external world, and its numberless inhabitants animal, vegetable, and the mineral."[38]

Lake Effect Country displays a minute-by-minute consciousness that graphically absorbs even the little changes brought about by weather on the landscape but desists from any conclusions whatsoever from the field of reality or notions of what reality is or should be. More and more the reader discovers the inclination of Ammons to prefer concrete experience to abstract thought. This preference for the concrete and the particular takes two forms; on the one hand, it finds its way into poetry by presenting a concrete image of the landscape or an experience without any attempt to intellectualize it, on the other hand, Ammons allows an intellectual approach to dictate the

tone of the poem, expose its idiocy to such an extent that when the poet returns to a concrete rendering of the experience it does not need any support to justify it. These two forms are equally used in *Lake Effect Country*. The bifocal method is more pluralistic and hence more suited to contemporary sensibility.

Ammons's interest in the animal world is also significant for another reason. It offers the poet the context to return to the world of reality, when too long a stay, and too insular an approach is entertained for a long time at the expense of the immediate reality with which the poet is confronted. Weather, like the animals, is a constant reminder of the boundaries of abstraction to which the poet can journey but always has to come back to. Thoughts on writing intermingle with the intrusion of images from the landscape, which the poet cannot be indifferent to. In an early poem of *Lake Effect Country* like the "Giving Up The Word with Words", Ammons worries about the inadequacy of words which he expresses in highly articulate terms when he asks "have words all along / imitated work better done undone"? (LEC, 28). This activity is immediately interrupted and Ammons notes:

> one eases off harsh attentions
>
> to watch the dew dry, the squirrel stand
>
> (white belly prairie dog erect)
>
> the mayfly clinging day long to the door screen. (LEC, 28)

The preference for the concrete is once again established. Self-conscious poetry, which is often seen as a part of dialogue poems typical of his early poetry, becomes self-conscious without the help of the dialogue device. A poem like "Negative Pluses" presents all his preferences and prerequisites thus:

> . . . an undue
> awareness of transience
> and a sense of place complex
> enough to represent reality
> and simple enough
> to be profoundly clear. (LEC, 30)

This explains the logic that operates in the poems where a strict adherence to the concrete reality immediately available to the sensitive mind of the poet is observed, a logic that explains most of the poems on animal life in *Lake Effect Country.*

Weather as an experience that is to be approached concretely results in a series of poems of *Lake Effect Country* worth mentioning for the precise imagery and observation that the poet employs in the construction of the landscape. Most of these poems are linked to his observation of the impact of weather and in "Dismantlings" he writes:

> Snow holds two
> feet deep on

top of the big

round yew,

providing underneath

a dome for cold lean birds . . . (LEC, 52)

From this image of the impact of weather on the landscape, Ammons proceeds to conclude with an image of the birds:

the dome cracks

into floats,

showboats,

the birds hang

around the slow

of the passing there. (LEC, 52)

This recording of the weather in a very objective and a journalistic style is continuous with the similar treatment of the animal world as situated in the bleak winter landscape. Whenever the animal world is evoked, it brings with it some motion, which animates the landscape and also reflects the influence of elemental forces that define it.

The preoccupation with the animal world in a landscape bound by weather is the theme of "Measuring Points." The landscape that he presents is constantly in a state of change, the visual patterns of which as Ammons sees it, are greatly defined by the movement of these forms of life in response to weather. The animal world that Ammons constructs in his

poetry is largely made up of responses of animals to weather. It is not the complexity of anatomy or any special qualities that might have come to them as a part of evolution that fascinates Ammons. In "Measuring Points", observing the squirrels in spring, he writes:

> Squirrels in the early
> spring ritual zoom , one
> after the other,
> winding round
> the trunk . . . (LEC, 55)

The poet proceeds to describe the effect on the landscape that he is trying to create. The motion of the landscape is conceived in terms of the squirrels' movement that is graphically presented. Ammons creates the consciousness of a reality changing every minute as is supported in the motion of the landscape caused in this case by the squirrels which "keep the whole / tree bobbing for/ minutes" (LEC, 55). The reality of the landscape is the reality of the animal life in it, an equation stressed in the concluding lines where he records the changes that have come to the landscape. The landscape comes to a standstill effected by these squirrels:

> . . . they
> stop ,scratch, and stop

they get the tree as

still as their eyes. (LEC, 55)

The link between weather and animal world is again the logic of "Spring Vacation", the penultimate poem of the *Lake Effect Country*. The impact of weather on the human body is only marginally allowed into the poem since Ammons is absorbed in recording the minute changes that take place in the landscape and the animal world trapped in it, which he presents in great graphic detail:

This snow's

swayed and busted open

the fine fingered

bushes (LEC, 58)

From this sense of the real time and place, which weather occasions, Ammons proceeds to record an image from the animal life that he encounters around him. The 'cause' of the striking central image of the pheasant starved "fence -skinny" is again weather. Ammons winds up the poem with an image of the landscape, which is unmistakably an image of weather where he wishes the clouds to sweep out and the sky to breakup. His interest in the wind continues because it is always a reminder of the processes of nature and it always heightens the fast changing configurations in the landscape. The animal

world is often seen in conjunction with wind to record the coming together of things.

Sumerian Vistas conveys the impression of an Ammons obsessed with the impact of weather on death in the animal world. The patterns that catch his eye are again those that pertain to the eye. When weather is the discussion, the poet seldom looks beyond the immediate field of reality offered by the connotations of time attached to the concept of weather. Ammons's focus on weather as a day-to-day experience intensifies the visibility of process, imparting intensity to the experience. Larger issues of life do not receive any treatment in such contexts where the implication is that the greatest issue though sometimes immediate is the proximate reality of weather.

Weather often offers Ammons a context to discuss death in the animal world that death in his poetry becomes a very concrete experience. Weather often intensifies the thought of death. Landscape in weather carries many signs of death and decay, and very often it is the aftermath of death that is more discussed in his poetry. The carcass being subject to decay is always understood within the context of winter or summer, which acts either as a promoter, or inhibitor of decay. The preoccupation of Ammons with the processes of nature receives further scope, emphasis and complexity by these images of death. Winter in this sense becomes very significant and the

carcass offers the poet concrete example to discuss the impact of weather and often minute details are incorporated in the description of the carcass, which parallels the technique that Ammons resorts to in his treatment of the natural phenomena.

The treatment of the carcass within the context of weather offers Ammons the possibility to accommodate a larger experience into his poems. Weather forms the background to death and it heightens the graphic quality of the image of death. Ammons sometimes uses the framework of weather to develop a note of poignancy. The winter landscape smells of death or sometimes it does not, either way it is traced to weather and is studied even as a case of weather.

The animal world is significant in yet another way since weather is understood as life of the animal world where, death too, is relevant to the composite image of weather that the poet is trying to portray. Life begins, for Ammons, in weather, and it ends in weather or at least in the vicinity of it. Surprisingly, human life does not receive such extensive treatment. The human body when it is the subject of discussion is related more to sickness, and death is rarely presented in a fully developed context of weather compared to the treatment of death in the animal world. The animal world that Ammons portrays is deeply influenced by weather; in fact, it is the most decisive factor that determines the patterns of animal behavior, which the poet observes as a part of his interest in the processes. It is weather

that points out the peculiarities of death as manifested in the landscape, and the drama of life and death in the animal world is played against the background of weather which interrupts to influence and modify our perception of it. Death as a concrete experience to be encountered by a figure in the landscape is simultaneously intensified and temporarily bypassed, only to be reminded of at a later point in time other than the one in which death occurred. Life and death are seen through weather; death sometimes goes unnoticed in cold weather since it does not declare itself. Death is more a concrete experience; it is realized through the senses; it is more often the smell of death which is more literal than figurative that proclaims death in the landscape of Ammons. Smell for the poet means the smell of death, no other smell is found in his poetry. For a poet like Ammons, who has written so much about weather and the seasons, the fragrance of the vegetation has played little role in his understanding of the landscape. Ironically it is death, not life, which he realizes through smell. Process, is strongly felt and experienced in Ammons's writing as death too, and his preoccupation with silence, that is, the characteristic absence of sound and noise, in his poetry, is supplemented by the silence of death though no endeavour is undertaken by the poet to philosophize it. Death is not the end of process, it continues still further even to the level of morbidity and obsession. Another kind of motion sets in , in his poems that treat death, a

motion that is more felt through the nose rather than the eye, a motion at the level of cellular decay; it is also a phase of process and Ammons sees life in it which *Garbage* describes and glorifies.

Ammons's treatment of the animal body in winter and summer becomes a gripping experience by the precision and vividness of detail. The desire to be precise that determines the drift of many poems of Ammons continues to dominate *Sumerian Vistas* in which he turns his attention to a carcass. The impression of an attitude similar to that of a postmortem cannot be missed, and the overall seriousness that he gives to the subject of the decaying carcass of a squirrel partly goes back to the seriousness of the manner in which weather is treated. The manner in which Ammons treats weather and the carcass constructs the impression of mutual reinforcement that is supported by a causality that is in a way the theme of this poem and a number of other poems. Weather receives elaborate treatment in such poems where Ammons slowly develops the reality of weather, which is sufficiently and convincingly established that one does not feel the uneasiness of rapid shift to such an unpleasant topic. The drama is deeply rooted in weather and the landscape that the description seems to be justified. Weather becomes the cause of the subject, and it becomes the logic that justifies the long drawn out definition of the object presented by the poet. Passage of time and weather

also comes to be gauged in terms of the disappearance or persistence of the object or the visual image, that is, it disappears or stays depending on the severity of winter that checks the decay. Death becomes a reality only when weather announces it; often it is a past event though not very distant but the immediacy is the immediacy of the senses that reduces the distancing that would be at work given the sense of the time that has elapsed. Weather as an experience to be directly felt and not one to be approached in an indifferent manner is established early in his poems that the logic is stressed early which does not receive any qualification, on the contrary, the animal world that he presents only adds to the intensity of experience and expects the reader to undergo the entire experience in the landscape with its stress on the concrete and the real. The preoccupation with all the possible meanings of process is reflected in the way Ammons incorporates death into his landscape with utmost cautiousness and wariness of the abstract that not a discordant note is heard in his writing. Weather and the animal world merge beautifully, an effect possible wholly due to the alertness of the poet that immediately rejects everything intellectual that may find a way into the poem. Ammons's images of animal life exhibit a mind at work constantly on guard against all that may hinder the directly felt experience that he tries to project.

Sumerian Vistas presents powerful images of death steeped in the images of weather. Death makes its appearance in the form of the carcass of a mole, which is preceded by a very graphic description of winter:

> . . . winter came and I
> put the affliction in the garage where
> naturally the temperature fell below
> zero , though sometime during the day
> the window found a ray . . . (SV, 19)

This is disrupted suddenly by the body of the dead animal with a "tail thicker than a rat's". The poet expresses the hope that the crows will dispose of it and a powerful description follows which is revolting:

> . . . I expect crows will come
> and peck it up, up, and away, the way
> they do squirrels killed on the
> streets . . . (SV, 20)

Ammons does not let go of the image but proceeds to elaborate the image and writes of the way in which the carcass is disposed of:

> . . . pulling at the long, small
> intestines and getting a toehold on

small limbs to tear off the big flesh

the rat was a mole . . . (SV, 20)

The poet switches back to an imaginative reconstruction of the death that must have occurred some days back. This gives the poet a chance to return to the weather in which the changes must have happened including its death and the rapid changes that followed after it:

. . . the arctic air

yesterday afternoon dried him out and

the freeze last night stiffened him much

reduced in size and scent . . . (SV, 20)

The same technique is adopted by Ammons, when he writes of a squirrel hit by a car, and whose carcass was lying on the road. He makes a detailed examination of the changes that weather has made on it; he comes back to it eleven days after the incident as he himself admits:

. . . the squirrel

killed 11 days or so ago chucked off

the road by crow or cop, was chucked

back but right on the road's edge . . . (SV, 35)

By fixing a time referent Ammons swiftly moves on to analyze it in the context of the climate and tries to present the course of the processes to which the squirrel's body is subjected:

. . . several

days were cold and nothing touched

the squirrel and then the snow filled

his ear and tallied his tail out to

the feather bone: so he

is doing pretty good . . . (SV, 35)

Once again Ammons returns to the image of weather, which will do away with the remains of the squirrel, which is significant for the poet for the disposal that it brings. For Ammons weather accumulates objects in the landscape and weather takes care of the disposal too. The poet wishes for the warm days:

. . . the old

killing is still etched on his face

and one wishes for the warm days,

the worms rising up under him and

draining him off into flight . . . (SV, 35)

It is weather that forces him to return to this image of the body and since the cold weather slows down the disappearing act that nature promises, Ammons expresses his irritation when he complains: "I have / mourned him so many times I grow angry / at his self-ful staying on" (SV, 35). This "self–ful" staying as he calls it, is explained as the phenomenon of weather. As mentioned elsewhere it is the smell of death that weather brings to Ammons, which indicates the climate. Decay and weather

work together to create the patterns that fascinate Ammons. Weather makes the presence of death more realistic and a part of the reality of the senses and earlier in *Sumerian Vistas* he writes:

> . . . I don't care if I tell the truth
> the way the struck squirrel in his fifth
> day by the roadside begins with perfect
> accuracy to advertise his whereabouts . . . (SV, 30)

Death as a sense experience, Ammons seems to suggest, is only possible as part of the experience of weather in which it is acted out. Death, like life, is placed and understood in the context of weather. Ammons sees weather as influencing all the activities of the animal world, a thought he entertains in "Abstinence Makes The Heart Fonder" with its image of raccoon. The image of a raccoon in winter searching for the garbage cans is more a description of weather rather than activity of the animal. Ammons begins with a graphic description of the cold:

> Midnight moonlight chisels the eaves' icicles blue
> but it is so parched cold and
> late, the moon
> shriveled sharp, the light splits
> into a dozen
> dazzles per eaves . . . (SV, 96)

Ammons does not lose sight of weather in the closing lines of the poem when he describes the motion of the raccoon searching the garbage cans through the snow-crust landscape.

The idea of the carcass as garbage is a powerful presence in *Sumerian Vistas,* and it is in the context of weather that the garbage is discussed by Ammons. He finds the backup of a scientific explanation of weather not just as a background but also as something having a vital role in the transformations that are necessary for making existence bearable. Animals are found to be instrumental in disposing garbage though on a smaller scale. An animal is garbage when it is dead, but when it is alive, it is also a contributor to the disposal of waste. The poet wishes for a change in weather when he writes "it's time to give up the spectral magic up, let / the eave's jewel–work go to waste" (SV, 96) which offers ample proof of the preoccupation with weather that the poet has entertained throughout his career. This repeated reworking of the pattern of bringing together the world of animal life and elemental forces shows the technique at work and the ideology behind it. There runs throughout Ammons's poetry the feelings of interrelatedness and balance that are not limited to human beings alone on this earth. A larger idea of interrelatedness wherein all forms of life are subtly and permanently interlinked, precluding the possibility of a separate existence or a vision grounded in such

an isolationist view of life, is characteristic of Ammons's poems. The idea of interrelatedness the reader comes across when he goes through these poems on animal life might not be accepted as very serious by someone who believes in the notion of man as the supreme creation totally independent of inferior forms of life. The poet attacks the idea of an anthropocentric world with enough scientific evidence to disprove it. The moving pictures of death that come to these animals living in extremes of weather also add to this idea of all experience as centrally explained through climate and the seasons.

Animal life in a landscape bound by weather appears in "Crinkling Trails" of *The Really Short Poems* where he observes:

> Snow's our winter brightening,
> the sun far away and low
> and, anyway, held away by clouds
> the color of everything else: (RSP, 42)

From such an image Ammons turns to look at the signs of life:

> . . . mouse most rumbled in a fluff
> of wings black roses, leaf radials flung
> up from under snow by
> day light's digging crows. (RSP, 42)

The animal world in Ammons's poetry as the poem suggests, is seldom separated from the changes brought about by the

seasons. He does not leave out the minute details of the landscape, and he exhibits what Lawrence Buell calls the "increasing commitment to the realization of vignettes of local landscape"[39] in which the observation of animal life is central to this enterprise. All motions in the landscape are to a great extent determined by the presence of the smaller life in it. "Planet Actions" turns on this idea where the hero of the poem is a spider across the driveway:

> The spider, dashing from
> marginal boughshade
> to cross the driveway
> hits the hot macadam
> and , legs dancing ,
> scoots back
> for the cool . . . (RSP, 57)

This observation of the animal world is supported by a human voice, which admits the "hot / weather we're having!" (RSP, 57). The activities, Ammons here underscores, are deeply bound by the seasons, a thought which he takes up again in "Still Frame" where the frame of the experience of the landscape is a framework of weather:

> The wind played
> down frost -still ,

sun rise brings three

crows into the nearly

empty sugar

maple . . . (RSP, 61)

Motion, again in the landscape here, is bound by weather. Weather and the seasons are not overtly present here but presented in what Robert Schultz terms "single strokes" [40] since the short poems allowed little room for elaborate descriptions which Ammons himself called "writing on a tightwire."[41]

The pattern of observing signs of animal life in the context of changing weather continues in "Twangs & Little Twists" where Ammons observes the squirrel where an experience of the weather opens the poem. From the "snow polished / hard after / day's melt" (RSP, 87), Ammons moves to the reality with which the poem concludes:

the squirrel's

scratchy paws on

strict

ice sound like

my shoes'

scratchy squish. (RSP, 87)

The Really Short Poems thus repeats the technique of presenting the scenes of animal life, which are seldom seen separate from the landscape in which it is trapped and this

landscape is one for Ammons undoubtedly bound by the sense of time and place, a time and place bound by weather and the seasons.

Garbage offers sufficient proof for Ammons's continuing fascination with the forms of life. The vision in this poem turns increasingly microscopic and the image of the animal world gets deeply linked to the processes of life. *Garbage*, which Helen Vendler called "that great memento-mori of Ammons"[42] is a meditation on all forms of decay that make life possible. The inclusiveness that Ammons has always spoken of is extended to the animal life, even to the microbial activity that is constantly at work. For Ammons such an inclusiveness of animal life in the scheme of things, involves a better understanding of the subtle relations that exist among all the various phenomena of the world. Of this inclusiveness Ammons told Steven Schneider in reply to a question of the inclusion of the high and the low that "everything is all here. The chipmunk is here, the stars are here, and all these actions take place. They are part of the reality and I like to include what is here."[43] What Ammons suggests is a vision of life that goes against the more familiar and popular notions, which are grounded on the centrality of man. Ammons's dedication of *Garbage* to "the bacteria, jumblebugs, scavengers" suggests the shift from the importance of man to lowly forms of life that play a significant role in the life of man. In *Garbage*, from the images of the "arctic terns which move

away from the still machine" and the birds' "shadows which lace the commissioner of sanitation's white sleeve" and the "blue jay's extensive vocabulary" Ammons proceeds to a direct statement of the relation of weather to animal life. Listening to the birds around in the morning Ammons claims he can "tell the weather by their voices before" (G, 51) he opens his eyes. From this reference to the dependency of animal life on weather Ammons further continues later in the same poem when he writes:

> . . . when the hens used to
> sing in the spring laying into their ladders,
> the windy courtship time of mating and
> nesting, I can hear the singing now . . . (G, 51)

The experience of violence in the domestic world of animals around, fascinates Ammons and *Garbage* becomes a search into what he calls a "representation of one kind of energy interlocked with another kind where one destroys the other or if one becomes dominant over the other or if they are equally matched they destroy each other where there is always a mechanism in nature that lets the knot decay."[44] The anecdote of the cat and the chipmunk, which Ammons recounts in section 9, echoes "Jungle knot" of *Collected Poems.* He places it within the idea of garbage. From the image of the chewed up chipmunk Ammons leaps to larger issues:

. . . garbage disposal

has become more broadly waste disposal

and guess two percent of permanent waste,

yep, disposable diapers, good to last four hundred years :

cute little babies shit: (G, 60)

From these larger issues, Ammons returns to the image of weather and animal life:

. . . dense rain shuts out the trees

they reappear ghostly in drizzle: birds, animals

lie quiet (birds twig up) enduring's acceptance, the

waiting out of the passage . . . (G, 61)

The minute and the small, the importance of which Ammons acknowledged in the dedicatory gesture surfaces in section 2 of *Garbage* which after a number of serious pursuit of questions of process Ammons suddenly returns to the very concrete and particular image:

. . . there is a web worm falls

sometimes aslant the honeysuckle hedge in spring

breeze or other dislocations and finds itself

asquirm dangerously dangled in the open air . . . (G , 71)

The dynamics of process, the consuming process, is a part of the animal world and Ammons acknowledges:

. . . anything

thrown out to the chickens will be ground fine
in gizzards or taken underground by beetles and
ants: this will be transmuted into the filigree
of ant feelers' energy vaporizations . . . (G , 85)

And the carcass image of *Sumerian Vistas* returns:

. . . everything is *real*, so
real, the climbing cloud-towers this morning,
each in its individual space so white-heighted,
the squirrel hide still lined here
and there with dried curls of meat, legbones
nearly outlined still in place, this out on the
lawn, tossed there perhaps from the road or
dragged in by a crow (a yardful of treesful of
raucous crows raising young every spring): (G ,86)

Ammons places the decay and disintegration of the carcass of the squirrel in a landscape where weather and the seasons figure predominantly:

(here on 10th it is so late into spring
it is nearly early summer: the big days turn,
hardly wobbling in time for a couple of weeks or
so around this widest day) . . . (G , 87)

From this larger image Ammons moves to a vision, which accommodates the small creatures:

> . . . the anthill has
> erupted gray-dry in the grass and the little
> black buggers are circulating outside and insider
> tunnels, as in a cave weather or meshwork weather's
> digestive, arterial systems . . . (G , 87)

The animal world frequently erupts into the poem and the elaborate abstract thoughts related to the question of reality, flux, questions of form and stasis are placed within the images of real time and real place, images which turnout to be that of animal life. The microscopic vision continues and Ammons revels in it when he writes about robin shit beads:

> . . . the beads compress into disks
> (little white disks) which peered into are alive
> with bellyroundsworms, intricate, worky, lily-white
> flailing bellyworms . . . (G, 98)

This image of the small forms of life is followed by a passage that shows the dependence and reciprocal nature of existence and the "biocentric acceptance "[45] of Ammons.

> . . . if you've derived from life
> a going thing called life, life has a right to

derive life from you :ticks, parasites, lice,

fleas, mice, flukes, crabs, mosquitoes, black

flies ,bacteria . . . (G, 99)

The awareness that underlies such a passage as this, forces one to rethink the status of man. One is also reminded of what Karl Kroeber calls "a holistic interdependence requiring that humans see themselves as a subset of nature, not its dominator"[46] which he sees as the most essential aspect of an ecologically oriented text. *Garbage* becomes Ammons's finest expression and culmination of the ecological consciousness with its attempts to qualify the inflatory and egotistical stances that anthropocentric imagination has always foregrounded. In *Garbage* with its constant thought of the "question of our proper place in the rest of nature as logically prior to the question of what are the most appropriate social and political arrangements for human communities"[47], Ammons registers a movement from an ego self to an ecoself. In *Garbage* Ammons is interested in the larger grammar of interrelatedness where man is forced to redefine his privileged status which he has clung to for centuries. Further his preoccupation with garbage as a central image informs the readings of the animal life in the poem, which persuade the reader to rethink the status of garbage and trash that one often assigns to the lowly forms of life.

In *Garbage*, Ammons acknowledges the awareness of the rhythms of animal life as related to the rhythms of the seasons and weather when he writes of a squirrel in early December whose tail has grown "fat and frizzly white for winter", that he sees in a "warm, sunny morning". And Ammons closes *Garbage* with an extended discussion of the need of a more radical and broader attitude towards other forms of life an attitude at variance with dominant homocentric western notion of man:

> . . . if there is to be any regard for
> human life , it will have to be ours, right regard
> for human life including all other forms of life ,
> including plant life . . . (G,117)

This attitude, which shows concern for other forms of life, makes Ammons an ecological writer who acknowledges that man alone is not the fitting object of study on earth. Ammons displays a love which Gary Snyder calls "not the love of the humanistic west but a love that extends to animals, rocks, trees, dirt, all of it."[48] A reverence for other forms of life and a sense of "human accountability to the environment"[49] are a part of the ethical orientation of *Garbage* which is clear when Ammons writes:

> . . . when we eat the body of

> another animal ,we must undergo the sacrifice
> of noticing that life has been spent into our
> life , and we must care ,then for the life we
> have and for the life our life has cost, and we
> must make proper acknowledgments and say some with
> reverence for the cruel and splendid tissue
> biospheric ... (G, 118)

The attitude that Ammons suggests is an ecocentric one and draws attention to the need of redefining our anthropocentric view of what is consequential in life and demands a rethinking of egocentric individualism and stresses in Suzi Gablik's words the relevance of breaking through "a certain infrastructure of thinking and experience in modern society that has been shaped by the assumption of separateness."[50]

The final image of the animal life that Ammons presents is squarely against the anthropocentric Christian vision of the west and Helen Vendler is right when she writes: "Ammons's work is Post-Christian not only in its marginal positioning of man, and in its acceptance of evolution rather than special creation, but also in the way it emphasizes the inevitably aspectual nature of perception and cognition."[51]

Garbage does not valorize human subjectivity, rather with its de-centering of man by suggesting what Leonard Scigaj calls human beings' "biocentric relationships with all orders of sentient beings who live in harmony with our planetary

ecosystems" [52] it becomes Ammons's most powerful ecological work with its awareness of what Finch would call "a sense of responsibility for preserving the health of the land"[53] explicit in *Garbage,* in the central image of the garbage mound which epitomizes contemporary existence, which becomes a "critique of man's operations within the ecosystems."[54] Such a critique in his poetry becomes all the more significant due to the general rejection of Christianity and Grace Gibson is right when she observes:

> In fact he wants, he said, to bypass Western humanism, to "get back to a pre-Socratic view of the universe." The humanist placement of man at the center, even the Biblical injunction to "have dominion" over Creation, seems to leave out too much, to overstate man's relative importance.[55]

Ammons rejects such overstating of man's relative importance in *Garbage.* The poem has thus become the finest expression and the culmination of his ecological consciousness with its attempts to qualify the inflatory and egotistical stances that anthropocentric imagination has always foregrounded. The search for a "larger grammar" which John Elder speaks of is the larger grammar of interrelatedness where man is forced to redefine his privileged status, which he has clung to for centuries. Further his preoccupation with garbage as a central image informs the readings of the animal life in the poem, which persuade the reader to rethink the status of garbage and trash that one often assigns to the lowly forms of life.

Animal life in the landscape continues to attract the attention of Ammons from the early poems of *Brink Road* and in "Enameling", the third poem, Ammons takes pains to observe the changes of the seasons, changes which affect the life in it, but not before the landscape under the pressure of the seasons is graphically described:

> the fairest morning
> in weeks, crystalline,
> yields to the fire
> rising in the east: (BR, 5)

With this sense of weather and the seasons that dominates the poem Ammons concludes with an image of the birds on trees, an image from which the association with weather is not eliminated:

> shaded snow ,twinkling
> millions in starred
> ground frost dust snow
> highlighting twigs
> lighting birds
> flurry free to light on. (BR, 5)

The technique of "Getting About" is similar to "Enameling" in that, here also, animal life is not separate from the landscape in which it is placed, a landscape determined by the rapid

changes of weather. After a graphic picture of the winter landscape, where rain and snow add to the complexity of the surroundings, Ammons writes of the crows sitting on broad oaks that "dip into penetrating / spills to check the wind." (BR, 42). Animal life, this poem reminds, is uniquely bound up with the experience of weather, a thought which Ammons takes up in "The Deep Slow" which echoes the images of animal life in *The Snow Poems*, *Worldly Hopes*, *A Coast of Trees* and *Lake Effect Country*. Unlike "Getting About" this poem opens with an image of the animal life:

> The pheasant's skinny
> feet skid
> on ice freezing
> rain polished
> the snow with last night
> and around . . . (BR, 52)

The minute and precise impression of the animal life in the landscape is further elaborated with details that necessarily point to the seasons:

> . . . carousel of icicle drops
> part way
> nearly shutting birds out:
> heaviness heavier

than leaves ,glazes

bush and branch

the hemlocks withered (BR, 52)

The impression that life in the landscape is continually influenced by the seasons which "Deep Slow" conveys is an idea which Ammons repeats in "Fall's End" when he writes:

Glassy rain on the roads

and day melting down

the bony hedges ink up ,

tip end inscriptions as if

scribbling out . . . (BR ,177)

From these opening lines Ammons proceeds to build up the landscape with a series of images of mist puddles and the gray hills and introduces the image of the redbird in the closing lines:

. . . remember broad

daylight: a red bird pitches

flickers in the shrubs,

a color beyond belief. (BR, 177)

The reality of the animal life as it appears to Ammons, here too, is inextricably associated with the other changes that the seasons bring to the landscape.

The interest in the smaller forms of life, which has always haunted Ammons from his earliest poems where landscape has always modified the perception of insects and worms, underlies "Chosen Truths" where the hero of the poem is a watery bright earthworm of which Ammons writes:

> A snatch of crabgrass broken through a crack in the
> blacktop
> suddenly a watery bright earthworm flips out whole
> into the
> midafternoon sun and hitting the scorched macadam
> dances
> in loops six blistering inches to the margin's shade . . .
> (BR, 184)

Such minute observations of the motions in the landscape bound by weather echo Thoreau, whose eyes were always trained on the soil absorbing the minute changes the small insects make on the landscape and the perception of them by a sensitive mind. This preoccupation with the minute objects of life stems for Ammons, from the awareness of the significance of these 'insignificant' creatures that are seldom treated with seriousness in early Western thought. And the final poem of *Brink Road* "Summer Place" repeats the conviction of Ammons that life on the landscape is essentially a life bound by weather

and he writes in very factual terms echoing many of the poems of *The Snow Poems*:

> the weather's so rainy and stormy you can't get your
> astronauts up: birds can't fly dry: worms are out of
> their holes: the cookies are bewithered with dew
> the towels are sticky, sour, and repulsive . . . (BR, 222)

Brink Road thus repeats the patterns and preoccupations of Ammons regarding animal life in the landscape by its persistence of vision, and the frequent references to animal life are seldom isolated from the weather-bound landscape, and he stresses the overpowering influence of weather in our experience of the life around.

The presence of the animal world is minimal in *Glare*. It is not a powerful presence as it used to be in his earlier works like *Tape*, *The Snow Poems*, and *Sumerian Vistas*. But the context in which it appears has not changed. Animal world in *Glare* still continues to be understood in terms of changes in climate and the activities of the birds and squirrels are seen in the light of an experience of weather. The images that Ammons employs continue to be the images of the body, sometimes images of the various stages of decay, thus stressing the preoccupation with process.

The drift of thought that Ammons builds up in *Glare* is clearly foreshadowed in the very first appearance of the world of

animals, in the fifth section of *Glare*. The section begins with an image of weather, animal world, and the human body and the impact of weather is clearly stated:

> seems like every winter the out side
> chills a mouse inside and then
> there you are: historical diseases
> and the funny viruses from Arizona . . . (GL, 16)

With such a passage, which firmly establishes the impact of weather, so powerful and inescapable even in the indoors, Ammons proceeds further to establish the link between the world of weather and animal world in winter:

> . . . last
> winter we thought we'd missed a
> visitor, when my wife pulled up a
> couch cushion , there was a clutch
> of nuts . . . (GL, 16)

From this acknowledgement of the relation between winter and animal world Ammons proceeds to an elaborate description of the activities of the mouse in winter. These images are domestic images, there is nothing violent or uncontrollable about it, the idea of weather is still in the background constantly modifying the appreciation of the selection of imagery and the overall impression of the section. As in his earlier poems, the image of

death makes an appearance so sudden and simple in keeping with the tone of realism that the section exhibits:

> . . . so I searched up the
> traps and cheese, and this morning
> and there he lay belly up with the trap
> on the top; he had got the wire not
> across the head or neck but across
> the middle . . . (GL, 16)

The reality of death, like the reality of winter, is the reality of the body and Ammons takes pains to present it as a concrete experience. Ammons effects such an experience by a focus on the body and the patterns that it creates are predominantly visual in nature that these patterns become an experience very similar to weather.

Death, like weather, is also treated in terms of the senses reinforcing the reality of death, which takes place in the larger reality of winter. Ammons rarely falls into the philosophizing mood in his pictures of death in the animal world and thus continues the same treatment that he employed in his attempts to represent the experience of death in the world of human beings. What is often strived for in Ammons is a sense of realism with a strict adherence to the concrete experience, which eliminates all thoughts that might look unreal in the face of a concrete experience

The fascination of observing the world of animals in the context of weather continues in section 7 where life is observed in great detail. For Ammons, animal world offers innumerable possibilities of the way in which reality presents itself to the human consciousness and these possibilities are often realized or even made possible in the context of weather. The activity in the world of animals as in many early poems is seen in the light of the transitions of climate, and the life of small insects, like that of human beings is deeply intertwined with weather. There is no difference between human beings and animals as far as dependence on weather is concerned and Ammons dismisses the independence of man from nature as often propounded by anthropocentric thoughts that centralize man in this vast cosmos.

Ammons writes of the animal activity in a passage that becomes a classic example of the attention that he brings to bear upon the subject:

> . . . dust winged
> soft flown entities , not a bee buzz
> or mosquito-whine among them , the
> living dead or doomed . . . (GL, 22)

The very precise and realistic picture of the animal world that Ammons presents here is placed in a context of time, which

strikes the reader as one of weather. The time, Ammons notes is one of the "mockery of summer" and once the reader is made conscious of the season in which the activities described are placed, Ammons proceeds with his impressions of the small insects that add to the experience of weather:

> the crickets stunned silent where
> they stood like little cargoes of
> recollection: I don't suppose you
> want to hear anymore about bugs:
> when I was in the second grade . . . (GL, 22)

The preoccupation with the smaller forms of life is grounded in a belief that acknowledges the great truth that life exists in all its variety and inexhaustibility among the smaller forms of life too. This thought aligns him to Thoreau, whom Lawrence Buell calls "an environmental saint, a barometer of the pulsations, limitations and promise of green thinking in America"[56], whom Ammons follows greatly in theme and technique.

Ammons's preoccupation with the concrete is most obviously visible in his treatment of the animal world and the way in which he introduces it into the structure of the poem to dismantle the serious philosophical positions that are sometimes pursued in the poem. Ammons introduces images of weather and animal life whenever the poem becomes too 'unreal' by an indulgence in the abstract and theoretical positions that

are possible towards the world of time and reality. Such a case is to be found in section 41 where Ammons looks back into the beginnings of the universe in a very elaborate fashion that it all becomes so opaque to experience and the impression of difficult reading that it creates is suddenly dissolved by an articulation of the variety of the animal world:

> . . . caterpillar, mushrooms
> and figs, mole rats and chimpanzees:
> five million insects and only a few
> white rhinoceros: lady bugs . . . (GL, 114)

The cataloguing that Ammons displays here is not a new technique, but it is much more powerful than the philosophic positions that are entertained at the beginning of the section. It further endorses his interest in the local, physical, and the more concrete as nearer to life and truth; the impact of such a reality felt by the reader is incorporated by Ammons into the concluding lines of the section. The catalogue is of another order of reality, which counteracts the flights of Ammons which he himself rejects in favour of more common experience. This weighty reality is the reality of the physical experience of the animal world in all its diversity, which is placed often within the context of weather, even in passages where weather is only an indirect presence. The images of the animal world take on the function of concretizing the experience and articulating a set of

preferences in which, the animal world by its strain of realism with which it is treated, comes to stand for the concrete as opposed to the abstract which filters into Ammons's writing as thoughts on the nature and origin of the universe, and reality so vigorously pursued to such an extent that the possibility of an equivalence in terms of a reality comprehensible and within the limits of normal experience is cancelled. Such flights of philosophy are returned to the sphere of common experience, consequently opening up the possibility of an awareness that would necessitate the reorientation of attitudes which devalue the common experiences as a result of the hegemony of certain traditional, hierarchical systems which continue to define the experience of life. Animal world for Ammons, like weather, offers concrete images of process that are self sufficient in that they exist in their own right with out any abstractions to validate it. The rejection of theory for Ammons, finds expression, time and again, in the return to this animal world soon after an abstract theme is pursued.

Ammons's preoccupation with process leads him to meditate on the way body decomposes in weather. Though some images of the violence of death, one comes across in *Glare*, these are not stressed and what is focused is the body and the transformations that happen to it, once death has occurred. Ammons exhibits a tendency that can even be called morbid when it comes to his treatment of the body in decay. Weather is

the agent of change as in *Sumerian Vistas, The Snow Poems,* and *Garbage* and it is the context in which Ammons represents the changes that occur to the body on a daily basis. Ammons tries to present as precisely as possible these transformations, and the impression that such poems create is an interest bordering on the abnormal and such a preoccupation with the changes in the body on a minute by minute basis is at the other end of the spectrum of responses possible to death. This stress of the physical aspect of the body in death rather than the philosophic and religious positions possible towards the phenomenon of death is a part of his eye for the concrete in Section 60 of *Glare* with its opening image of weather:

> it's a brisk bright fall day and
> from these two campus chycks passing
> by, I hear, "I am always so uncomfortable
> in my winter clothes" . . . (GL, 163)

From these images of society Ammons moves on to a description of the carcass of a squirrel killed by dogs that he saw in the University campus, and rather than the moment of death, what captures the attention of Ammons is the changes that happen to the carcass as days go by further stressing his preoccupation with process. Processes of life, continue for Ammons, even in the events of death and though unconventional it might seem, Ammons tries to present the life in small worms and flies which

stand for life and take life from the carcass of the squirrel. A picture, rich in detail, ensues:

> . . . I passed close to look
> upon it and a blow fly, bright metallic,
> was pitching about on it . . .
> . . . . . .
> the fly "cares" but the
> dogs are gone, doggone dogs: other
> squirrels were not in attendance: (GL, 164)

The image of the decaying body closes the first part of *Glare* and it is ample proof for the close observation that Ammons makes on insignificant forms of life. He records the changes that happen in that world which include death and post death transformations which *Sumerian Vistas* and *Garbage* explored.

The second part of *Glare* continues his preoccupation with the animal world, and weather is the background mediating the understanding of the animal world in section 67 where a self-conscious passage is immediately followed by the activity of crows in the locality:

> . . . the crow convention
> in the tall trees downslope yesterday (big berry
> boluses) was somewhat unsettled, shifty, and
> quarrelsome . . . (GL, 185)

The progress of the day is seen clearly in terms of the culmination of the activity of these birds and Ammons proceeds to present a clear picture of the sense of real time and place in which the activity that he is describing is situated:

> . . . it's 10 March: the red bird
> has been whistling and chipping since mid-
> February : small bud-feeding birds have
> cheeped and sat still, fluffing themselves as
> in an adoring mirror . . . (GL, 186)

This passage is unusual in *Glare;* here is a clear reference to the date and month, a way of writing that characterized *Tape.* The general tendency in *Glare* is to refer to weather and the seasons and to be indifferent to the actual calendar time.

Weather, in *Glare,* creates a sense of time that is more general and less modern, compared to *Tape.* The pressure of the minute by minute changing reality of *Tape* or even *The Snow Poems* is absent in *Glare,* the result of an elimination of the references to calendar consciousness of time, in keeping with the theme of these passages where what is focused is the world of animals where no such notions exist.

The strain of realism that runs through Ammons's poetry, has rejected, by and large, all thoughts and concepts that might hinder the experience of a life through the senses. The reference

to the notion of time as March 10 induces a sense of reality less real than the reality of March 10 conveyed by the presence or absence of the redbird. The two notions of time thus come together and are opposed by their association with the natural and the fabricated, and the elaborate description of the natural sense of time induced by weather with these images of animals, effectively qualifies the reality of a sophisticated concept of time and a picture of progress and relative modernity.

The concluding section of the second part of *Glare* is relevant in that it offers sufficient proof to substantiate the argument that Ammons's preoccupation with weather and the animal world, is one which he never outgrew. It continued to exist in his poetry till his death as a possible source of the proof of the inexhaustible quality of reality, which for him was located in the experience of weather. Ammons had to return to such a world and time experienced as weather and the seasons even in the last pages of his last work where he wrote:

> . . .(the crows gathered somewhere across
> the hill this morning- August 3- and there
> was a flurry of raucous introduction , the new
> young, ready to fly, getting acquainted with
> the old community , winter together ahead,
> the isolations of summer- rearing behind) . . . (GL, 293)

Chapter 4

The Verbal Provinces

> Right, a lot of your poems seems to be concerned with their own procedures as they go along, they reflect back on themselves.
>
> Procedure could come to be the central narrative, you see.
>
> A. R. Ammons in conversation with Philip Fried [1]

Ammons's preoccupation with the problems of writing begins as early as in *Collected Poems 1951-1971* and discussions associated with it are linked to the reality of weather and the seasons. One of the earliest examples is "Grass Miracles" where the reality of the seasons is elaborately built up in the poem within which the thoughts of writing figure. This reality is the reality of the autumn season of which Ammons writes:

> The grass miracles have kept me down all autumn
> the grasses heading barbed tufts
> airy panicles and purple and spikes
> have kept me stalled in the dead ends
> of branching dreams (CP , 27)

This graphic picture of the autumn season which Ammons renders as a sense experience is also carefully related to the psychological activities in the word 'dreams' and the poem concludes with an open declaration of the act of writing which remains deeply fused with the landscape which brings with it a sense of the time and place in which writing takes place:

> I have not been industrious this autumn
> it has seemed necessary
> to accomplish everything with a pause
> bending to part the grass (CP, 27)

Ammons makes it clear that the activity of writing comes to be associated with the seasons. Weather provides the theme of his writing and also the space in which writing becomes possible. His technique is to create a reality of weather which appeals directly to the senses and once this reality is available as palpable experience to the reader, the thought of writing is introduced setting up a tension between the concrete and the abstract where weather stands for the concrete and the psychological activity that it occasions in this case signifies the abstract which for Ammons is the awareness of the relation between writing and landscape which is weather bound.

Ammons's attitude towards the reality of the landscape and the possible positions that are to be taken towards poetry appear in his writing very often placed within the same reality as in "Gravelly Run" where intellectual pretensions and superimposition of one's knowledge on to the landscape are

mocked at. Writing does not appear directly in this poem but the impulses behind writing and the limitations of smuggling in abstract philosophy are directly touched upon by Ammons when he writes:

> no use to make in philosophy here
> I see no
> God in the holly , hear no song from
> the snow broken weeds: Hegel is not winter
> yellow in the pines . . . (CP, 56)

The self-conscious poetry of Ammons, from his very early writing as this poem suggests, is purposefully linked to the landscape in all its variations caused by weather that the dynamics of writing which Ammons exposes does not appear separate from it. Discussions of writing in the context of weather make obvious Ammons's preoccupation with weather as the finest example of the concrete manifestation of process. The same pattern of discussing the problems of writing in the context of weather and landscape occurs again in "Joshua Tree" where his preoccupation with form is articulated in a straightforward manner:

> I must go on
> consigned to
> the form that will not
> let me loose
> except to death . . . (CP, 59)

This preoccupation with form continues to the end of his poetic career and it appears related to the elemental forces that the closing lines of the poem where language and weather come together become significant:

till some
syllable's rain
anoints my tongue
and make it sing
to strangers . . . (CP, 59)

In the middle poems of the *Collected Poems* the self-conscious mood becomes more dominant and hence more obvious, and Ammons indulges in the discussions of writing, its objectives and techniques. Such expansive moods in the middle poems are linked to weather and it appears as a concrete experience decisively controlling the impression of the poem in general. "Poetics", which belongs to this period does not differ from his early poems and Ammons attempts a picture of the seasons before he takes up the issues related to writing:

. . . the birch tree white
touched and black branches
will standout
wind glittering
totally dawned apparent self: (CP, 199)

It is this reality of weather, which contributes to a sense of time and place that Ammons locates the self-conscious mood, a mood occasioned by the acknowledgement of the same:

> I look for the form
> How a thing will
> unfold :
> not the shape on paper -though
> that too -but the
> uninterfering means on paper . . . (CP, 199)

In the concluding lines of the poem Ammons still extends the self-conscious mood to look into the problems of form and shape. The inadequacy of established and conventional forms available in language to recapture reality, is a thought that persisted to the end of his career:

> Not so much looking for the shape
> as being available to
> any shape that may be
> summoning itself
> through me
> from the self not mine but ours. (CP, 199)

The rejection of preconceived form and the need for a receptiveness to all experience are at the heart of the notion of poetry which he made clear to David I. Grossvogel:

> This is exactly the model I try to jump into...you get to that ordinary level of things and, in a normal, almost journalistic way. You get into action, things happen, and then they end. Meanwhile they describe a curvature of some sort that's either narrative, or myth or structure or whatever, but is, it exists.[2]

The idea of writing as a unique and private experience possible through the peculiarity of an epiphanic experience operating through some unnatural self is countered by a more collective

experience appealing to a creative mind which is defined as not very much different from the so called common self. Ammons here begins though in a mild way his revisionary exercise of Romantic poetics, which becomes increasingly significant as his poetry matures.

"Summer Session", a long poem brings within its scope the description of language and reality, and the way reality comes to be represented in language and all discussions are brought within the framework of weather and the seasons. The persona of the poet-teacher makes its first serious appearance in this poem which occasionally surfaces in his later poetry. The image of the poet-teacher is less frequent than the image of the poet perhaps the result of the distrust of the intellectual mode of experience that has played a significant role in the impression of all the poems by its presence or by its absence. Whenever such attitudes are entertained, Ammons takes pains to qualify the claims that such attitudes have always put forward. Ammons imagines in a dramatic mode, a dialogue with a student who happens to be a member of his writing class. The passage has implications on the attitude to language and reality that Ammons holds:

> as a writing teacher I tell them
> revise the world
> they clip,trim slice
> they bring it in
> oh no I say when they bring it in

you've killed it . . . (CP, 257)

This failure of words to create the reality as it is, and the elusive nature of the world outside are clear when Ammons concludes the section: "What is the use, I throw up my hands / We're already two or three worlds / behind"(CP, 257). This failure of words to recapture reality and an awareness that sees the power of imagination as suspect are part of his self-conscious writing. Ammons was totally unambiguous about the power of imagination in his reply to a question on the relation of actuality and imagination raised by Philip Fried:

> On the fate side of it, we may recognize that we have to accept those limitations that the incarnation imposed upon us. So already, the imagination has had to step down a couple of spaces and what we can change, it seems to me, is the structure we make we think represents things and is our fiction. We can change our fiction and we can change the way we feel about fiction we make. But we can't change actuality.[3]

This "actuality" for Ammons is largely an experience of weather. Thoughts of writing again occur along with thoughts of weather in another section where Ammons writes of his scribbling in a reality where "day after day the camels of the rain / bear their gray way by" (CP, 259). The concrete reality of weather experienced here as part of the senses becomes a counterpoint to the thoughts on writing thus continuing the dialectics of a tension that Ammons generates between writing about the weather and writing about writing. "The Put Down Come On" yet another self-conscious poem, looks into the problems of

processes, preoccupations, and priorities in writing as Ammons sees it. With a flamboyant declaration Ammons sets the tone of the poem: "You would think I would be a specialist in contemporary/literature, novels, short stories, books of poetry" (CP, 263). From this dramatic denial, Ammons looks into the problems of writing as he sees them: "my empty headed / contemplation is still where the ideas of permanence/ and transience fuse in a single body" (CP, 263). Such a self-conscious mood is again placed in the reality of the landscape, which comes to be mediated through the experience of weather of which Ammons writes: "Green pushes white up the slope and a maple / leaf gets the wobbles in a light wind and comes loose/ half ready" (CP, 263). It is this reality of weather that forces Ammons to be self-conscious in the closing lines. Reflecting on the difficulty of writing, Ammons admits, "turning the permanent also / into the transient takes up all the time that is left" (CP, 264). This conclusion, which applies well to the problems of writing, is equally valid to the landscape to which Ammons is exposed which has occasioned the self-reflexive mood. "Essay On Poetics", a long poem that appears towards the end of *Collected Poems* which Cary Wolfe sees as the beginning of the "adoption of a different model of nature, one fundamentally different from the talking wind and mountains of the early poems"[4], is one long meditation on the problems of form and its association with reality. The entire poem is set

within the physical reality of weather, which makes the poem possible though the setting of the poem is not directly expressed until the end. The relative merits of the various poetic forms which receive exhaustive treatment in the poem convey the impression of a high degree of abstraction, specialized knowledge, and readership and "Essay On Poetics" inaugurates the appearance of the long poem in Ammons culminating in the book length poem *Glare*.

Problems related to the notions of wholeness and organic quality associated with structural forms which draw heavily from the romantic poetics, are brought within the scope of discussions that the poem undertakes. Ammons begins the poem with his preoccupation with the concept of the lyric which he explains as having the "high recognition of wholeness, that synthesis wherein /Feeling aroused controlled and released' (CP, 296) leads to an experience of a different order. This experience is part of the question of the one and the many, which is an extension of the concrete and the abstract, and the particular and the universal.

Ammons's understanding of the poetics does not occur in alienation; it gets constantly linked to the landscape, and the presence of a concrete mode of experience and reality emerges which acts as a contrast and balance to the psychological activities and the artistic preoccupations. This reality is the reality of weather, which for Ammons is a convenient pattern

that substantiates the artistic preferences. The examples that Ammons cites to pose the problems of reality are clear images of weather: "I will bet in warm climates with heavy, may be daily rains / There would be little wear under trees, for the cows would enjoy being / out in the showers" (CP, 297). Ammons is discussing the reality of the mind and how it modifies the external reality and the reality that he places against the constructions of the mind as the passage evidences is one of weather. For Ammons, the problem of reality is inseparable from language, and frequently, Ammons in his discussions of reality and language, tries to see them linked to the images of the landscape where the presence of the seasons is unmistakable:

> Stop on any word and language gives way
> the blades of reason unlightened by motion sink in
> melting through and reality's cold murky waters
> accept the failure . . . (CP, 298)

The references to weather and climate articulate the reality of writing. Ammons continues the same technique when he writes:

> . . . for language heightens by dismissing reality,
> the sheet of ice a salience controlling, like a symbol
> level of abstraction, that has a hold on reality and
> suppresses
> it though formed from it and supported by it . . . (CP, 298)

In his discussions of reality and language Ammons uses images of weather creating the impression of a concrete sense experience, and aesthetics itself becomes an experience greatly

defined by weather. Weather thus is a controlling experience in writing, on the dynamics of writing, Ammons admits, by limiting the free flights of abstract thought as well as the comprehension of the world outside which occasions such flights. The more concrete return to the present which is marked by the presence of the changes in the landscape due to weather occurs later in the same poem where Ammons discusses the problems of the multifaceted reality that cannot be accommodated into the lyric form, simply because it contains only a centre which would be incapable of encompassing the larger reality, a thought expressed in the following lines:

> . . .reality is abob with centers indeed there is
> nothing but centers; centers of galaxies, systems planets ,
> asteroids,
> moons drifts atoms electrons and the center, as of the
> earth where
> all turns and pressures meet is inexpressibly light,
> still and empty . . . (CP, 299)

Ammons is discussing the reality of the lyric and his statement to Cynthia Haythe expresses his unambiguous stance: "In a lyric, you must aim at something essential because you only have time to capture a single thing in its essentiality. You're not multiplying your responses. You're finding the one central response that will find its pure tincture in that single poem."[5] Ammons's technique of linking the discussion of aesthetics to the more concrete areas of experience is again a

tendency by which the abstract and the concrete come together. On the limitations of the specific form Ammons's preoccupation lasted to the end of his career, and Ammons expressed his interest in the long poem as against the short poem and the lyric to Schneider: "It [the long poem] would just dissolve such a small, little perfect configuration of things, painted and artificial, dead. The underground flow and process of the long poem would just float something like that along."[6] This interest in the possibility of the long poem later results in *Garbage* and *Glare*. This pull towards the concrete becomes complete in the lines that immediately follow:

> . . . the spruce tree at this moment deeply
> sway with snow and snow is falling the temperature below
> freezing: the muffled morning offered no relief: now though
> just after noon small gusts twist the branches . . . (CP, 299)

The self-conscious mode becomes more obvious as the poem progresses:

> . . .I am experiencing at the moment several
> clusters of entanglement: if I took a single thread from a
> single cluster viewed it , explained it, presented it would I
> not be violating my reality into artificial clarity and my
> bundles into artificial linearity . . . (CP, 301)

Such overtly self-conscious passages that look into the problems of writing become increasingly common from "Essay On Poetics" onwards suggesting the distance that Ammons has travelled from the romantic temperament, which his early poetry

typifies. The digressions become more pronounced and elaborate thus seriously curtailing the possibility of the romantic empathy, which he indulges in his early poems. The poem moves to a close and correspondences between poetry and the landscape defined by weather begin to appear. Both poetry and landscape Ammons sees as subject to motion:

> poems are arresting in two ways: they attract attention
> with glistery astonishment and they hold it: stasis they
> gather and stay:
> the progression is from sound and motion to silence
> and
> rest . . . (CP, 310)

The concept of poetry that Ammons echoes here is very similar to the one that he espoused in his Pittsburgh lecture, a thought that would not be out of place in Zen thought:

> Second, I would suggest you teach that poetry leads us to the unstructured sources of our beings, to the unknown, and returns us to our rational, structured selves refreshed. Poetry is a verbal means to a nonverbal source. It is a motion to no-motion, to the still point of contemplation and deep realization. Its knowledges are all negative and therefore, more positive than any knowledge. Nothing that can be said about in words is worth saying. [7]

The fact that the passage quoted above appears at the end of an elaborate build up of an analogy between the act of writing and the act of walking in a landscape underscores the correspondences between landscape and poetry still further:

> . . . I am conscious

that the landscape is fixed at the same time that I can
move around in it:
a poem is the same way: once it is thoroughly known it
contains
its motion and can be reproduced whole, all its shapeliness
intact,
to the mind at the same time I can move around in it
and know its sound and motion . . . (CP, 310)

This gradual movement to the concrete, evident in an elaborate build up of the similarities suddenly reaches its height by the acknowledgement of the scene of snow outside:

. . . eight more inches are piling
on to ten we had and every evergreen has found the way it
would
lean in a burden ,split its green periphery and divide . . .
(CP, 310)

It is with such an outdoor scene, which Ammons admits, that has made the poem a reality, that he concludes stressing the significance of weather within which not only the discussion of poetry alone but also the very poem became possible:

. . . my essay is finished ; I thank it
with all my heart for helping me to get through this
snow storm :
having a project is useful especially during natural
suspensions. (CP, 317)

Tape, which Robert Gilbert sees as a poem that "intermittently reflects on the difficulties of composition and the cosmic implications of form,"[8] continues the exploration of the

problems of writing and self-reflexivity, and this long poem is a meditation on all these framed within the larger narrative of weather. The preferences of Ammons are seen in action in the presentation of weather as a concrete experience existing in its own right without the help of any theory. The treatment of weather in a very direct and concrete manner itself becomes a statement of his priorities, stated directly in the discussion of poetry and reality. The moods of introspection and self-consciousness are always occasioned by the weather in which the poet is deeply placed. The act of writing and weather become ordeals for the poet. Weather is often seen as an experience to which body more than the mind is subject to.

The thoughts of diffidence and of inadequacy dictate the recurring patterns of self-reflexive poetry. Such thoughts are presented often along with an acute sense of the limitations of the body, which are made still more acute by the experience of weather. Weather is the reality for Ammons that defines the scope of other ideas of reality like that of the body and even the general notions of reality are coloured by the immediate reality of weather.

His interest in the body and his attempt to appropriate everything to a more palpable reality force the poet to see poetry too as more linked to body, by establishing an attitude at variance with the more common notions of poetry as a mental activity. This shift in the definition may be viewed as taking a

position that favours the idea of seeing all experience as physical and Ammons accepts the physical as the basis of experience and a complex triadic relationship emerges among poetry weather and the body, mutually defining and reinforcing one another. The rhythms of the body are the rhythms of weather and the seasons and the rhythms of poetry are those of the body as influenced by weather.

Weather has a formal and a thematic function in *Tape.* It controls the drift of the poem, it modifies it, sets forth the limit, defines the idea of the voice, and the treatment of weather endorses the priorities that Ammons entertains in his attitudes to reality. The theoretical positions towards reality are realized in the treatment of weather. Passages on weather that emphasize the concrete, stand as a contrast to the theoretical formulations that Ammons raises. The treatment of weather thus becomes theory in action.

In *Tape*, weather offers a context to discuss a series of attitudes that one can hold towards reality and life. *Tape* belongs to a period when he was, as he told Jim Stahl, interested in getting it "right the first time, writing spontaneously."[9] Possible attitudes towards life stem from, and are discussed in the context of weather. Even the schools of responses that produced particular types of poetry in the past are incorporated into his writing in the context of weather,

which are discredited in the treatment of weather that precedes or follows such literary practices.

Time and its smaller dimensions like day and larger dimensions like the seasons are realized in his poetry in a concrete manner projecting the experience of weather as an experience that defines time. Time is never an abstract idea for Ammons. It is significantly immersed in experience and this experience of writing poetry and experience at large, are experiences defined by weather. This pull towards the concrete experience greatly demystifies the act of writing and tries to view it as an activity that is less opaque to analysis and tries to see it as available to a larger section of people. Further, it tries to see this activity as temporal and spatial, and therefore a feeling that this experience lies nearer to the common sphere than ordinarily thought of in romantic ideology, is conveyed. Weather is more an experience of the body than an experience of thought, and scientific details that might create an impression contrary to this are avoided.

The idea of writing as a significant experience, Ammons observes, is enmeshed in a deeper experience of winter. *Tape* turns around the two ideas of weather writing poetry and poetry writing weather. Both are inextricably fused, with weather slightly more significant than the process of writing. The idea of writing the weather, in the end, turns out to be weather writing all activities including poetry. This double preoccupation is the

result of a double consciousness, which he tries to resolve by imparting ascendancy to weather, which is in keeping with the priority of the experience of the body. The idea of weather writing poetry does not mean for Ammons that it exists for the value of inspiration that it creates, on the contrary, it is there as just an influence, which is acknowledged.

Ammons's interest in weather is evident in the selection of imagery that he uses to attempt a definition of poetry. It is in terms of weather that he tries to explain the objectives and wishes about his poetry and he wants this to be "plain as day/ exact and bright" (T, 4). This attempt to see the mental activity and poetry in terms of the landscape and weather helps to some extent to externalize the activity of the experience of writing and to see it as part of the commonality of experience, a tendency in keeping with the distaste that Ammons has always had towards attempts to mystify psychological activity.

The self-reflexive and self-conscious moods, which Ammons indulges in, generate extended arguments on the nature and scope of poetry as understood and undertaken by the poet. His interest in the nature of poetry is a part of his larger interest and concern with reality and these are placed in a context of day or weather which is the reality of experience. The "long thin poem" that he writes is long enough to accommodate the large canvas into it. The self-conscious attitude creates a sense of inwardness and interiority and the

rules of expectation that one should familiarize oneself with, are voiced early in the poem and the distaste for the intellectual positions towards reality and obscurantism that might follow it are clear when he writes:

> no muffled talk, fragments
> of phrases, linked
> without logical links, strung
> together in obscurities
> supposed to reflect
> density . . . (T, 4)

Against this he places his wish:

> . . . let this song
> make
> complex things salient,
> saliences clear, so
> there can be some
> understanding (T, 5)

What Ammons voices here is his attitude to the function of poetry, which he stated to Zofia Burr:

> I am just too old-fashioned to talk here, but I always thought that the poet should be deeply enough involved in the complexity and many-sidedness and depth of things, that he would be naturally be struggling for some sort of clarification and that he would put his whole effort into creating a model that would show how some clarification runs through this multiple structure of things.[10]

A rejection of the attempts to mystify all intellectual enterprises that deliberately make things difficult is behind such a

statement and this distaste for the intellectual is strengthened by a sudden return to the reality of weather:

> in the
> last
> 10,000 years (a bit of
> time) the
> glaciers have been
> melting, some now unfed,
> disconnected, lying dead (T, 5)

Tape displays a dual consciousness of time: one is the idea of time as now which is greatly weather and the other is a notion of time associated with a sense of history which Ammons presents to highlight the transience of human life:

> . . . how strange
> we're here,
> raw ,new, ephemeral our
> lives and cultures. (T, 6)

The "juxtaposition of human history with natural history"[11], which Schneider senses, is a rare feature in Ammons's poetry, and it "throws into perspective the ephemerality of our days."[12] His poetry exhibits the tension between the knowledge of life as essentially complex and the need to see things lucidly in language. He asks, " nothing is simple, but / should we add / verbal complexity? "(T, 6). Language is often a preoccupation here as in his earlier works and the problem of representation is discussed in the question that Ammons raises:

is there a darkness
dark words should
imitate?
I mean to stay on the
crusty
hard -clear surface . . . (T , 6)

Throughout his writing the preference for the immediate and the visible is seen in his defence of it. Ammons rejects "the deep / the fluid, the hot motions / and intermotions"(T, 6) on the grounds that one does not live there.

His rejection of metaphysics as "inedible and unsurrendering" to experience though entertaining, continues when after an elaborate description of language and its function of representing reality Ammons poses a question which undermines the primacy of intellectual enterprises to tackle reality:

but when we
surround mind & world
to say all
in a single word,
we kill advantage with
the cost of gain . . . (T, 8)

These questions of reality and representation that Ammons raises, which support the sufficiency of sense experience, become a rejection of language itself that he poses in his essay "On 'The Damned' ":

> The center of consciousness for me is not verbal. I live in a world of things, not texts, written texts. I feel that language are arbitrary systems of intrinsic coherence and incoherence that arise change and disappear in response to circumstance, taking nothing from and adding nothing to nature.[13]

Such a sense of loss opens up a possibility that appears as a rhetorical question: "Can't we break loose /and live?" (T, 8). The urgency of the question only emphasizes the rejection of all that is not directly acceptable to the experience and all his journeys, psychical and physical Ammons declares have only one objective:

> bring the man
> home, to
> acceptance of his place
> and time (T, 10)

Tape oscillates between thoughts on reality and thoughts of the poem he is writing. Both are not mutually exclusive, problems of reality and representation invariably lead the poet to the specific situation of the poem in process and the poem on process is also a poem in process, that is, the poem as it is formed, its own dynamics is exposed and made the theme of the poem. Ammons's *Tape* becomes very much American not just for the sense of the place that it conveys but also for the self-reflexive qualities that are predominant in the poem and Gerald Graff's observation is relevant here:

> It has taken little time for earlier theories of Americanness of American literature to be written in the deconstructionist register

> since Americanness lay not in the romance, the symbol, or the frontier but in the self-reflexiveness of the problematic of the writing itself which is to say in the romance of the self- deconstruction and heterogeneity[14]

That Ammons was deeply preoccupied with the problem of form in the writing of *Tape* is evident from his statement to David Lehman: "In 1963 when I did the *Tape* I had been thinking of having the primary motion down the page rather than across."[15] He repeated this thought to Schneider: "*Tape* still offered me the opportunity to think of the poem as a kind of juggling in which the poem is up in the air and the two sides of it are being walled in and are having to ricochet off each other as it goes down."[16] This preoccupation with the poem's process is juxtaposed often immediately with the notion of weather as process. A baring of the technique and form of the poem is articulated in the lines that follow:

> but the story , tho
> contained,
> unwinds on this roll
> with time & event
> .....
> it coils again
> on
> the floor
> into the unity of its
> conflicts (T, 10)

Such a self-conscious and abstract mood is suddenly followed by a return to the landscape with its images of an empty tree

and the reality is the reality of weather. William Harmon's observation that "in *Tape* poet attends to the weather of the day and from that center launches casual excursions into ethics and aesthetics"[17] is true here but often he returns to that centre which is the realty of weather as he does here. Experience is not mediated or should not be mediated through any ideology but should remain as pure as possible, Ammons suggests, and he concludes the section with images of birds, an experience more concrete than the theoretical discussions.

The reintroduction of the concrete whenever an abstract thought is presented creates the impression of a conflict and a feeling of instability that add to the idea of process. Abstract thought, it is safe to say, occurs in a static medium since it is always disengaged from the concrete, the now, and the experiential. A switch to the concrete image of the landscape accomplishes the return to the world and to time:

> this morning
> .....
> the purple leaf occupied a
> bush- dozen kinds of
> lichen on an oak. (T, 12)

The same pattern of placing the abstract and the concrete side by side though in a sequential order is seen in the section on December 8 where the self-reflexive mood of the poet makes him write:

> . . . the

volcano mind
emits
this ribbon of speech . (T, 13)

What Ammons attempts here and in *Tape* in general is to reflect as faithfully as possible the activity of writing and the constant scrutiny of the process of writing accounts for much of the self-conscious writing of Ammons; the intense activity that Ammons conveys here with this image of volcano underlies the aesthetics and dynamics of poetry which he presented in his *Paris Review* interview: "I think it comes from an 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."[18] The ribbon of speech continues in a self-reflexive mood and proceeds to a study of the "inexhaustible/ multiplicity & possibility/ of the surface" (T, 13) which is interrupted by the references to weather:

we're having
warm weather and
windy rain
.....
smoke & heat
that held
would bust the cone off,
inundate the house
with direst melt . . . (T, 13)

The word "surface" is crucial, since for Ammons, surface is his preoccupation throughout *Tape* and this surface is most often

the surface of today and the earlier provisional title underscores this idea. In his interview with Schneider Ammons was expansive about the program of *Tape:* "Yes, the reason that it starts with "today" is that was what the poem was going to be called at one time. I thought it was going to be called *Today* because it was going to be the surface of things as they occur – from day to day to day."[19] The surface of things for Ammons is often a return to the external world of reality, which becomes an awareness of weather.

Most mental activities are called into question and their significance is looked upon with suspicion. The tortuous activities are not above doubt and the entire activity of finding correspondences as an act of the poet is reproached when he asks " what is the use of the / vast mental burden / of correspondence?" (T, 14). This self-reflexive mood is immediately interrupted by the reality of weather:

> 9.35 pm: lightning! what,
> in December? just flashed
> blue- bright and
> thunder . . . (T ,15)

The problem of the vast mental burden of correspondence is immediately thus superseded by a concrete experience that acts as a relief to the poet and Ammons underscores the belief that experience is enough, it justifies itself, and does not need the help of a mental activity connected to a larger framework of meaning.

The preference for the concrete and the event controls the record of events of December 9, which begins with a reference to weather. This is followed by a description of a plane crash only to swing to a self-conscious mode where the idea of order becomes the focus of thought. Theoretical positions are discarded and the priorities made clear when Ammons writes:

> let us be sorted and
> assembled: let a new
> order occur
> from the random &
> nondescript . . . (T, 17)

Ammons wishes to escape to an "undifferentiated / sensation-paradise"(T, 17). This preference for the sense impressions and a concrete reality, which is expressed through a statement, is immediately realized by a graphic presentation of weather:

> 1 p.m:
> had the storm last night
> came half a mile farther
> east, it would have
> taken my roof off and
> and wet my poem (T, 17)

In a way, the poem is already 'wet', since the poem is about rain and weather and the violence of weather is physically described in the storm disrupting the landscape creating chaos and other human voices join the poem further driving home the feeling of weather as less an abstract thought to be arrived at

intellectually and entertained than to be "carried away" by the storm. The violence is described in vulgar terms that further stress the pull away from the abstract notion of reality:

> . . ."must have been
> a sucker" he said "lifted
> oil cans right of the
> shelves" (T, 18)

Experience fails to comply with theoretical formulations, a feeling once again admitted by Ammons when he admits: "reality last night was / more than I apprehended"(T , 18).

Ammons in his self-conscious and self-reflexive mood voices frequently the fear of the inadequacy of the translatability of experience and it is this inadequacy that he articulates here:

> I wonder what all did
> happen? but
> the record
> can't reproduce event: (T, 18)

What is hinted at here is the failure of language to capture reality. The privileging of the experience of the concrete is related to the powerful sense of becoming that informs his writing. The unpredictability of experience, of experience as a constant surprise and a painful and uneasy reminder of the inadequacy of theoretical postulations is obvious when Ammons observes:

> those who rely on any shore
> foolishly haven't faced

it that
only the stream is
reliable . . . (T, 19)

As experience is greatly defined by the working of the body and mind, Ammons points out that the fate of pure physical experience is doomed. It is the fate of the body as a sphere of experience intervened by the mind that Ammons describes:

. . . then
reality brings its
interference in
and the simple outward
mind, complicated by
postponements, symbols (T, 20)

The activity of losing oneself in speculation results in the loss of the contact with experience and the speculations about the loss of experience in modern life are interrupted by references to the plane lost in the bad weather, in the turbulence of the wind.

The problems and attitude towards the reality of the world outside, the classification and representation, the dangers of exclusion and inclusion as two principles that dictate any notion of reality are persuasively discussed in the realization:

. . . we can approach
unity only by the loss
of things-
a loss we're unwilling
to take (T, 23)

Ammons touches a problem here that has haunted him from his early writing days, the question of the one and the many and Ammons becomes contemporary in his suspicion of the totalizing attempts and he elucidates the one and the many problem in his interview with David Lehman:

> For example if you wish to focus on a single point or a statement to the extent that you have purified the location or content of that statement to that extent you would eliminate the comprehensiveness of things on the other hand if you tried to include everything comprehensively you would lose focus. So you have a polarity, a tension between bringing things into assort of simplified clarity and going back into the wilderness of comprehensiveness, including everything.[20]

These abstract speculations on reality and the sense of loss that accompany all systems of representation conclude with a sense of place and with all that comes along with it:

> . . . we have
> a place
> at dusk a deep blue
> sweeping smooth
> cloud mass went just
> between us
> and the night is clear
> and full of stars: (T, 24)

Landscape is the reality to which the poet has to return, however far he may venture out from the sense of the place and time. The transitions and changes in *Tape* are not the changes of philosophical perspective but of the changes of weather.

Many a section begins with weather and ends with it. Weather triggers a philosophy only to return to it, it sets the limits of experience both of philosophy and of itself. Those sections, which begin with explicit references to weather, move away from it to discussions of the relation between feeling and intellect only to return to the reality of the present, a reality that is hard to ignore.

Ammons's poetry is a witness to his search for a context that would help widen the experience of life. Self-conscious poetry that exhibits its preferences and workings is significantly most predominant in the context of weather thus making weather the theme and also a context for discussing the practice of poetry:

> we make a context
> that lets us out, permits
> fullest life we must
> care for ourselves (T, 25)

For Ammons this context is the context of weather and an experience as concrete, unpredictable, and as various as life itself. Weather, for Ammons, thus provides an experience of a better and fuller life. This self-reflexive and self-conscious strain proceeds further to enunciate the preferences of Ammons. The self-conscious mood puts to doubt the disposition that is always at pains to theorize that calls for a conscious appropriation is evidenced in the rhetorical question, "why always / make something out of / everything?" (T, 29). Theoretical formulations

are sarcastically handled and their ineptness in exploring and tackling reality, the stock mechanism of trying to shift reality to language, and conferring a normative status to language, all are mocked at in the concluding lines of the section:

> anybody doesn't believe in
> reality should
> try to start a dead car
> behind on a10 degree
> morning: (T , 32)

His preoccupation with the problem of mediating experience through language troubles him mostly in the context of weather. Ammons's poetry conveys the impression of weather as an experience that defeats all other activities including speculations on the nature of reality. Though such activities may be eclectic and wide ranging, Ammons's intention, it seems, is to discredit all the theory and human activities that deflect experience onto some other sphere. This activity, which is seen as a sign of intellectual refinement and sophistication, is condemned even when the poet realizes the trap of the same into which the poet will necessarily fall. The technique, again one of a dual consciousness, that is, the impossibility of an unmediated reality and the need for such an experience, a technique used deliberately by Ammons, allows both the modes to be brought within the purview of his poetry, both become themes and their manifestations can be seen right from his early poems to the last ones he wrote. The section on December

11 begins like many other sections with a brief picture of weather and time:

> they changed the forecast and
> today from
> partly sunny to
> mostly cloudy . . . (T, 34)

The pattern of discrediting science and prophecy and of extolling the primacy of experience over theory is extended to weather itself where meteorology and experience do not tally. These questions and positions are raised in the context of weather. Ammons hints that experience can never be fully reproduced, when he admits:

> the direct
> yields abundance, while
> calculation
> drags upon the event . . . (T, 34)

The inadequacy of abstractions and prophecy demands that experience be valued most and he prays:

> I beg my eyes that are open
> be opened, that the
> drives, motions,
> intellections, symbologies,
> myths - lift,
> expose me
> to
> direct
> sight . . . (T, 34)

His interest in the direct sight concludes the section with returning to the present and taking note of the changes in the landscape:

> 11.16 am: a blur of light
> just came into
> the room,
> lived a few seconds, then
> died away: (T, 37)

The self-conscious and self-reflexive moods continue to appear between these references to weather. The ideas on reality are as frequent as the ideas on poetry and the problem of the event becoming the word leads to a discussion of art:

> . . . we select
> and create
> the moment
> occurring forever: (T, 37)

This theory of the dynamics of art becomes at another level the justification and defence of the poet's preoccupation with weather and the seasons.

The critique of the imagination, of intellect, and of poetic reception is placed in the context of weather and as his poetry proceeds the references to weather increase, the interruptions become more frequent, and discussions are dropped in the middle of the development. The frequent references to weather further the passage of time and induce a hectic pace and an impression of a mind running on various tracks. The length of

the passages on weather increases, and information after information is piled up. Once this is done, a late introduction of an abstract thought does not undermine the argument built up so far and exists just as a footnote.

Though the role of the poet as well as his relation to the public comes within the scope of discussion, these are suddenly replaced by Ammons's attention to the condition of weather. This pattern is repeated later when the discussion of his poem, which he calls "the rich pouring of this verbal itch", is suddenly interrupted by an image of weather:

> the day's unchanged- gray
> undivided clouds:
> but the
> snow's stopped: (T, 66)

His interest in the nature of the poet as constructed in romantic ideology and his distaste for it is found in the following lines:

> a nerveless creature
> because all nerves:
> odd- one- out
> because he stands aside to
> see: fool that makes
> foolishness a law: (T, 69)

The poet's interest in the trivial and in the insignificant and his emotionalism are gently mocked:

> he will have
> room

and a universe
to cry all day
the trampling of a weed: (T, 70)

What Ammons rejects here is a romantic susceptibility to excess emotion, which is seen as a strength. Ammons had no doubt about the role of emotion in poetry, which he made clear in his interview with Jim Stahl:

> If you feel secure enough in the power of what you seem to be feeling you don't have to insist on it. You can understate it and be quiet about it rather than constantly overstating it. I would like to be, I don't know what I am but I experience myself as turning to poetry as a way to ease my anxiety rater than to penetrate a flamboyant atmosphere that's going to convince some body else that I am a person with deep feeling. I'm not interested in that. And I'm not interested in poets that do that either.[21]

Tape does not exhibit extreme emotions, and the intimate relation to the reader that the poet has developed in the poem partly due to the diary mode, is personal but seldom emotional, and the weather theme once introduced checks the personal and the subjective from taking hold. The external reality takes over when Ammons concludes the section with images of the falling temperature.

Ammons's fears and anxieties, the thought of the difficulty of completing the poem and bodily constraints, all are discussed by him in many sections of *Tape* with the narrative opening with weather and closing with a clear allusion to weather:

. . . it's
colder than you
can imagine: must be
around 8 yipe! (T, 76)

The attitude and responses that the poet takes towards reality, the self analytical practices that he brings to bear upon himself and on the reality of the observation of life in general grow naturally from a description of weather with its focus on a minute-by-minute account that becomes a commentary or a live telecast. Such descriptions that stress experience as a moment-to-moment, highly dynamic phenomenon, lead logically to extended descriptions:

10:29 a.m: the bead is gone
1:40 a.m: fine, hurrying snow:
12.48 p.m: everything white
3.20 pm: still snowing . . . (T, 86)

Ammons's self-conscious writing conveys an impression that even language and words are useless against the passage of time and he exhibits this fear and suspicion of the inadequacy of language in poetry. Ammons's attempt to impose some structure on reality is used as a context to analyze himself:

why do I need to throw
this structure
against the flow
which I cannot stop? (T, 87)

Ammons looks into himself to analyze his attitudes and looks for any force, which resists " the passing away of days / and birds, / of flowers and leaves"(T, 87). The right attitude towards process, Ammons suggests is

> acquiescence, acceptance
> the silent passage into
> the stream, and going along,
> not holding back. (T, 87)

With this as the right attitude towards process one finds Ammons looking into the problem of defining and recapturing reality in poetry:

> I try to transfigure these
> days
> so you'll want to keep
> them : (T, 88)

This attempt is doomed to failure, which he knows and admits:

> I hold these days aloft,
> empty boxes
> you can exist in: but
> when you live in them
> you hurry out of your own
> life: (T, 88)

The difference between life and a work of art, and the lack of correspondence between them are behind such a thought, and the efficacy of language becomes suspect and the fictional quality and the feeling of dealing with an artifact are never

suppressed. Ammons here exhibits what Bakhtin calls "a semantic direction into the word which is diametrically opposed to its original direction, . . . the word becomes an arena of conflict between two voices"[22] and Ammons here satisfies Patricia Waugh's definition of Metafiction: "Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."[23] What one encounters here is a writing, which Patricia Waugh sees as one, which "consistently displays its conventionality, which explicitly and overtly lays bare its condition of artifice and which thereby explores the problematic relationship between life and fiction."[24] The structures, Ammons argues, will not stand the pressure of experience and he conveys the impression that life is definitely free from definitions and the attempts to define life only evade life as it is lived.

Ammons's poetry is placed in the tension between experience and the conscious attempt to structure experience. It is always a failed enterprise. Such conscious attempts to hem in experience, result, Ammons writes, in experience sliding away:

> I stop to fasten, and
> currents
> swirl around ,over
> me, wearing my
> structures away, teaching
> me not to grasp, not to

try to keep: (T, 88)

It is this awareness of the failure of the attempt to categorize that ossifies reality that teaches the poet "not to grasp not to try to keep." Being with the stream of process is the only alterative to life, no theory or no resistance is of any value as process comes to remind him continually of its failures and Ammons's poetry shows a desire to prefer silence and wordlessness and it is undoubtedly a part of this feeling of failure, a feeling of the failure of language in trying to accommodate, appropriate and articulate experience that he desires to be silent:

I have a notion to be
wordless ,but
active with immediate
deed, open
with the glance of my
need . . . (T, 89)

Such inadequacy drastically qualifies the primacy of the poets with their mastery of language described as creators in romantic ideology, and Ammons here effects what William Doreski calls "an alteration of the romantic aesthetic with his disavowal of poetic privilege"[25] and the section concludes with a rhetorical question:

are we creators in fact
or collectors of relics:
do we make grow
or cast into stone? (T, 89)

The preoccupations have not changed for Ammons, the active function of language as creating reality is challenged, and the representative quality of language is suspected to be an illusion.

Weather is a concrete experience, so concrete that it offers a set of norms within which philosophical speculations are placed. The persistence of time and experience through references to weather voices Ammons's preferences which are sometimes articulated in a theorizing fashion and the rejection of theory too is often done in a context of weather and sometimes a humorous tone is adopted, completely debunking the seriousness of theoretical speculation and the frame of the concrete experience is emphatically argued for. In one of the sections Ammons presents the image of weather forecast:

> . . . the forecast for
> today was snow, turning
> along the coast into
> sleet & rain: (T, 99)

Ammons expresses a desire:

> release us mental
> presence into the actual
> fact, the mere
> occurrence , the touched
> tasted, heard, seen: (T, 99)

The superimposition of theory onto experience is invalidated by a realization and a conviction, "in the simple event is/the scope of life" (T, 99). The construction of categories to confront life, for

Ammons, is only a technique to avoid life and a refusal to meet life head on and he wishes: "let's not make up/categories to toss ourselves/around with" (T, 99), and Ammons returns to reproduce in action his preferences: "look it is snowing/without theory/ and beyond help" (T, 99). What is suggested here is the independence of the world from the word and a rejection of the claims of romantic notions of writing. The reality of weather even makes language and articulation physically impossible, and this thought further adds to the suspicion of the adequacy of language and underscores the thought of language being stifled by the physical experience.

Ammons often uses weather as an event and a context to deflate the status of language and philosophical enterprises. Consequently there is a return to the reality of weather that reiterates the emphasis of experience in general and weather in particular:

> 4.48pm: the vowels are
> lifting around here : breve
> *a* is becoming breve I:
> "I c'int stind it" (T, 100)

The problems of inspiration, the invocation of the muse, the difficulty of writing consistently, and the fear of failure, all these are presented in the context of reality, which disturbs both mind and body. This reality is the reality of December, a reality of winter and the tribulations that the poet undergoes are discussed within the frame of the weather.

Throughout *Tape* one repeatedly encounters the depressing moods of the poet mostly related to his fear of writing and all these occasions are punctuated by references to weather so much so that one tends to relate the references to weather and the problems of writing in a causal way. Patrick Deane's observation that *Tape* "is humorous meditation on his own inability to think enough thoughts and write enough words to fulfill the requirements of the form"[26] suggests the self-reflexive nature of the poem. The feeling of insufficiency, the fear of a writer's block and a fading inspiration all find expression:

> . . . are you here now and therefore
> whipping a tired spirit
> the best you can?
> I admit
> I've shot my load
> but I can't stop: give
> me a second wind: (T, 101)

The attitude towards reality, the relationship of form to reality, the problems of existing forms available to scrutinize reality, and the need for the discovery of new literary forms occupy the poet's thought, and these are again placed in a context of weather as the record of December 26 proves which begins with the observation: "today's bright, warm"(T, 102). The preoccupation with reality leads him to the question of form. The feeling that there are thoughts and feelings that cannot be

reproduced through the existing forms of language troubles him. He declares:

> here I make other forms,
> play -forms,
> to express them through
> that's the center: (T, 105)

Ammons here is in a self-conscious mood, and the sense of an artifact that characterizes metafiction is hard to miss and the section ends with a return to the image of weather, which becomes a return to the present when Ammons observes that the warmth has made the "light glossier"(T, 109).

The preoccupation with weather continues even in his description of the dynamics of poetry and language. Firmly rooted in a consciousness of time as the present, Ammons falls into a self-conscious mood where the elemental forces are present in the imagery used to articulate the problems of writing. He raises the question:

> . . . can
> windy vowels
> brushoff all the bits of
> paper
> & leave a clean place for
> the simple design? (T, 136)

Weather makes the poet conscious of the body and he often acknowledges it, and this in turn, becomes a reality hard to elude. These repeated references to the body act as a check to all the attempts to theorize weather and to make it an

abstraction distanced from immediate reality. Body is understood as a series of sensations and most often Ammons tries to drive home the idea of sensations as greatly influenced by weather.

Self-conscious poetry is placed in a context of the awareness of the body as greatly defined by weather and its constant changes. Weather thus becomes a physical experience within which introspective moods and ideological stances are discussed. Elaborate and extended arguments on the form of poetry and the scope of different categories of writing always begin from the concrete and personal experience of weather. The section on December 31 begins with the idea of weather as a concrete experience at the personal and physical level and is followed by a discussion of Ammons's intention to write short lyrics, which he thinks, will be capable of singing with "preestablished rightness." The self-conscious tone continues and a discussion of the right kind of language which will be able to represent reality and embody the variety of moods to which the poet is subjected to not infrequently, ensues when Ammons declares:

> I've been
> looking for a level
> of language
> that could take in all
> kinds of matter
> & move easily with
> light or heavy burden: (T, 144)

The search is for a language Ammons admits, which would neither be completely prosaic nor inadequate to "the surges." A pose or not, Ammons admits the existence of a self-conscious poem that he often attempts to write when he admits: "I have hated at times the / self-conscious POEM" (T, 144). These periodic lapses into the self-conscious mode paradoxically form a context to discuss the preferences that Ammons has always entertained and the preferences are for a set of experiences that are common, objective and simple. Such preferences undermine the idea of uniqueness as a necessary prerequisite for experiences to be treated as and in poetry. He writes

> I've wanted to bend
> more, burrowing
> with flexible path
> into the common life
> & commonplace: (T, 144)

Self-conscious poems are significant for Ammons for another reason. Writing becomes a different experience of time, which tends to modify the notion of reality and he mentions how art defines the experience of time both in the finished work, and in the process of writing. Once again the context is "last day of the year" and writing which he calls "idle tendance of typewriter & muse" is discussed at length. The experience of writing is closely observed when he writes:

> I'll miss the
> hovering over time,

the watchfulness-an idea
about to take hold
an image reach for shape : (T, 145)

Time for Ammons is always a physical experience even when he admits that it is lost or modified partially by the experience of writing itself. This is evident in the sense of loss that the following lines convey: "I will miss the/gathering up into days." (T, 145) Art, Ammons admits, is a matter of selection, and he realizes that it will have to act out " several more shows" (T, 145). The context of weather appears again when the poet makes the theme of poetry the theme of the poem. 'Impermanence' Ammons declares is the only theme of poetry, which it tries to present with as much permanence as possible. The theme of impermanence is seen in the immediate reference to the landscape and weather susceptible to rapid changes, which Ammons has no choice but to experience which he articulates when he notes "the moon was I suppose full / last night" (T, 145). The minute-by-minute changes to which the poet is exposed is most easily identified with weather. Weather becomes both the text and context for Ammons's writing:

9 degrees this morning
with the highest
atmospheric pressure
recorded since 1927:
  something like 30.82
  and mostly sunny
  today: (T, 146)

The pattern of interlacing passages which exhibits self-consciousness and self-reflexivity with direct and obvious references to weather is common in his writing, so common that the mood of self consciousness Ammons conveys, is induced by an understanding of weather. Many sections begin with a picture of the weather, and the section on the first of January offers a good example:

> raining:
> at the borderline &
> promise
> of snow
> gale warnings up
> along the coast: (T, 150)

The promise of reality is the promise of weather, and it induces in the poet a mood of introspection, which results in a reflection on the aspects of writing and the states of mind that it induces. The self-reflexive mood creates a mood of confession:

> (I forgot what
> I was going to write
> about today)
> (it was going to start out
> something like -wise up ,
> you guys) (T, 153)

The attitudes towards experiences and reality become part of art, become a subject of the poem and Ammons continues exploration of the function of the poet when his accomplishments are evaluated. More than a subjective

analysis, which might be seen as a study of personality, it is about the possibilities of art and a declaration of the preferences that Ammons has always emphatically stated. The same tone informs the cool statement:

> I care about the statement
> of fact:
> the true picture
> has a beauty, higher
> than Beauty: (T ,153)

The self-conscious mood continues in Ammons and he takes pains to keep the discussion limited to the poetic accomplishments eliminating everything that might come in the way of the definition of poetry. A cautious eye removes everything that might betray his submission to a feeling or emotion and the focus essentially remains fixed to the problems of transformation that have always attracted the attention of the poet whenever the topic of poetry crosses his mind. The doubt pertaining to poetry is raised by Ammons:

> have I prettified the
> tragedies,
> the irrecoverable
> losses: have I
> glossed over the
> unmistakable evils :
> has panic
> tried to make a flower: (T, 153)

The extended discussion is interrupted by a small image, "the sky is raw" which sets the limit of such speculations very effectively and the pattern is not really new, one finds it repeated throughout his writing.

The preoccupation with the use of language in poetry, its relation to reality and what constitutes poetry, and the possibilities of employing poetry are again discussed in the framework of the concrete experience, which for Ammons is the experience of weather. Language is of paramount importance for Ammons that he realizes that "the end of poetry is / language" (T, 177). The passage assumes great significance in the light of a statement he made in "A Note on Incongruence" since the focus is not on a world outside but on the genesis of a poem, which for Ammons is the realization of a new word order:

> A poem is a linguistic correction of a disorder. A thing made of language, a system of signs, symbols, pictures, is created which is consistently itself... We begin to sense a disjointure between our feelings and our linguistic expression of them. At that point a new poem becomes necessary. That is, a new language system needs to be created which does ampler justice to the facts behind the feelings.[27]

Ammons believes language is retrievable, an old language can be restored by a conscious attempt to use old words and he expresses the conviction that words are never lost, they may lie hidden but are always available to a sensitive mind open to the possibility of words. Ammons was worried about the life of language and it occupied much of his concern which is clear

from his statement to David I. Grossvogel: "Take language: language is the same kind of history as survival. In case of language any discontinuity between its beginning and its present would interfere with our use of it now."[28] Poetry is significant for Ammons because he believes, though poetry is artificial, it realizes the potentials of reality. Ammons is strongly convinced of the uniqueness of every language and he accepts that each language represents a different form of reality, and raises a concept of reality that is essentially complex, heterogeneous and which is resistant to simple definitions.

Language becomes relevant for yet another reason, and this is associated with the place assigned to emotion. For Ammons, language has a vital role in the way emotion is handled in poetry, it has a regulating function exercising control over the articulation of passion and this is expressly stated in his declaration:

> passion is
> vulgar when not swept up
> into the cool control
> of syllables : (T, 179)

Ammons's description of a really great poet in his interview with Jim Stahl is relevant here where Ammons sees the handling of emotion in language as a decisive factor in assigning greatness:

> But the very great poet has such good manners, it seems to me, that he only indicates and touches on, as if to spare the reader more pressure than he can handle. To me the really great poets feels as

> deeply as anyone these matters, but touches only and controls them lightly with delicate gestures that just merely register they are there.[29]

Ammons is discussing the technique and language suited to great poetry and language thus is a deterrent of powerful and spontaneous flow of emotion; it offers a frame within which responses to reality in the form of emotions and passions are to be held. Ammons acknowledges the necessity of language:

> sorrow is brown & empty
> unless
> ocean vowels thunder
> from it in
> organizations like surf: (T, 179)

Too much discussion on the nature of language, reality, form, poetry and emotion always results in an abrupt return to the concrete experience, and this section too is no exception with its images of the bright sun that illuminates "half a dozen green leaves" of the thornbush. It is his interest in the minute details that the weather brings about, that one witnesses here after an extended discussion of the dynamics of language and poetry, which is essentially, abstract, impersonal and at the farthest remove from the concrete experience. The concrete, for Ammons, has always meant a description of the minute and everything that has always been considered insignificant by dominant ideology. This interest in the commonplace stems from the belief that much is to be understood from common experiences and that one does not need outlandish or unnatural

subject matter for poetry. This view is repeated in a view of life, in an attitude of celebration and acceptance, in a distaste of withholding oneself however slightly, from experience, an attitude exposed when Ammons advises:

> take the risk of
> moving in,
> merge with coming &
> going common life:
> drink
> the average
> drink: (T, 181)

The "average drink" for Ammons is an immersion in the simple, concrete, local, and common experience, which is free from any attempt to mystify it with the aid of the superimposition of the patterns taken from philosophy, theology or theories of reality. Frederick Buell's observation that "in *Tape* Ammons carried the wisdom of "Corson's Inlet" as far into the American commonplace as one could wish"[30], is true, a thought which he extended to the aesthetics which rejects the outlandish for a common experience. The experience is simple and striking, and the preferences are clear when Ammons writes: "2.18 pm: didn't / stay sunny long" (T, 181). The same pattern and preferences are once more laid bare.

Weather is the most important concrete experience for Ammons; theories might be propounded about reality, but reality, though the term may be a problematized one recently, is

weather for Ammons. A thought that haunts Ammons is the inadequacy of language in representing the reality of experience and the experience of reality. Such a haunting thought, it is interesting to note, appears in its train of thought initiated by an awareness of the poet that constantly reminds him of the deep roots that he has in the present time and landscape.

A case in point is the section on January 8 which begins with explicit references to last night's temperature which dropped lower than the "predicted 30"(T, 182). Experience always refuses to be hemmed in by language, and this idea is taken up later by Ammons when discussing the problems of determining the topography of the ocean floor, where he admits his defeat in recapturing reality in its multifaceted nature: "the only representation/of the sea's floor/is the sea's floor itself" (T, 184). Ammons has to be content with the realization, which is an admission of the limitations of language in representing reality, which he voiced to Richard Jackson in his *Poetry Miscellany* interview: "At some point in our development words and things were indistinguishable, and words had power of things. That is no longer, I think, feasible, except as a primitive impulse.[31] Ammons realizes that any attempt to totalize reality is doomed and there is nothing to equal experience and an attempt to translate it through the medium of language is futile:

> we take soundings & we
> get schemas, approximations,
> but we can't come

to the whole truth: (T, 184)

The confession is immediately followed by a reference to time "1:31 pm" a concrete experience signalling the return to the present or at least a temporary change in interest or an acknowledgment of the external landscape and reality, to which Ammons has to necessarily return, however long he indulges in abstract thought.

His poetry displays thoughts about the reality and language, which are in many ways contemporary. It is not a mere articulation of the inadequacy of the poet in explaining the reality to which he is exposed that makes him contemporary since such an attitude can be traced to romantic ideology, the legacy of which Ammons himself has acknowledged. The problems that he expresses are contemporary in that the inadequacy is not explained as a shortcoming of the individual but as a condition of language itself.

The sweeping imagination of the romantic poet who is confident of embracing the entire spectrum of existence is absent in Ammons's writing; rather it is the inadequacy and the idiocy of such an attempt that the reader confronts in his writing again and again. *Tape* comes to a close with a recounting of his objectives, accomplishments, promises, formal demands, moods that accompany poetry, and the time and times in which he wrote. The self-conscious mood into which the poet falls produces a summary of almost all the themes that have attracted his attention in the writing of *Tape* and his vision

of life as one constantly changing vast stream makes the formal characteristics of the short poem too insufficient to represent life. Life as a long poem and a long poem as mini-life can be traced to his idea of life, which he voices:

> . . . but all day
> life itself is bending ,
> weaving ,changing ,
> adapting , failing ,
> succeeding: (T, 204)

What he has offered the reader, he states unashamedly and he anticipates the criticism that could be levelled against him. His preferences in poetry and what constitutes his poetry are also succinctly stated when he declares:

> I have given you the
> sky,
> uninterrupted by moon,
> bird, or cloud: (T, 205)

And the poem concludes in a manner typical of Ammons:

> the sun's bright:
> the wind rocks the
> naked trees :
> so long: (T, 205)

The poem thus comes to rest on the experience of time as more a physical condition rather than an abstract one. The reader is made aware of the deep and powerful sense of the particular,

which the poet has always realized in himself and this makes his poetry so inspiringly unintellectual and successful.

Sphere continues Ammons's preoccupation with writing and definitions of poetry, the relation of reality to language, and the problem of the abstract and the concrete. As in "Essay on Poetics" and "Hibernaculum" , these discussions occur in a context of weather. The reality of writing and its relation to the reality of weather are present in *Sphere* though the obsessive quality that strikes the reader in the later poems is not a part of sphere.

Weather is an integral part of this world that Ammons builds up in this long poem. The earliest appearance of such a feeling that weather is an integral part of the ruminations that the poet submits himself to, is in the opening lines of section 20 where the life of the poet, and his social reception surface in a passage which is equally a passage on weather:

> though the boughs on the south side of the blue spruce
> hang calm in a heat holding of the bright sun and though
> garage eave is letting the snow down in a linear rain
> still I'm not high on the best-seller lists the Wonderful
> Award is gradually being given to someone else (more
> deserving) . . . (S, 19)

Though in such a passage writing is not directly discussed, the references to weather and the references to awards amount to a comment on the subject of poetry, the responses and the demands of the public and the notions associated with the

subjects worthy of being treated in poetry. Further the persona of the poet comes to be associated with the reality of weather that is a part of the poem and of the reality in which he is condemned to live, a reality, which sets the limit to his writing.

Writing about identity, for the poet thus turns out to be an action that Ammons believes, cannot exist without taking into account the reality of time and space, which for him is most easily manifested in the seasons. For Ammons who has often expressed his program in *Sphere* as a search for a space where the abstract and the concrete can coexist, this coming together of weather and thoughts of writing signifies the concrete and the abstract and weather becomes a physical space in which mental space is explored.

Ammons, who has always insisted that he has written in a condition of isolation, rarely alludes to other poets in his attempt to articulate the possible modes of reality. In section 30 Ammons introduces a critique of the treatment of nature that he has adopted by incorporating an imaginary dialogue with Matthew Arnold who reproaches the attitude taken by Ammons. The treatment of nature is one greatly defined by the elaborate description of weather as in section 30:

> calm tomorrow (which was yesterday) not a leaf will fall :
> you know the casual fall when a leaf comes off over
> nothing :extremity can
> move ahead of time : but by today others had mellowed at
> the pedicel , ready to unclasp to zephyrs . . . (S, 23- 24)

It is within this reality that is both a part of the poem and of the world outside that Ammons writes of Matthew Arnold:

> . . . he is going to
> reinaugurate the distinctions and subordinations that make sense: he is going to turn the lofty, lofty and broad and force the minuscule into its residence . . . (S, 24)

What is criticized is the tendency of segregating reality, which Ammons sees as the result of an indifference or obliviousness to certain levels of existence where such differentiation will not hold. Ammons's statement to Jim Stahl is significant:

> Whereas I think the analytical mind, you know, takes this thing apart and says, "Well, wait. Let's separate this into nine varieties and we'll redefine that." And pretty soon you're down into such small work of analytical nicety that accurate as it might be it has bypassed the subject, which was the more total and comprehensive experience.[32]

Such questions of aesthetics, as in "Essay On Poetics" and "Hibernaculum", Ammons places against the theme of weather which stands for a concrete experience that cannot be held at bay for long. It encroaches into the reality of abstract thought often articulated in a self-conscious mood. The frequent flights into poetics and attempts to expose the workings of poetry and the process of writing are always possible only after the introduction of the theme of the immediate reality, which for Ammons is weather.

Sections 36 and 37 taken together present a classic example of this technique of playing one against the other, a common enough pattern in Ammons's writing. Section 36 is an elaborate account of the poems written by others with justifications and discussions attached to it and with references to the vocabulary and language employed in the writing of the poem:

> . . . I never used the word *rink* in my work nor
> *tosh* as in *turgid tosh* nor *slipup, backswing, tocsin*
> *discint ,skin- flint razzmatazz*: thank the Lord
> if the world wears out ,there are still shenanigans left in
> the lingo . . . (S, 27)

This preoccupation with the language, and the awareness of the difficulties of achieving the desired effect in writing are suddenly interrupted by images of weather:

> . . . the world around here which
> is mostly winter: but the old quince bush looking like
> a mess of last year's baling wire is putting out the redbud
> so much that the dry intertwining morning glory vine is
> starting to look ridiculous . . . (S, 27)

Occasionally, Ammons uses images of weather to communicate his impressions of poetry and poets. Writing thus becomes an activity similar to the elemental forces, which intensify the reality of writing not as just an activity, which is real in the process of the act of writing but the reality of which as a

finished artifact, which becomes difficult to ignore like weather. Ammons opens Section 73:

> If rain drops are words, the poet is the cloud whose
> gathering and withholding overspills generously and
> unmissed from a
> great keeping:(depression, low pressure area) (S , 43)

This analogizing tendency in terms of weather is disrupted by the reality of weather:

> . . . gifty showers, twists and blowouts:
> on the way back from Northfield today (April 29, I have
> been
> away a few days to Baltimore)I wrote a poem as follows
> when I go up into mountains , I like to go up into the
> the mountains . . . (S , 43)

The analogizing tendency is extended to the circumstances of writing and to the psychological conditions, which make writing possible, when Ammons writes of articulation in a fashion that externalizes a very private and invisible activity:

> when anxiety rises words too start to stir rising into schools,
>
> moving into sayings (a recourse though delusional] like
> winds
> making up before a mild May -evening thunderstorm, the
> winds
> spilling across the trees, then like surf sucking back in a
> growing tug . . . (S , 52)

This inevitability of the language pressing into the consciousness of the poet is, Ammons contends, very much akin to the inevitability of weather and the experience of writing becomes an experience seen in terms of the storm:

> . . . I have weathered a batch
> of storms: the words rising from behind the palings of
> the back fence, getting loose and showering up from the
> points
> of maple leaves . . . (S, 52)

This picture of the mind besieged by weather is interrupted by the reality of external word and Ammons notices that "the few drops of rain have put a fizz/ on the street" (S, 53). Ammons here sets the reality of the mind and the reality of the language in poetry against the reality of the external world implying an order in which the primacy of weather in modifying all forms and experiences of reality is underscored.

The abrupt return to the reality of the present which is part of an awareness that one's fate is deeply bound up with the seasons is evident in his attempts to see mental activity in terms of natural phenomenon in section 113 where a discussion of reality and the ability of the mind to create reality are taken up. Such passages often appear only after a set of correspondences is established between the activities of the mind and the happenings on the landscape in terms of weather. The reality of the mind is inferior and at variance with the

physical reality that one has to grapple with, a point that Ammons observes:

> Or in the mind the swirlings of imbalanced means loops
> between highs and lows just like
> weather predictions and actual
> storms over average landscapes . . . (S, 61)

The distance between the reality of the mind and the actual reality is seen as the difference between weather predictions and "actual storms over average landscapes." It is within such a plane of realization that Ammons looks into the problems of difference that the mind creates as a part of its existence, and he expresses his suspicion of the inevitability of such differences and his desire to get rid of the same differences as a part of the ongoing dialogue that Ammons has ventured to undertake, a part of his preoccupation with the questions of the one and the many, the high and the low, and the concrete and the abstract:

> If there are no boundaries that hold firm everything can be
> ground into everything else: the mind making things up,
> making nothing
> of what things are made of : scary to those who need
> prisons ,
> liberating to those already in . . .(S, 61)

These questions of exclusion and inclusion related to a definition of an identity are immediately interrupted by the reality of the seasons: "The poppies are all gone: / the tulips

were all gone last week: we have lemon lilies now / some spirea still white where it is mostly brown"(S, 61).

Section132 of *Sphere* continues the preoccupation of certain earlier sections in that, here too, Ammons is preoccupied with the idea of the poet and his idea of himself as a poet and as in earlier sections, an attempt is made to see poetry in terms of the seasons. Ammons proceeds to see himself and his poetry as deriving meaning and existence from the landscape, which in turn is defined by the continuity of the seasons and initially establishes an affinity between himself and the earth, stressing the similarity of the seasons in himself and the world outside:

> I am like the earth about
> twenty-three degrees off which gives me summer and
> winter
> moods , sheds hopes and sprouts them again: what are my hopes . . . (S, 69)

From this image of himself as part of the seasons, Ammons proceeds to look into the nature of poetry. His preferences as a poet are conveyed through a set of images of weather:

> What are my hopes:
> it's hard to tell what an abstract poet wants: my hopes
> are for a context in which the rose keep its edges out of
> frost . . . (S, 69)

The irony of this passage, the final one in *Sphere,* is not lost on the reader for the simple reason that a context that keeps out

weather is an impossibility that Ammons continually realizes to the end of his last poem *Glare* and paradoxically the articulation of the failure of evading a context of weather is the strength of Ammons.

The Snow Poems offers evidence of Ammons's obsession with the problems of writing, and self-conscious writing in *The Snow Poems* continues to appear in relation to weather. Weather and the landscape appear in *The Snow Poems* as a form of reality, more real than the problems of writing. Ammons was concerned with the twin problems of writing and weather as he told Schneider in reply to a question on the importance of weather: "Exactly. That is what they are supposed to be altogether. It starts with the first snows in the fall and goes through to the end in the spring. The whole purpose there again was to write about nothing."[33] The act of writing, the personal fears and preferences along with general observations on reality, language, and poetry display a wide range of emotional involvement ranging from the very personal to the disinterested statements on language and reality, all are located in a time and place where weather is the dominant presence.

"Ivy Winding", one of the early poems, discusses the problems of writing in the context of weather. Ammons begins the poem with an elaborate picture of reality of the seasons in which thoughts on writing crowd the poet's mind. He begins with the picture of a tree, the leaves of which are gone indicating

the autumn season. It is within this reality of the seasons, which the poet faces that he looks into the problems of writing. The essential incompleteness that accompanies any attempt to represent the reality in language is unambiguously stated:

> writing something that never forms a
> complete thought, drags you
> after it, spells you down, no
> barrier describing you . . . (SNP, 17)

From the problem of representation, Ammons moves towards an awareness of the reader, a significant aspect of self-conscious writing when he admits: "I write for those who have / no comfort now, and will never have any" (SNP, 20). From this self-conscious moment Ammons returns to the reality of the landscape:

> forecast for today
> were snows and blizzards
> but we may
> have a mere
> high empty with glory. (SNP, 23)

It is within this reality that he raises the question:

> would a collection
> of clarities
> be clearer than a clarity.
> or as the collection
> grew would the
> single clarities remain
> clear . . . (SNP, 23)

Such questions are a part of the problems and functions of poetry that he raised in his Pittsburgh lecture:

> Definition, rationality, and structure are ways of seeing, but they become prisons when they blank out other ways of seeing. If we remain open-minded we will soon find out for any easy clarity an equal and opposite, so that the sum of our clarities should return us where we belong, to confusion and hopefully to more complicated and better assessments.[34]

Ammons here suggests a resistance to all preconceived forms. When the discussion of the problems related to the possibilities of handling reality becomes tortuous, strained and severed from the reality of felt experience, Ammons returns to the images of weather and the landscape and concludes the poem with a return to the present and writes: " winter is the ashes / (snow) a sprig of smoke / rising here and there" (SNP, 26). What is evident in these passages is the pattern of placing the abstract against the concrete, a persistent technique in his writing. Whenever there is too much of an indulgence in the theories of reality and writing, it is cut short and tempered by a concrete sense experience, which is often an experience of weather. This pattern is present in "Your Full-service Mover Madam", with its picture of weather:

> overcast forecast a
> true cast but this afternoon is
> to open sunny periods ,dashed
> dashesn. . . (SNP, 27)

The picture of sudden change and transience conveyed by this passage is the context in which Ammons discusses the problems of defining and writing:

> explanation explains nothing *away* :get
> up the next morning and recalcitrance
> has shaded up into opacity again:
> think of the medium, medium's
> malleability, explanation works in,
> wordy nothingness . . . (SNP, 28)

The problems of defining reality and their relation to language are placed in a context to which one cannot be indifferent. Ammons concludes the poem with a precise image of the weather-bound landscape with its image of the mist "too fine / to form drops / at the eaves" (SNP, 29).

The problem of reality, at the conceptual plane, might demand one's attention, but is unlike the experience of weather, which throws itself over the poet, over which Ammons has no control, a thought, Ammons has often reiterated by the strategic placing of the experience of weather at vital junctures in the poem. Ammons's response to reality, his preference for the experience, and suspicion of language sometimes surface when he prefers experience to definition and this preference for the experience is articulated in terms of weather. "Hard Lard" begins in the present, a present of which Ammons notes: "the clouds lower low dipping almost / skirting skinny brittle treetops / but drop a ground brightening"(SNP, 40). This reality

is the springboard to look into the inadequacy of definition in understanding experience and Ammons articulates this in concrete terms:

> the verbal empire's blocks, pigeonholes,
> axioms, pronunciamentos, and stuff (stuffiness)
> chewed up in the simplest
> wind -sand design or snow flurry . . . (SNP, 40)

This favouring of experience is further enhanced with an image of weather, which stands for experience in his poetry:

> . . . oh to
> break through the strangling entanglements,
> binds, clusters of wordy mentality and
> Feel the luster of woods floor under snow! (SNP, 40)

Weather thus becomes a context to discuss the relative merits of language and experience and it is weather that comes to stand for a mode of experience, simple and more palpable, that qualifies the significance of language as a medium of creating and experiencing reality.

Ammons writes about weather in a self-conscious and self-reflexive manner. The thoughts on weather, of using the theme of weather, and weather finally closing up the speculation on writing occur in "8.45 A.M.- Doorbell Rings: Wife" where the intention of using weather as a theme begins with an image of weather when Ammons writes, "this day blue dog clear / I stood in it absolutely"(SNP, 51). Within this reality of the day Ammons declares:

> I hope to devote myself to the weather,
> majors and minors of substance, the high
> substance, nothing is done about, the
> low showers narrowed into washouts . . . (SNP, 51)

The concluding lines of the poem, "It is too dark to write/gather it up and rip it off"(SNP, 51) intensify this self-conscious declaration.

The reality of weather begins many of the thought processes in Ammons and the fate of the same processes is determined by weather and the concluding lines of the poem suffice for the argument and substantiate the observation, an observation true to many poems of Ammons. The same pattern is evident in "The Snow Is Fine Sightless Today the Ground", which opens with an image of a garage roof covered with snow. It is within such a context of weather that he takes up the theme of language and writes: "scald and rinse every word/ till it takes on and gives off/the exact hue" (SNP, 66). This advice regarding language, a sufficiently strong self-conscious aspect of his writing, is placed against an experience of reality, which turns out to be one of weather:

> the unchanging reality
> is the polar extreme's
> intolerable
> exaggerated weather
> the temperate zone . . . (SNP, 66)

For Ammons, even the discussion of the nature of reality is often related to a set of images associated with the seasons. Within this frame of weather Ammons falls into the self-conscious mood, "I write this to be writing" (SNP, 66). This mood lasts only for a moment, which is swept aside by the reality of weather to which the poet returns and has no choice but to articulate: "but look/a patch of blue the size of a man's hat/it could grow into a radiant clearing"(SNP, 67).

Self-conscious writing forms the theme of "Sun Daily Climbs Higher" but the theme is introduced only late into the poem and only after the images of weather are sufficiently ingrained in the mind of the reader. On the progress of the sun Ammons writes:

> The sun climbs daily higher
> into a longer arc:
> lows ride
> thaws in from
> the south for a day . . . (SNP, 96)

The minute description of weather, a technique adopted by Ammons, becomes a context for another self-conscious passage:

> I have to do some
> light writing
> so i can do some
> light reading (SNP, 96)

The self-conscious mood gradually enlarges to accommodate a response towards poets who indulge in obscure writing:

poets add
obscurity
to the
inexplicable
for critics
who can't
get their
tools sharp on
the obvious (SNP ,96)

The treatment of weather in the poem thus is an implicit critique directed towards other poets who resist the obvious. Ammons prizes experience over articulation, particularly articulation in poetry that obfuscates and makes the same experience difficult.

Ammons's poetry abounds with passages, which discuss the workings and characteristics of poetry. One such passage is in " A Seventeen Morning &" where a self-conscious description of the aesthetics is intercepted by weather. Ammons looks into the problems of the relationship between the concrete and the abstract when he writes:

poetry operates, not to deny
the abstraction or the
particular and not to diminish
the distance between them but
to hold it in relation the
widest play between them (SNP,101)

In a way this passage explains the poetics that underlies the entire poetry of Ammons where he tries to explore the constant tension that he senses between the concrete and the abstract, between the universal and the particular. Ammons told Schneider:

> So many people have bought into the myth of concretion now that the only way you can write is about a particular thing. I appreciate that very greatly. Without a particular world we don't have one at all. Concretion is a myth, however. Look into any so called "solid object" and it breaks down into this and that and the other until finally there may be nothing going on there but motion or spirit or energy.[35]

The difficulty to escape the particular is substantiated by the poem itself when Ammons returns to a sense of the concrete, which he experiences as weather:

> today, fair saw the sun
> all the way down
> till, arc, lost, it
> touching scattered up
> and down the ridge . . . (SNP, 101)

The significance of poetry as an escape, though temporary, is also often toyed with and this is the movement in "Cold Didn't Keep The Stuff" where Ammons initially writes of a sense of the seasons:

> a sprung spring can't
> unspring and spring again
> till devices
> rondures have clicked

through and gone round (SNP , 124)

It is from this sense of the seasons that Ammons desires an escape, an escape into poetry in general which his poetry voices. In the perilous times of weather one needs "clipped unsustained / lyrics with no / drama" (SNP, 124). These lines touch upon not only the idea of poetry as a way of relief but also problems of reality, form and language that one has to tackle when one writes poetry. Since Ammons sees the landscape and time as greatly influenced by weather, a description of himself situated in a landscape of constant change attempting to write poetry occurs frequently in his writing. The entire activity of writing, and the way a day remains in the mind of Ammons are linked to the writing he has accomplished influenced by weather. Consequently the impression of a day coexists with the impression of writing and he confesses: "I think I may not write much/ today"(SNP, 126). Ammons further recounts his activities; all of them linked to weather and finally weather erupts into the poem after he admits: "I didn't get anything down/on paper /to speak of" (SNP, 127):

> . . . late in the
> day the sun having broken out few
> clean into a perfectly clear
> sky, I just came home and hung in there . . . (SNP, 127)

And finally the poem comes to an end with a realization in which weather and writing come together:

> . . . we have

a quarter-hour left to
sundown I don't think I will get
much done today
toodleoo (SNP, 127)

One finds in Ammons's poetry the awareness of writing as an activity, taking place in time where the sense of time is defined in terms of weather. Weather is the reality that sets the limits to his writing, an idea that forms the theme of "Snow of the" in which an elaborate picture of the snow in the landscape is maintained by Ammons almost to the end of the poem which is interrupted by a more personal note when he writes:

here a month of snow,
more January than
February intervenes
during which
I wrote
nothing . . . (SNP, 140)

The associations between writing and the seasons are further made evident when he realizes " it is / the winter deep the / annual sink" (SNP, 140). The final correspondence between writing and weather on the landscape is achieved when he compares writing to the changes brought about by weather on the landscape and Ammons advises: "Leave it unwritten / as snow unwrites / the landscape"(SNP, 140).

The theme of weather as sufficient experience for writing poetry is part of his self-conscious mode which appears in the

poem " The Perspective Stalls As" where observing the landscape in winter Ammons writes:

> . . . though the radio says it is
> now 42
> the drips from the garage eaves
> slow winter down : (SNP, 145)

This image takes the poet to a self-conscious mood to think of the potential of weather to be a source for explaining the experience of writing: "You can write a sonnet/between one drop and the next" (SNP, 145).

Often Ammons uses weather as a mode of reality against the one suggested by the abstract descriptions. Occasionally Ammons uses this technique of contrast in a manner, which is reinforced by the appearance on the page, and he presents the two different themes on a two-column basis and "Tell What Will Not Tell Direct" is a case in point, which plays off these two types of reality:

> and this yes, but only because
> with the sky gray gray as attendance to truth
> before as usual enlarges complexity:
> well but even so its good
> weather for February (SNP, 153)

Such a technique presents the reality of weather and the reality of the philosophic inquiry side by side and the judgment is left to the reader. The closure that Ammons offers, if there is one, does not partake of the tone of philosophical enquiry but of the

more common reality of weather that is physically nearer to experience:

> with the prevailing snow
> and full moon, nothing ,
> nothing prowls through here
> at night
> without declarations
> raccoon prissy
> used sway (SNP, 153)

The two-column presentation that Ammons employs is part of his attitude to reality and of the importance of more than one perspective. Ammons, in reply to a question on the nature of the double columns observed:

> Yes, I think they are related. The double columns in *The Snow Poems* have unnerved some people. They are intended to be playful; they can be read at one time, but with an awareness of the other column, the other perspective. Once the center of a poem is found and established in the way we talked about earlier, then the poem is both closed and open, and it will have a dialectical form.[36]

The dialectical form for Ammons is one where weather and the questions of reality are the two possible perspectives and weather enjoys privilege.

Observations on language and the problems of articulation are often embedded in the graphic description of weather as in "Like Fifty" where he reminds the reader that the discussions take place in a time of snow. Ammons writes about language in an overtly self-conscious manner:

I want
to make a point:
the point is essential,
the connection: the language
should be adequate: (SNP, 156)

The statement is justified in the concluding lines where the reality of weather mingles with the echoes of William Carlos Williams whose treatment of weather and his aesthetics are incorporated into the body of the poem: "Promises of presents "a wheelbarrow/red, rained on and stereo" (SNP, 163). The problems of representing reality, often discussed at length in Ammons, begin in a context of weather and are often interrupted or brought to a conclusion by concrete images of weather as in "I Look Up Where" where Ammons presents a picture of winter:

snow remains [remains
of snow] out under
the woodshedge brush
and lee of the put- out
Christmas tree . . . (SNP, 164)

It is against the background of the reality of time and space that Ammons writes of attitudes, that one has to maintain towards reality in poetry:

the dialectical
sways
in on the clarification of
over simplification

and falls into opposite or
indifferent tendencies : (SNP, 165)

This comes very near to what Ammons told Zofia Burr: "You can approach it from so many different sides. Is that not true? And so I always thought you can be clear about a poem, clear enough to see how it disposes itself, and yet it can invite you to consider more and other aspect of things, so that you can learn from it."[37] From the dialectical sways Ammons is brought back to time and space by an image of weather: "the weather today continues / recent trends: 35 at dawn, / near 40 now" (SNP, 165). The reality of time, a minute and sophisticated one, that Ammons wants to convey, is the reality of weather. The minute description of winter and snow is treated in a concrete manner that the discussions on the nature of reality that follow, which are predominantly disengaged from the particular, lose whatever immediacy they have.

The same self-conscious mood occurs in "One at One with His Desire", a long poem which is for the most part self-conscious with its preoccupation with form and poetry, the significance of the short line, the limits of the senses and its binding on reality and Ammons looks into the question of form:

. . . has to desire
so much more than nothing
this stanza compels
its way long: a
break will humble it: (SNP,169)

What Ammons does here is to look into the problems of form and he shows a consciousness that accepts Wittgenstein's notion that "one thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it."[38] From this problem of style, which in this context is related and limited to this poem, Ammons proceeds to look at the idea of form in general:

> form consumes:
> form eliminates :
> form forms the form
> that extracts of the elixir from
> the passages of change : (SNP, 169)

The general statement is broken by the particular reality of "a marvelous morning /dull gray with the possibility of light" (SNP, 169). The image is further elaborated:

> . . .the light changed
> its way into the indistinguishable
> gray, flickering wet dashes,
> the windowpane:
> colder, foggier , suddenly: (SNP, 169)

This sudden presentation of a concrete image is a part of his aesthetics of which he told Schneider:

> It would mean mostly that you would be kind of stupid to come up with any very pure train of thought or very pure movement of things, without at the same time, taking into account the downside or

> whatever else is present there. Otherwise, you would be simplistic and foolish.[39]

From this reality of weather, Ammons proceeds to a conclusion where the two realities of writing and weather become one. Writing becomes an activity similar to the changes occasioned by weather:

> sheet deep in sleet
> I haven't written as
> many words as an hour's
> grains of sleet . . . (SNP, 170)

The reality with which Ammons concludes is a picture of weather but could equally be a picture of the poem on the page:

> and so far only a scattering
> impression of white
> has risen from the lawn:
> one should go on till one's
> hue is
> unmistakable (SNP, 170)

The technique of articulating Ammons's notion of poetry, in a reality of weather is evident in "The Temperature Rose15 Degrees over" where Ammons begins his discussion of poetry but not before the space in which the discussion becomes possible is conveyed:

> good to see a streak of water oozing
> caterpillar ripples across
> the dry high way and to notice
> farther up

the forsythia thicket letting its
holdings of ground snow go (SNP, 177)

Faced with such a landscape Ammons turns expansive about poetry:

I would love to get the poetry just
the way it happens, the way it comes
on, heavy and thick like
a thunder tangle . . . (SNP,177)

It is significant to note that Ammons tries to see poetry in terms of elemental forces which further endorse the power of his preoccupation with weather.

Frequently, Ammons writes of the minute changes in weather and finally makes his statement about his writing activities, which becomes sometimes an ironic comment on the poem itself as in "It's Half an Hour Later before." The poem concludes with the realization that there is "not much verse today" 'which becomes a comment on the poem itself. It is predominantly from a record of the changes in weather that the poem begins:

last night it rained easy
all night till dawn the rain
got white and
the dawn world, stained this
or that, came up white
coming upon white (SNP, 189)

From this image of the last night, to the morning, Ammons takes the poem with a picture of weather:

> heavy stuff, white and sticky,
> right on the rain line,
> has been falling in a
> calmness no tree quivers
> they's a limit . . . (SNP, 189)

The question of considering mere reportage as poetry and Ammons's preferences for the concrete and the particular become a subtext of the poem and the concluding lines, by the peculiar position that Ammons attributes to these lines in the poem, become an ironic statement and a critique of the technique adopted in the poem itself.

The preoccupation with language some times takes a dramatic presentation in Ammons's poetry, and such a technique is impelled by his preference for the concrete. Such a preference is emphasized by the references to weather as in "The Word Cries Out" where a dramatic presentation of writing is constructed by Ammons. The beginning of writing is the thought behind the passage such as the one that follows:

> a thing or thought is noted
> and from need or in
> response to pressure
> urgency for a verbal version arises
> and words dash in wor(l)d
> taking trial positions,
> sort and resort themselves (SNP, 193)

The same dramatic tone is obvious in Ammons's comment on the conditions of the origin of a poem:

> The emergence of the poem is often unexpected, though the poet may be under durance of heavy tension - those interior forces. There is certain undefined anxiety before the poet recognizes that two or three things come together in the mind that creates the unexpected conjunction which is integrated and expressive at the same time. The poet consequently feels the release of himself into this 'event.' [40]

The dramatic tone continues when Ammons imagines the realization of the poem:

> the verbal version
> with the last minute stumbling or twitching
> on the edges
> declares itself
> its trimmest (SNP, 193)

The realization of the poem coming to life, of the completion of the poem is interrupted by weather:

> there was a heavy
> frost of snow on the garage's
> roof scales but the sun
> whipped it off
> or the garage crawled away (SNP, 193)

The logic of the poem is clear in the word "wor[l]d" placed parallel to the poem and the poem concludes with the images of the poet looking into the process of writing in terms of images of weather where the idea of ordering words where the rearrangement of words becomes similar to the snowflakes

driven by the wind constantly rearranging itself in different patterns. The reality of weather in this poem, as in many other poems, interrupts as a physical presence and also offers the poet an analogy for writing. Weather becomes for Ammons a literal as well as a figurative reality.

"I'm Unwilling", another self-conscious poem operates on a reverse process since it begins with the self-conscious mood:

> I am unwilling
> to write this
> morning but
> things
> keep nudging me
> to sidle with
> them into
> words . . . (SNP, 218)

Soon weather interrupts to convey the impression that it is the most persistent thought:

> the bloom shed of the
> maple is
> spring's
> first fall (SNP, 218)

From this image of weather Ammons is again back to poetry and to the function of the poet:

> it's not for the poet to
> speak the speakable
> that which long known & said
> requires no energy (SNP, 218)

But weather and the seasons return soon:

> there was a time in January
> when the light was barren
> moving in blurs and glows
> between clouds and falling
> on the snow . . . (SNP, 220)

The graphic picture of weather that Ammons builds here is again interrupted by the questions of the centre and the periphery but the final image is of the sky, which suggests a return to the concrete reality that Ammons has always preferred.

Weather for Ammons is such a significant experience, which comes to modify almost all patterns of reality that poetry itself for Ammons comes to be very close to the experience of the seasons, which he echoes in "Arm's Length Renders One":

> the poem hangs
> on like winter,
> words flying out and dropping
> to greet
> the leftover flurries and
> chills: (SNP, 232-233)

The correspondence that Ammons here realizes and establishes achieves a greater effect when one considers the fact that it appears in between two passages both of which explain in great detail the winter landscape where intense fluctuations are experienced and expected.

The Snow Poems thus continues Ammons's obsession with the problems of writing which are problems of weather and Ammons winds up once more with the strong conviction that has always coloured his writing, a conviction that weather writes everything and, that includes for him, the poetry on poetry.

Thoughts on writing, problems of language and reality, and self-conscious and self-reflexive moods find a significant presence in "Ridge Farm", the first section of *Sumerian Vistas* which opens with an image of a very detailed picture of the landscape in weather and it is within this physical reality of the landscape and the seasons that the thoughts about writing and the experience of language are discussed. After an elaborate buildup of the transitions in the landscape Ammons takes up the question of writing. Though in the form of dialogue with a friend of himself, Ammons discusses the subtle issues of writing and a sense of weather runs throughout the discussion when he writes of the landscape:

> yesterday afternoon cleared the
> sunset side of trees, the hemlocks
> especially, limbering loose, but
> the morning side, the lee , sunless
> again today . . . (SV, 3)

This experience of the weather induces in the poet a mood to discuss the problems of writing:

> that is not the way, the way

is to say what you have to say
and let the voice find itself
assimilated from the many tones and sources, its
predominant and subsidiary motions
not cut away from the gatherings: (SV, 4)

This dynamics of writing is an experience, which is the result of introspection, is triggered by an experience of weather. The same preoccupation with the thoughts of writing one finds in the forty-second section of the "Ridge Farm" where Ammons writes of the problems of creativity that he encounters:

I am done with creativity
only to discover the next day or hour
that everything cut down to
creativity everything goes with
that . . . (SV , 34)

The response to such thoughts is immediately interrupted by a reference to weather and to the world outside.

. . . today cleared
so bright blue one felt the offer,
this is it, take it, and trying to
take it found no way to do so . . . (SV, 34)

The image of the landscape is not sufficiently developed here but the movement is clear; the drift is from abstract thoughts to a more concrete experience of the world outside a pattern that Ammons repeats often. The link between weather and thoughts of writing is directly expressed later in the same section:

how painful beauty is that gets away

full and unbesmirched and how comfortable
the rainy day that publishes your
lesser failures . . . (SV, 35)

Earlier Ammons had resorted to a direct relation between weather and writing in "Hibernaculum where he tried to explain the form of writing in terms of weather, which he later returns to in *Glare*. "Tertiaries", a poem in the third part of *Sumerian Vistas* closes with an image of language where language and its sense of reality are reflected upon by Ammons in a fashion, which offers proof of how deeply he is influenced by the image of weather and the seasons:

but how almost a true shower
illusion is for me and others of us
we enter into word rain and
so closely think we live ,we nearly live. (SV, 66)

For Ammons, while writing, thoughts of language, thoughts of weather and experiences continually interrupt which cannot be held back, a reality, which *Brink Road* and *Glare*, the last works of Ammons amply testify.

Garbage is a meditation on the dynamics of the processes that had occupied the mind of Ammons ever since his *Collected Poems*. The transformations that are possible in poetry are a part of the processes that Ammons tries to explain in this long poem. His preoccupation with the world of words and bacteria reaches its climax in this long poem where the processes are always seen both at the microscopic and the macroscopic level.

Process as weather, process as animal life process as poetry, process as language, process as body, and process seen as garbage which defines modern life, all are held together by his preoccupation with time, and time does not come to be dealt with as an abstract notion, on the contrary, it becomes an experience that derives its meaning by being a part of the physical processes that Ammons discusses. His interest in reality as a process includes the processes that try to represent reality and to fix it within the boundaries of language. For Ammons, the process of articulation is as significant as the subject of articulation. As in earlier works, weather helps to concretize experience that the poet is trying to express in language. It introduces a notion of time that is concrete and acts as a device to set the limits of abstraction possible within poetry. *Garbage* is as much about weather as it is about garbage and the extended and elaborate ruminations on the nature of reality, process and art are frequently punctuated by the physical experience of weather. Weather appears as an objective reality, and the physical treatment of weather acts as a counterpoint to the impression of abstraction created by the reflections on the problems of representing reality. Weather, which is predominantly a sensory experience, becomes an easy manifestation of the process. It is within this set of physical responses triggered by weather that minute processes of writing are discussed and *Garbage* belongs to that category of

literature, "whose primary concern is itself."[41] Weather thus becomes the ultimate concrete experience against which other responses are judged. Though the poem has a physical setting of the garbage heaps, a concrete experience, which highlights the surroundings of the poem, is used as a framework to discuss the body, reality, representation of reality, death, sickness and the world of small animals and insects. Rain is a part of the world that Ammons creates in garbage, it is seen as a part of the process that rules this world, further, it intensifies the experience of past processes that are locked in time, it offers a set of images that accelerates the notion of process. It becomes an agent of change, and change itself comes to be experienced, as in his early poems, as a change of weather and the link between weather and the process is made clear in the fourth section of *Garbage* where a discussion of the significance of fire as indispensable to contemporary experience and disposing of the waste of life is preceded by a reference to rain. Ammons's self-conscious technique of writing is visible early in the poem when he asks "why should I be trying to write the flattest poem?" and he takes up the problem of tackling reality when he writes:

> . . . there is a
> riddling reality where real hands grasp each
> other in the muff but toward both extremes the
> reality wears out ,wears thin ,becomes a reality
> "realityless" . . . (G, 30)

The preoccupation with the problems of reality is further intensified when Ammons thinks of the reception of his present project:

> . . . is a poem about garbage, garbage
> or will this abstract ,hollow junk seem beautiful
> and necessary as just another offering to the high
> assimilations . . . (G, 30)

This self-conscious poetry is immediately interrupted by the image of rain:

> . . . rain sulls deep
> coals ; wind slams flickers so flat they lose
> the upstanding of updraft and stifle to white
> lingo . . . (G, 31)

Ammons's preoccupation with weather is so powerful that discussion of poetry is often interrupted by the concrete experience of weather. In such a context weather comes to stand for reality and discussions of poetry stand for the speculative processes, which for Ammons, are highly abstract and farthest from sense experiences. The lumping together of poetry and weather is not new in Ammons, it was there when weather first made its appearance in or when poetry made its first appearance and a discussion of poetry is invariably related to the discussion of weather in Ammons that the reader gets the impression that one cannot exist without the other, one is even the cause for the other, one is the space in which the other

becomes possible. There is constant association between weather and poetry in Ammons and he writes:

> . . . the sun was
> terribly hot,and the words of poems read out
> loud settled down like minnows in the shallows
> for the moment of silence and had their gaps
> and fractures filled up and healed quiet . . . (G, 37)

The idea of bad weather is so persistent in his writing that the process of writing itself comes to be seen as an experience of bad weather and writing itself comes to be testing out the possibilities of a journey through bad weather; the self-reflexive mood is often placed between observations of weather and some times writing itself comes to be seen in terms of weather imagery as in section 6 where Ammons describes the activity of writing:

> . . . in writing a poem -you sit vacant and
> relaxed (if possible),your mind wandering
> freely ,unengaged and in search of focus: you
> may sit this way for several minutes . . . (G, 42)

The elaborate description of the moment of writing is followed by an equally dramatic description of the beginning of a poem, which is in terms of weather imagery:

> . . . but you keep your mind
> open and on the move and eventually there is a
> trace of feeling like a bit of mist on a back road
> but then it appears stronger and more central
> still coming and going . . . (G, 42)

From this self-conscious mode Ammons returns and his "mind picks up the environment again", and turns to the "practical policing of the scene" and returns to the "normalcy" of the world.

Often Ammons indulges in the discussions of language and such discussions are often interrupted by over obtrusive inventing author as in section 7 where Ammons writes of the function of language:

> . . . but the words do for us what other
> languages do for others-they warn, inform,
> reassure, compare, present :we may be alone in
> words but we are not singular in language (G, 50)

Such a discussion is immediately replaced by the presence of the author:

> have some respect for other speakers of being and
> for god's sake drop all this crap about words,
> singularity and dominion: it is so boring
> when I hear it a hook of anger in my guts tears
> the lining . . . (G , 50)

The thoughts about language are a powerful presence in *Garbage* and John Romano's observation on *Sphere* that "self-consciousness substitutes for subject matter"[42] is equally applicable to *Garbage* and Ammons constantly returns to it. That language was a major concern for Ammons in *Garbage* is clear from his words to David Lehman: "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."[43] *Garbage* becomes for Ammons a search into what Gyorgyi Voros calls "the potential disposability of language."[44] Ammons writes: "whole language like species, can/disappear without dropping a grain of earth's weight"(G, 51). This thought, which suggests the disposability of language, is again interrupted by references to weather and animal life in it. In section 10 of *Garbage,* the same progression is visible when Ammons writes of the physical reality of the tape on which he is writing:

> . . . I do not
> feel I can go on: progression lies down in the
> ditches of inpouring doubt: I think of this tape
> (this is another tape, a little wider, just about
> pentameter)as the showboat churning down the
> Mississippi with the banks, the fast currents . . . (G, 63)

The fascination with the problems of form, and the search for words for narrative, which he calls "minor assemblages of incidents on a string", are cut short by a graphic picture of violent weather:

> . . . hurricanes have hit
> inland far enough to drive boats of any size
> right upon river shores: and boats have had to
> wait weeks, at times for a wall
> arriving down stream from a flood elsewhere: (G, 64)

The possibilities of language, the losses incurred by the use of language in representing reality, and the awareness that there is only language to tackle reality however insignificant it might be,

come to be discussed within the context of weather which for him is the reality. This reality, is in time as opposed to the idea of language as beyond time and his poetry exhibits the tension between these two both at the level of abstract thought and at the level of language itself as an experience inferior to the experience that it tries to duplicate, further, the poem itself becomes a play of these two types of experiences. The discussion that Ammons initiates between the word and the world is frequently interrupted by weather that apart from a suspicion of the word as inherently incapable of representing the world, a physical reality of weather that he presents though in language adds to the diminishing of the importance assigned to language, the unreality of language is discussed and driven home. The physical once again becomes victorious, intellect and language may be significant to some extent but experience, and in this context weather, which is the ultimate experience of process, qualifies whatever significance Ammons attributes to intellect, language and a thoughtful approach to experience.

In *Garbage,* Ammons takes on the function of "the poet as archaeological garbologist"[45]. He believes that "what people have owned and thrown away can speak more eloquently, informatively and truthfully about the lives they lead than they themselves ever may."[46] But he is not merely worried about land pollution, what Melosi calls "the third pollution."[47] He is equally worried about the problem of language and imagines a

transformation of language that the poet can effect. It is similar to the transformation of waste by fire which Ammons acknowledged in an earlier section of *Garbage* where he writes: "in the poet's mind dead language is hauled /off to and burn down on, the energy held and/shaped into new turns and clusters / (G, 20). This idea is taken up again in section 17 where Ammons writes:

> . . . poems themselves
> processing, revitalizing so much dead material
> become a dead material concentrate time's
> longest actions sometimes can't dissolve . . . (G, 109)

This image of language, the last significant image in this long poem, is also an image of the garbage of the mind, which is placed against the image of the waste mound of Florida. More than being a *fin de siecle* poem, *Garbage* becomes an incisive look into the various wastes that have come to define modern life, and it conveys the impression that language and poetry are not the least.

Ammons discusses in a number of poems of *Brink Road* the problems associated with writing and the questions of reality and language and he retains in them the impression of a self-reflexive mood. Aspects of writing, often abstract, are placed against the physical reality of time and space, which for Ammons is inextricably linked to the sense of weather and the seasons. Ammons's poetry has always greatly depended on the tension between the concrete and the abstract, which becomes

an aspect of his self-conscious writing. A discussion of language and reality occurs in the context of weather in "Erminois" where a general observation on the reality of weather opens the poem:

> The weatherman says "if
> the rain continues the roads
> will be icy tonight"
> of course but what if it
> doesn't . . . (BR, 23)

From this frame of the weather as an experience, which comes to stand for reality with which one has to live, Ammons proceeds abruptly to a question of language:

> "if the spoken language lay
> down and turned up its toes,
> the written language
> would have its balls"
> if word order
> meant nothing in this language"
> but it does: (BR, 23)

But Ammons does not pursue the argument to the end and though a return to the world of weather is not directly conveyed he concludes the poem with a "sense of the tiny place that life that is and is to be"(BR, 23). The image of the landscape with which the poem concludes, though merely mentioned, refers to the beginning of the poem where the sense of the landscape is unmistakable.

Ammons's preoccupation with process, a significant aspect of his writing, returns in "Readings By Ways" where the

problems of the Epicurean philosophy are discussed in the context of weather. Weather, in fact triggers the thoughts of process and Ammons writes of the problems of representing reality in language which trouble him, in a set of images where weather and landscape figure indirectly when Ammons writes, "I get / caught up in clouds illustrating / the sky or muddying out" (BR, 67). Ammons is so preoccupied with the experience of weather that the questions of reality for him are questions of weather and the landscape.

Occasionally one comes across in his poetry references to the life of other writers though these seldom receive a powerful or substantial attention. Such minor happenings in the poems of Ammons are not free from images of weather. "Tenure's Pleasure" is a case in point, which opens with an image of weather:

> Plenty of the young dropped
> this morning when the rain
> iced a quarter inch jewel hard
> on the walk ways (BR, 86)

This image of time and place which is very much an image of weather is followed by a description of a novelist:

> . . . far
> off in Michigan , a plane's
> wings iced over, too , and
> the novelist scheduled to
> read here this afternoon

canceled . . . (BR, 86)

Writing, for Ammons, thoughts of it either directly related to problems in language or the world of writers, cannot escape the treatment of weather. For Ammons weather is a reality impossible to evade.

In "Disclaimer", a more serious look into the problems of themes admissible to poetry takes place in a context of weather. Ammons begins the poem with an experience of weather:

> A downpour, thunder sudden and quit, rattled
> then hummed the roof last night, but the woods,
> so dry, soaked it up, the brook this
> morning still a shimmer in silence . . . (BR, 126)

What Ammons presents here is an image of rapid changes in the landscape, changes of weather, an experience so ordinary that the impression of realism and a sense of the concrete cannot go unnoticed. This sense of the feeling of time and place is the context to discuss nature poetry. Ammons sees the nature around as still capable of producing nature poetry:

> . . . you can have
> poetry in our time if there is no poetry in it , a
> voice if it speaks without a voice: you can
> have the world if you will have none of it . . . (BR, 126)

The self-conscious mode that one senses here is swiftly replaced in the closing lines of the poem with a return to the present where landscape still retains its charm.

The preoccupation with the question of the nature poet attracts the attention of Ammons in "Summer Place", the last poem of *Brink Road*, where the discussion of a nature poet is part of the reality of the landscape.

> . . . I hope there will be some rain
> to lay the dust: but how nice to be cooled off : ninety
> degree days are not as nice as less than ninety degree
> days . . . (BR, 189)

Confronted with such a reality, Ammons discusses the question of the nature poet, again in terms of the imagery of weather when he advises, "go off and eat the wind, what else and suckle / the rain and pretty soon you're a nature poet" (BR, 190). Ammons proceeds to indulge in a digression about writers who are still writing in America only to return to his own problems in writing when he admits, " I don't know what to say: not only / don't I know what you should write or how, I don't / know what or how I should write"(BR, 192). Thoughts of writing figure again later in the same poem:

> I can tell you right now like to know how to write
> verse, not even poetry if I did I wouldn't be here
> so to speak: I'd be on a Greek island with Merril
> or in the radiantly inaccessible regions with Ashbery . . .
> (BR, 192)

From these personal apprehensions, Ammons proceeds to look at the role of the poet and the thoughts on the nature of a poet

are immediately interrupted by the references to weather and a sense of place:

> . . . the poet of nature or of civilization
> reports a human seeing : the longest thing in North Carolina
> is Sunday morning: sex is at the bottom of things
> .....
> ... a poem
> is a thicket whose clearing is disposition . . . (BR, 204)

This final image of the thought of writing that appears in *Brink Road* is an image about the quality and nature of poetry that he expects and wishes to achieve. This picture is interrupted by an image of time and place, and it is significant for the pattern of the coming together of thoughts of writing and thoughts of the landscape where the landscape is increasingly defined by the signs of weather and the seasons to which Ammons returns in a much more elaborate manner in *Glare.*

The preoccupation with weather and writing often forces the poet to see poetry in terms of landscape and weather and it is this thought that makes Ammons write in section 17of *Glare*:

> My poems come out of a little tug of
> A rift in an oceanic doldrums: it's a
> tiny little ship, an air ship: fog
> could drown it, saturate its jib: (GL, 52)

The inadequacy of language is again pointed out in the concluding lines of the section when he writes after a moment's

solace in the world of words, "now don't blubber poor comfort, / such poor comfort twaddle" (GL, 52).

Ammons conveys a causal relationship between the physical reality of weather and the explorations that he undertakes into the significance of language in poetry. Section 20 presents thoughts on poetry along with images of a journey through the landscape in which the weather is so awful that one cannot ignore it. The section is prefaced with a picture of a journey:

> . . . we took off
> early for Syracuse: it was 13 and
> the trees in the valley where waters
> and fogs run were entirely white . . . (GL, 60)

Once this physical landscape is firmly imprinted in the mind of the reader, Ammons moves on to the problems of diction expressing his speculations and convictions about writing in the closing lines of the section:

> . . . my vocabulary may be
> chary but my diction is still sheer
> poetry: I mean, my diction is
> poetic: don't you think? (GL, 61)

As in *Tape*, many sections begin with a clear reference to weather and it is within the context of weather that reality comes to be discussed. Section 28 begins with a detailed picture of the weather and minute details are not missed when Ammons notices the birch trees with "their tops loose from the snow" (GL,

82). From this image of weather he moves to the discussion of reality in motion and general observations on life and concludes with a theoretical position and a possibility in concrete terms:

> . . . but as with all verdicts
> there's something more to it:
> verdicts are fences in fields
>
> where lava flows (GL , 82)

Ammons who is preoccupied with weather as a major theme of his writing is sometimes forced to supply a definition and a justification of his constant harping on the theme of weather as the most important subject in his writing. In such justifications, Ammons tries to acknowledge the variety of life as synonymous with the variety of weather. These justifications are often placed in a landscape in which weather is the most pervasive influence and the justification of the importance of weather in his writing occupies a dominant thought of Section 30 which begins with the description of the journey to Ovogo where Ammons takes pains to explain the landscape of snow, fog, and rain. The physical description of the landscape, and his interest in it which creates such a landscape, are supported by a theoretical justification:

> . . . I
> love the weather, its moods and elements
> are for much like life; often if I
> don't feel just like the weather I
> feel the opposite . . . (GL, 86)

Ammons does not claim any universality to the argument. For a poet who is too sophisticated to ignore the subjective aspect of any kind of reality can only conclude with a reference to a student:

> . . . I had a
> student once , Wendy Zomparelli from
> San Diego, and she said she couldn't
> stand it when the sun came out *every*
>
> morning: (GL, 86)

Weather thus becomes the context and the theme to discuss weather and reality and to accept the essentially subjective responses to reality that it elicits. Ammons always conveys the impression that writing takes place in a physical space where one cannot ignore the overpowering presence of weather, a feeling which is a part of Section 32 which begins with the image of winter and snow which also becomes an image of his old age. The detailed picture of the minute changes in the landscape, which he calls the "slow procedures", is followed by the idea of writing on a typewriter:

> . . . I
> plink upon my machine outmoded as hell
> [I hope hell is outmoded] and
> meanwhile a quiver of the flank in
> Sumatra quivers a flank in Jersey
> City . . . (GL, 90)

The section ends with the advice, "let us be realistic" which refers to the beginning of the section, since Ammons has pictured weather in such a way that what is practiced at the beginning is theorized at the end.

The disruption of the discussion of poetry by weather occurs in section 34 where Ammons tries to discuss in a self-conscious and even an interrogative mood, the problems of his writing and the obsessions of the poet. This is suddenly cut short by an oblique reference to weather in the images of shoes specially made for use in snow and ice. From this reference to weather Ammons proceeds to conclude the section with a thought of the proper form in writing, a problem specific to *Glare* when he realizes that the " strip is so narrow / a rhythm cannot unwind across it"(GL, 97).

In *Glare* the thoughts of being trapped in a specific physical scope, that is, the size of the adding machine tape forms a powerful current of thought and this is heightened by the peculiar landscape in which the poet finds himself. That formal concerns were uppermost in *Glare* is evident from the obsessive references and Ammons's comment to Schneider: "It gives you a very different feel because the rhythm has to adjust to the line length. I complain about that in the section "Strip" of my longest new poem, *Glare,* about being confined. In fact, that is the only subject of the poem, how hellish it is to be writing these lines."[48] And this preoccupation with form becomes

physical when Ammons brings to a close the section by linking the limitation of this strip on which he is writing to the physical constraints of the body under which poetry should materialize:

> it cracks my shoulder blades with
> pressing confinement: the next time
>
> I take up prosody, I'm not going to
> take up this (GL, 97)

The figure in the poem that Ammons creates in *Glare* is not an influential figure at the center of the society. It is a modest diffident figure, a figure marked by loneliness. The lonely figure that Ammons created in his early writing is extended to the idea of the poet himself alone in his activity. The idea of a poet speaking to lonely people, to that loneliness in everyone, which Ammons has always insisted finds expression:

> . . . one little
> guy seeing and saying not speaking
> through the megaphones of public
> structures but if to anyone to another
> alone, one to one . . . (GL, 98)

The idea of audience that these lines convey seems to be a reworking of Ammons's observations to William Walsh:

> I never imagined an audience. I imagine other lonely people, such as myself. I don't know who they are or where they are and I don't care, but they're the people whom I want to reach. I'm really an isolationist. There is some element of ultimate loneliness in each person. In some

> people it's a crisis. Those are the pieces of loneliness I would like to share at this distance.[49]

Poetry, for Ammons thus becomes a private and intimate experience, which relegates the audience to least significance. The act of writing poetry does not partake of the qualities of the public sphere of activity. There are some sections in Ammons that deal exclusively with writing, the problems of writing, and the mechanics of writing which includes a scientific step-by-step description of not just typing but of the typewriter that strikes the reader as boring. In section 37, the act of typing is the focus of his writing, which is critiqued and justified by his own awareness of the problem, which he voices:

> The great thing about attention is
> that you basically have only one and
> when it is occupied it is hard to
> preoccupy it . . . (GL, 102-103)

These exclusive sections on writing might be taken as a counterargument that weather is not omnipresent in Ammons's writing but a closer look at the pattern of *Glare,* or any long poem for that matter in Ammons, reveals an interesting structural uniformity and peculiarity. Passages without any reference to weather or landscape are followed by sections, which begin with explicit references to weather and landscape creating the impression of weather waiting just outside the smaller frame that cannot be held back for long as an elaborate

section on typing in section 37 is followed by the minute description of weather in section 38:

> logs, limbs, and branches lying by,
> tugged off the street
> but today oh, " today
> the temperature has gone to 37(that's
> Fahrenheit, son) and drip-drops are
> falling everywhere . . . (GL, 104)

The section is mostly about weather and the occasional references to writing and poetry are related to the images of weather. Ammons compares throwing poetry away to the way ice crystals fall out of trees, and he further compares the experience of weather to reading a poem of Wallace Stevens who figures prominently in *Glare*. The dominant impression of this section like most sections in *Glare* and other poems is of an experience being mediated through weather and ends with the description of the weather in the manner of a statement: "this is the / fourth day" (GL, 104) which could be taken to mean the persistence of a natural condition caused by weather. The theme of weather, which concludes section 38, begins the next section that introduces the theme of weather in a very vivid and elaborate manner:

> the petunias are, this morning,
> bewept with dew: they focus intensely
> downward
> it's rained in a summer of
> the least rainfall ever ,the lawns

ghastly dry ,some leaves falling before
fall lilacs crinkled yellow . . . (GL, 106)

The reality of the weather is further driven home when Ammons writes:

. . . the ground cover(pachysandra)
looks wilted: so when
I got up this morning and saw
reflecting pools of rain out along
the road's edge . . . (GL, 106)

From this image of the local landscape bound by weather Ammons proceeds to take up the specific problem of poetry which has a deep significance in his writing when he asks: "Why do people / not want things eased away instead of / wired to the highly charged?"(GL, 107). Ammons here touches upon a central thought of his aesthetics, For Ammons, poetry is a kind of release of tension and not a working up of it and he considers those poets who intensify the tension, inferior.

Glare is as much about writing in general as it is about writing *Glare* itself. The problem of form and its relation to writing are placed along with the problem of form that is unique to Glare. The interest and preference for the concrete comes to inform the imagery employed by Ammons to explain the dynamics of writing *Glare* when Ammons declares "strip typing / is like strip mining"(GL, 108). Ammons sees writing as "geology making news out of old geology." His interest in trying to see literature as concrete and as real as possible with a

physical basis to it becomes decisive in the selection of the imagery with which he tries to explain the nature and function of poetry. The act of writing has nothing ethereal about it and the process of writing is stressed by Ammons by the way he tries to link it to the images of the earth. The section concludes with the thoughts of the limitations of realizing a reality in language which become powerful in the context of a realization that "many things are so dense they are / so meaningful that they are hard to know" (GL, 109). This dense reality is often for Ammons the reality of weather with which the section began. Reality, for Ammons, is weather, and the possibility and failure of recapturing it are a part of his conclusions and the conclusion of this section is about the attempts of representing a reality and the inevitable failure inherent in such an endeavour.

Ammons's attempts to look into the shortcomings of language become most obvious and powerful when these are placed in the context of his elaborate descriptions of weather. The self-conscious mood that accompanies such descriptions of weather often results in a process of qualifying the accomplishments possible through language in representing and consequently controlling reality. The self-conscious mood proceeds to look at the possibilities of language in a suspicious manner and the poet comes to the conclusion:

. . . talk is cheap : it's the only

thing I could buy enough of to fill
up this tape: and talk is action
and the mouth is an image . . . (GL, 111)

The inadequacy of the language is further emphasized by the image of the landscape in weather, which has remained unchanged even after the poet has tried to modify it by incorporating it into his poetry through language:

the trees are still bent, downloaded
deep; white weight: more trees
have splintered and resplintered,
branches closing roads . . . (GL, 111)

What follows is a minute-by-minute account of the changes thawing causes in the landscape. The elaborate description displaces thoughts about writing and the possibilities of writing modifying the reality. The process of nature which in this context means weather, continues unhindered despite the poet's attempt that he has no choice but to return to the landscape of weather which he records in the concluding lines of the section:

. . . tonight ice will come
back where water was: some people
moved to Florida: others wouldn't
think of it , think of it (GL, 112)

The interweaving of the details of the landscape in winter and weather in general with the activity of writing poetry continues in section 42 where the poet's attempt to ward off the thoughts of weather results in failure when he admits: "I am

trying to think of nothing / the forecast is for four to eight more inches" (GL, 116). This thought becomes powerful that the poet tries to recapture in a precise and exhaustive manner the changes wrought by winter on the landscape:

> . . . today's snow brings
> down whole deceased or overextended
> limbs, so the trees get skinny and
> light, their catchments shrunk like
> sculptural wire . . . (GL, 119)

The section discusses the problems of writing and there is the persistent reference to the typewriter and typing as a physical reality that refuses to be ignored that is similar to the function of weather as a reminder of the reality that refuses to go away. The connection is made clear by Ammons when he presents the thought of typing in the context of weather:

> everything now is in a still, white
> suffering, an unloaded tension, I
> mean, a tension in which the load
> has not been un . . . (GL, 120)

Writing comes to be seen as a release of this tension and writing about the weather is an attempt to exorcise the preoccupation with weather. The link between writing and weather becomes clear when he tries to see writing in terms of weather:

> . . . I don't like to be
> cooped up: I don't have any *Snowbound*
> resources:my typewriter's my only

outlet into this cramped-up strip: (GL, 120)

The identification of the writing with weather is underscored by the use of the phrase "snowbound resources". Writing viewed in this light comes to be the result of weather. Physically he is bound by weather, which makes him aware of yet another bondage, the shape of the tape. Ammons by acknowledging the limitations of weather as a physical presence sets the limit to his writing, a realization that further intensifies the physical shape of the page, which also acts as a constraint to his creative activity. Language thus loses many of the connotations of freedom by the conscious stress on the physical aspect of writing, which becomes an enterprise in actual time and space in which the poet is placed and in which no transcendental claims are admitted by Ammons.

The "unloaded tension" that Ammons speaks of comes to mean the problems of articulation compounded by the problems of the reality of weather and the physical shape of the poem. *Glare* focuses more on the seasons rather than the day-to-day changes in the climate. The reality of the seasons is approached in a much more relaxed manner in section 45. In a relaxed tone Ammons observes, "we have had some rain / dribbles at midnight" (GL, 127). From this statement he proceeds to the recording of the subtle changes that have come over to the landscape only to realize that further change is in the offing:

first frost is possible tonight:
we're peeling the last of the peaches:

the trees are smirched dry-
, red, frost
or no: tomatoes . . . (GL, 127)

From this image of the seasons Ammons tries to theorize about time:

. . . time that
takes away every second it gives
goes straight, too we are not in
keeping with its round bubbles or
animal balloons . . . (GL, 128)

Ammons tries to conceptualize the notion of time by bringing the image of the mobius strip which has two sides on one. The tendency to intellectualize is suddenly cut short by a self-conscious mood which makes him criticize such an attempt:

. . . I'm
sorry: but I do not feel that obfuscation
is a good cover for mystery: no,
mystery is what comes true at the
center of the perfectly clear . . . (GL, 129)

There is in Ammons this sense of failure, which comes from the feeling that all efforts to clarify life through writing are necessarily doomed and one has to succumb to mystery. All poetic processes that resist an acceptance of experience at the lived level are rejected, a thought clear enough in the self-conscious and self reflexive passage which winds up the section:

. . .mere perversity
resulting in the unintelligible is

not mystery but a neat trick one is
not likely to get away with for long (GL ,129)

The self-conscious writing in Ammons is frequently cut short by images of weather. For a poet who has written so much on weather, which he uses both as a theme and technique, it is only natural that his assessment of himself as a nature poet should be interrupted by weather. Writing on the idea of the 'nature poet' Ammons realizes, " I am not in Nature Writing / because I have been too deep in nature / to notice: nobody noticed" (GL, 133). The irony of such a declaration is suddenly felt when this passage is immediately followed by a picture of "a cold windy clear Sunday afternoon" (GL, 134). The words Sunday afternoon echo Wallace Stevens and Ammons proceeds to look into the ways of the Stevensian way of seeing life. The critique is directed at the dismissal of weather themes as not fit to be called nature poetry. Ammons, in his writing, uses weather to critique the intellectual activities including the criticism leveled against him. All the abstract compartmentalizing attitudes are implicated along with the literary practices which shut out reality by the exclusionist policies, and intellectual activity comes to be looked upon with suspicion and its infallibility and purpose are qualified by the presentation of experience. The need for fluid definitions, Ammons conveys, is underscored by the pictures of fluid reality of weather making it inevitable the failure of ossified definitions of weather. The same pattern of discussing the formal

configurations, constraints, and demands within the framework of the reality of weather occurs in section 51, which opens with an image of the dried up and shriveled leaves and weeds and plunges suddenly into a self-conscious mood. The analysis of the problem of form is introduced with an abruptness that is typical of Ammons:

> . . . oh, this tight despite strip breaks my
> rhythms loosens my stable tables ,
> pours everything toward the middle
> where it runs off, a streak there
> isn't room enough to lay something
> down flat . . . (GL, 140)

In *Glare*, it is the physical limitation of the strip upon which he is writing that becomes the basis of his aesthetic preoccupation, a problem, which was touched upon though lightly in *Tape*. The demands of the form take up a considerable portion of *Glare* in general and this section in particular, but as in many earlier sections this too ends abruptly with an image of weather:

> the pools scooped out along and built- up
> roads have so retreated into themselves
> that hardly a snitch of water remains
> a heron can wet his toe in . . . (GL, 140)

The section ends with an image of a journey through a Chicago landscape bound inextricably to the changes of weather.

Ammons does not show much interest in the political and cultural happenings of America and even when such thoughts

are sketchily allowed into his poetry, these are interrupted by a local reality, which for him is almost always the reality of weather, which by its very immediacy refuses to be ignored. World personalities rarely figure in his writing and when they do, appear with their vision and version of reality which are contemporary and hard to evade due to their sheer force and scope are immediately passed over by a different view of reality which is more local and personally comprehensible. The local and the particular for Ammons come to be identified with weather which is a more pressing reality than the reality of Bill Gates. The preciousness of the individual moment untouched by global systems that manufacture faceless reality is what makes Ammons write:

> fall is here: the crows are up in the air,
> like leaves
> .....
> nuts hit the
> ground and water jiggles in the brook . . . (GL, 152)

The reality that Ammons presents is noted for its absence of civilization and progress. There are no signs of industrial ravages on the landscape and the result is the presence of an image of landscape that seems to be beyond time and history. It is in this context of weather that Ammons discusses his preferences of the concrete, a preference one feels, is already clear in the theme and structure of the poem. The poems are the result of his preferences for the

> . . . tightly woven,
> gutter rutted, stone -thick unutterable
> poems artifice sets up
> to stall the mind . . . . (GL, 153)

Ammons is conscious of the activity in which he indulges of and he admits "overdone, it gets funny" (GL, 153). The treatment of weather itself thus comes to be criticized in such self-conscious passages, which characterize the drift of Ammons in his last work.

The tendency of discussing language and reality in the context of weather inaugurates the second part where Ammons discusses the problems of farming in the weather- bound landscape:

> . . . desperate to make a dollar, some guys
> on the outskirts between farming and
> handymanning will borrow into front -end
> gear for snowplowing and then one or two snows
> fit to plow will hit the whole winter . . . (GL, 181)

This is immediately followed by the discussion of language:

> . . . language plays
> upon what is the way light plays on water : it
> is without substance [as light nearly is]:
> moving glancing dipping, cresting is its
> veracity . . . (GL, 182)

The self-conscious narrative continues when Ammons writes: "my science may be right or / wrong but telling you about it is the truth" (GL, 183). The self-conscious mood is immediately

interrupted by thoughts of weather and he attempts a picture of the landscape "on those sucked-dry/skinny bright days" (GL, 183).

The self-conscious writing of *Tape* continues throughout *Glare* where the focus on form as the consuming theme continues in the second part where the specific form of *Glare* comes to be less and less important giving room for Ammons to discuss poetics. One hears Ammons talking more about writing than about his life in the second section. Ammons is more comfortable when he is writing about writing rather than writing about his past. The steady focus on the dynamics of writing helps him focus on the present, and on the writing of a poem. It is the poet rather than the man who is in the foreground in almost all his poems. In *Glare*, Ammons makes certain references to Shakespeare and notably Wallace Stevens but these references are broken by a return to the present, which is signalled by a reference to weather. Section 69 has an elaborate description of what his writing will be in terms of the differences of Shakespeare's preoccupations and techniques and in the midst of this description he suddenly confesses that he has not seen a robin though it is already the end of March. Such interruptions are common in Ammons and point to the significance of weather in his writing. They come to stand for the immediate reality in Ammons. The pressures of reality are the pressures of weather and other thoughts become

insignificant in their looming presence. The complex attitudes to reality are discussed frequently in his writing and this is often interrupted by thoughts of weather, which become a world in itself acting as a counterweight to the "wordy realities". Weather occasions thoughts on the nature of reality and he expresses his conviction that "people need only be outside the / normalcy of perception to be original" (GL, 193). This insight and conclusion are placed in the precise reality of weather with its image of "eight inch dump load of snow." The theoretical positions thus come to be supported and endorsed by the reality of weather or positions arise from the reality of weather or they come to qualify the free reign of thought processes. Either way weather becomes the ultimate reality for Ammons.

The disposition to use weather as a situation to discuss the problems of writing continues in section 78 where the poet is conscious of the minute-by-minute changes in climate, which he records:

> my characters aren't characters but charact'ry
> all kinds of things played out poorly:
> if the temperature, as they say it might, goes
> to 25 tonight ,the begonias will be gone the
> daffodils will be daffy . . . (GL, 212)

In this context Ammons proceeds to take up the discussion of writing, the criticism levelled against him, the problems of reception and of the difference between "graspable stories" and "gaspable stories" only to return to the reality of the present

which reminds one of the way in which many of the sections in *Tape* concluded:

> . . . I'm
> signing off for today, I have to brush my teeth
> and get some sleep, tomorrow I have to get
> the garbage out by the road by 8 A.M: (had he
> taken the 'wrong' road he would have hit an
> EVEN BIGGER DIFFRENCE (GL, 213)

This return to the present occurs in Ammons at crucial points in the progression of the poem, especially when the poet feels that he has indulged in the discussions of reality to the point of being oblivious to the physical experience of it. The preoccupation with the possibility of seeing writing in terms of weather leads him to the possibility of understanding the consciousness that makes writing possible in terms of the landscape.

The awareness that consciousness itself has affinities to the landscape often leads the poet to a discussion of the landscape and to a graphic portrayal of the change that has come over a period of years due to man's presence in it. *Glare*, towards the end becomes increasingly self-conscious which leads to a discussion of the tension between the abstract and the concrete, between the spontaneous and the reconsidered, in a frame of an experience of weather as in section 95:

> these are the longest days, the sixteen-hour
> daylights, the quicksleeps, so many hours to

potter away and putter about: the baby robins
are nearly grown . . . (GL, 248)

This is followed by a discussion of the changes in the vegetation. Once Ammons is convinced that the image is strong enough to remain in the mind of the reader, he ponders over the change that happens to the landscape and reflects on the changes on the environment that man has provoked by his indifference to the delicate system of the earth. The bleak picture of the earth that he presents is disrupted by a self-conscious mood that is aware of the problems of writing:

. . . I apologize
for the loss of immediacy spontaneity might
have stirred: and doubly apologize for the
cement of lagubriousness that hardens around
the reconsidered . . . (GL, 249)

The same technique of placing together the images of weather and the problems of writing is very well evident in a later passage in *Glare* where he discusses his attitude towards confessional poetry. The reservations that Ammons has towards confessional poetry form the thought of the passage when the poet falls into the personal mood consequently incorporating references to his old age and the problems associated with it, a mood suddenly interrupted by the reality of weather which the poet has no choice but to record:

. . . we stopped
by the Farmer's Market in Syracuse this

> morning, and the front due to arrive from the
> Northwest bringing southwest winds, somehow
> hadn't arrived or was still pushing the cold
> front before it . . . (GL, 252)

The preoccupation with the landscape and weather makes Ammons discuss his preferences without any attempt to mystify those preferences. The total indifference to the political movements which characterizes his writing, which becomes conspicuous by its absence erupts in the closing sections of *Glare* where he voices his animosity towards the committed writers:

> I'm roaring in the aisles over these long- face
> poets who labor (poetically) over their
> country's identities and problems: their
> symbols are going to come into control of ale
> and "mixing and mingling" . . . (GL, 270)

Ammons's sarcasm is directed towards committed writing and he conceives the primary aim of writing as free from purpose. In "A Paragraph of Precedence" Ammons writes: "The work of art in its primary thrust must be uncompromised by utilitarian aims or applications of any kind so as to prevent all hindrance to the emergencies of its newness as a thing-in-itself. Any use, standing ideologies allow, can then be made of the work."[50] The feeling that political movements have only access to superficial reality leads Ammons to a position where he cannot ignore the transient value attached to the political movements and Ammons has no choice but to direct his questions and

explorations to the more common and more permanent aspects of life. His 'interest' in what he calls the nation is neatly summed up:

> . . . guess who gives a hoot: I
> don't know about your nation, but my nation
> would just as soon it not be bothered, and I
> wouldn't want to bother it ,would you (GL, 270)

Such declarations are rare in Ammons. His expansiveness is limited to his discussion of the poetics, the problems of language, and the relation between language and reality. Section 116 which is the penultimate section of *Glare* exhibits the same tendency of lumping together landscape in weather and self-conscious conditions that the problems of writing, the consciousness of the audience, and the manner of perception and reception find expression when Ammons realizes that "this note is turning into a dissertation"(GL, 291). This self-conscious statement is suddenly eclipsed by the thoughts of the "slated hillside" and Ammons remembers that "it sure has rained this spring and summer" (GL, 291).

The return to the experience of weather in the midst of serious discussions on the problems associated with writing serves to underscore the idea that weather right from the beginning of Ammons's career to the last work remains powerful enough to disrupt all structures that man consciously builds in language as an escape from the reality of time, space, and ultimately all processes.

Chapter 5

The Miraculous Residence

> I ally myself more with Oriental culture.
>
> A. R. Ammons in conversation with David Lehman[1]

The preoccupation with the body in the poetry of Ammons dates back to his early interest in science and to his early but aborted attempt to become a doctor. The agrarian roots of Ammons foreground the awareness of the body in the landscape and the corporeal dimension of existence in the landscape receives close attention in his poetry aided by a mind receptive to the findings of science which in turn is inspired by a desire to question the attempts of Christianity to belittle the significance of the body. The setting right of the records and the enterprise of restoring the body to a more respectable space in Ammons, this chapter argues, are always placed in a context of weather. The centrality of the body and the need for a revisionist attitude to redeem it by acknowledging its complexity and sophistication, are discussed in a set of contexts that are defined by the rapid changes in weather which add to the dynamism that the body experiences and which eventually comes to define it. For Ammons human body is the miraculous residence of the very

sophisticated and countless activities that persist to the end of life.

The sense of the body in *Collected Poems*, like his idea of death, which is discussed in the next chapter is deeply linked to the landscape that is subject to constant changes mainly due to the impress of the seasons. The early poems convey a sense of the body where the importance of the persona is central. Ammons introduces in the poem "Thaw" the connection between the body and the landscape which is defined largely in terms of the seasons. The poem opens with an image of the seasons, which acknowledges the impact of the landscape on the mind:

> Winter over, ice bound
> mind better not
> rush to a spring meet fast;
> might trip stiff thoughts,
> shatter. . . (CP, 60)

Ammons moves forward from this implicit link between the mind and the landscape to a more obvious and direct expression of the correspondence between the body and the landscape:

> Better not warm up too
> close to sun
> might melt, run gullies
> caking off the good
> firm country of the brain. (CP, 60)

This tendency to adopt a metaphorical treatment is rare in Ammons's later poetry where weather comes to be treated more objectively; what is focused in later poetry is the consciousness of the body exposed to an experience of weather, and no attempt is made to develop a correspondence between the processes of the body and the processes of the seasons. The physical experience of the body treated in realistic terms is constantly enhanced in his poetry by the equally realistic and sense experience oriented impressions of weather that Ammons incorporates into his writing. The experience of the life of the body, for Ammons, is distant from all spiritual connotations and for him body is a biological existence.

"Thaw" is significant in that it places experiences of the mind, body and the landscape together in an interlocking relationship from which his later poems on writing, body, death and animal life evolve. A sense of a deep interrelatedness runs through this poem, a theme which continues to his last poem *Glare* which manifests as the tension between the concrete and the abstract, between the intellectual and the emotional, between the high and the low, between the one and the many.

"Terminus", repeats the same pattern effected by an image of the poet in the landscape:

> Coming to a rock wall
> I looked back
> to the winding gulch

and said
is this as far as you can go: (CP, 68)

Ammons resorts to the metaphorical strategy and writes:

So I sat down, resolved
to try
the problem out,
and every leaf fell
from my bush of bones (CP, 68)

Ammons uses the sense of the body to create visual patterns, and in his early poetry he indulges in a sense of the ' I', which has a central existence in the poem, a notion partly conveyed through the sense of the body. The image of the self that Ammons builds up in these poems is primarily an image of the body.

In "Terminus" and a number of early poems the sense of the body is to a great extent morbid in that Ammons is obsessed with images of anatomy with his frequent use of the images of bones, tendons, sinews which point to disintegration and even death. A sense of dissolution accompanies "Terminus" which by its metaphorical treatment conveys romantic associations by communicating an intense sense of the dissolution of the body brought about by the ravages of time, a thought which has produced some of the finest poems of the romantic movement, and 'Terminus' concludes with an acknowledgment of the link among the body mind and the landscape, where mind too, is conceived in terms of the body:

I sat in my bone's fragile shade
and worked the
knuckles of my mind till
the altering earth broke to
mend the fault
I rose and went through. (CP, 69)

"Terminus" is significant for yet another reason, for Ammons does not leave the connection among the body and mind and the landscape to be gleaned by the reader from the images that he presents. He states the connection directly, though such explicitness disappears from his later poetry, where the images are often presented in a disjunctive fashion.

Ammons imagines the loss of his body in "Mansion", written in the same fashion, which belongs to the same period, in images that again exhibit the same pattern of the experience of the body as an experience of the landscape in which it exists:

When the tree of my bones
rises from the skin I said
come and whirl winding
stroll my dust
around the plain (CP, 76)

The dissolution of the body, which almost merges with the theme of death, is enacted against the backdrop of nature. Moreover, the distinction between the body and the landscape itself is erased by Ammons by seeing one in terms of the other. Sameness is the focus of such a technique, a sameness which

romantic poetry, right from Shelley, has glorified. The tone of empathy that his early poetry frequently exhibits, which his later poetry completely discards, creates an image of the body totally identified with the landscape. The exercise of empathy that completely disappears as Ammons moves out of the intense subjective relation with nature, into his post romantic phase which begins with "Extremes And Moderations", a poem that appears towards the end of *Collected Poems.*

The attempt to see the body in terms of the landscape continues in the poem "Open", a poem significant in the overall development of Ammons's poetry in that, for the first time, Ammons focuses on the private aspects of the body that appear with increasing frequency as his career advances. Body, for Ammons, is the site of sex, and he does not try to gloss over when he writes of the body. The shocking images of the body that he builds up in his later poems can be traced to this poem and the poem is relevant for the way in which he brings together the themes of landscape, body, and sex. Ammons builds up the central image in this poem with the realization that the mind cannot get rid of the consciousness of the body and of sex, a thought that he articulates:

> The mind cannot be
> rid
> while it works of remembered genitals
> beautiful, dank, pliant,
> of canyons brush hills , pastures, streets . . . (CP, 109)

The contours of the landscape become the image of the body so that even the "exact remembrance of liquid buttocks" comes to be fused with these images of an external terrain. The "magnified territories of going down and rising", which Ammons terms a journey through the body in moments of physical intimacy, become an experience of the landscape thus essentially externalizing to some extent what is often considered a personal and private aspect of life. The later poetry of Ammons admits images of sex and thoughts that are linked to the body but Ammons does not resort to see the body in terms of the landscape beyond the *Collected Poems*.

The transition from a self-centered consciousness of the body to a larger vision of the body, a transition accompanied by the images of the seasons, is clear in "Still", which belongs to the same period. In a Whitmanesque mode, Ammons glorifies the body, the democratic Whitman is not far away when Ammons writes of his encounter with a beggar, an encounter of love, where body figures:

> . . . I
> found
> below the brown exterior
> green mechanisms beyond intellect
> awaiting resurrection in rain . . . (CP ,141)

In such a setting, where time is conceived as a dominant physical experience, greatly constructed as an experience of the seasons, clearly exhibiting the technique of placing the processes of the body along with the processes of nature, Ammons writes of the experience of love, which shook his body like devastation" (CP, 141). Ammons concludes the poem declaring there is "nothing lowly in the universe" (CP, 141) in the vein of Whitman with a declaration which has great relevance to his later poetry since it justifies and echoes an idea and a treatment of the body that refuse to reject anything related to the body however shameful it may be in the dominant systems of thought.

The universe, for Ammons, includes the universe of the human body to which he continually returns which he places in the larger context of the external landscape either as a part of his exploration of the possibility of finding certain levels of correspondence or as mere setting within which the sense of the body is experienced. Ammons continues his technique of imagining the body as a part of the vegetation in "Guitar Recitativos" where he writes:

> Gladioli are steering out of the small of my back
>
> strumming their cools stalks up my spine
>
> Zinnias radiating from the crock of my neck
>
> and petunias swinging down. . . (CP, 219)

The reality of the body for Ammons in this poem is largely the reality of experience by its relation to the world outside with which it merges. The sense of "his spine, the small of his back the crock of his back and his earlobes" becomes part of the flowers that he mentions. But Ammons does not allow the romantic connotations of these flowers to interfere with the image of the body that he creates and the strain of realism remains strong in the final impression that the poem communicates. Such correspondences bank on the sense impressions, which act as a counterweight to the abstract notions of the body that wilfully develop a sense of the unreal.

Ammons does not lament the loss of the body even though his poetry abounds with the changes that the body undergoes as a part of being trapped in time. A sense of the ailing body is part of the poetry of Ammons right from *Collected Poems* where such a sense sometimes occurs in isolation without any sign of the landscape or weather. "Renovating" is a case in point where the physical reality of the body is presented with such immediacy:

> I can tell you what I need is a good periodontist
> My gums are so sensitive separated and lumpy
> I have to let my cornflakes' sit and wilt
> the niacin leaks out . . . (CP, 224)

The poem foreshadows the minute details of the body that occupy very large segments of his later poetry where equally

elaborate descriptions of the body in a vocabulary of anatomy are placed not in isolation but along with lengthy descriptions of the landscape.

Ammons's preoccupation with the concrete and his preference for the sense experience are reflected in "Touching Down", where the question of the duality between mind and body is taken up, where Ammons places the experience of the body over the mind, where, death, Ammons insists, is inscribed in the body. "Summer Session", a long poem, which as its title indicates with its broad background of weather and the seasons, has some of the most 'irreverent' passages on the human body which are placed against the solid reality of the seasons. Ammons begins in a harmless way, gently touching on the questions of the propriety of the eye and vision and certain aspects of the body:

> past 21 women suffer
> unbearably(!)
> take bladder irritation: that headachy
> backachy feeling:
> that burning stitching itching gives them
> the weewee's makes them need
> fast relaxing comfort . . . (CP, 252)

From this 'unpleasant' reality Ammons pushes forward his sense of the body to include specific details of the female anatomy:

> pours pellucid lubricants

down the drains of microfloral
habitations:
the clitoris rises above
surmountings, backs, off
and takes testy peck . . . (CP, 253)

The passage, like the earlier one, is placed within a frame where the presence of weather is sufficiently strong enough to influence the impression of the body that Ammons creates in the poem. "Spiel" focuses on the natural activities of the body and Ammons explaining the simple event of eating, writes, " I just ate a green banana: it is in / me now mushed and gushy: there is / nothing small enough to conjure clarity with" (CP, 269). And even this simple event is placed along with a sense experience of the seasons though not very explicitly stated:

from the state of distress a pill can
remove you :meanwhile the blue
spruce
is perilously unaffected:
it's monsterless. . . (CP, 270)

With his image of the footprints disappearing at the edge of melting snow, Ammons takes the reader from the sketchy image of the landscape to the more direct awareness of weather. Once more the sense of the activities of the body is inalienably related to the consciousness of the seasons that intrudes continually and sets up a level of experience, which comes to influence the impression of the body.

The image of the body in sickness which received its first serious treatment in "Renovating" is taken up in "Run Through" where Ammons looks into the grave prognosis of aneurysm, a poem where irony and understatement work together to create even a humorous effect. As in "Renovating" Ammons is preoccupied with the various stages of the human body in its condition of sickness ranging from minor ailments to the fatal ones which his later poems take up. The treatment of the later poems does not differ from "Run Through" or "Renovating" but the technique of placing the sense of the sick body against the seasons or just the weather of the day is lacking in such poems where body is the sole focus, which he conveys when he writes:

> a tube in your skull bursts:
> you bleed half
> still:
> with one arm
> you show how
> the other flops
> you show ,show
> speechless with pantomime: (CP, 285)

A sense of the body as related to weather, and as subject to its changes becomes more obvious in "Essay On Poetics" where a domestic picture is attempted by Ammons. The reality of the cold weather is also obvious:

> . . . John's

> old tractor on the lawn only shows its steering wheel: the
> snowplow's been by and blocked the driveway: It's
> December 26
> yesterday was Christmas . . . (CP, 310)

Such clear references to calendar time, which become prominent in this poem, reach their culmination in *Tape* where the reality of the weather is almost always linked to the reference to the days of December and January. In "Essay on Poetics", the sick body of the poet's son is mentioned in images of fever and tonsillitis with reference to the closing days of December. What is suggested here is the feeling that Ammons has always experienced, the impossibility of an experience of the body unrelated to the landscape, a feeling of growing significance especially in his later writings.

In "Hibernaculum", a title indicative of the seasons, Ammons returns to the metaphoric activity which was typical of his early writing where his attempt was for a correspondence between the body and the landscape though the image of the body with the exception of one or two poems was limited to the 'respectable zones'. But the treatment in "Hibernaculum" has very few rivals with the exception of some overtly confessional passages in *Glare*. The shock effect is unparalleled when Ammons writes in a surreal tone:

> today's paper says that rain falls on the desert and makes it
> fertile: semen slips, jets, swims into wombs
> and makes them bulge: therefore, there must be

> a big penis above the clouds that spills the rain:
> that is I think reasonable . . . (CP, 351)

The images of the body and of the seasons come together in the idea of a "big penis behind the clouds" where semen becomes the rain that brings life to the earth's womb. Though the metaphor Ammons employs here disrupts slightly the strain of realism, the poem is a significant landmark in his poetry in that it still pushes the limits of morality further, and consequently the imagery employed underscores the distance that Ammons has travelled from the traditional association of the clouds and rain.

From the image of the sex organ, Ammons moves on to the thoughts of the sex act but still relying on the association of the penis-semen-rain that he mentioned at the beginning of the poem:

> screwing is nearly worth perishing, and, too, the two not
> always concomitant : perhaps, coterminous: but then the
> penis is also (like the heavens) splitting and pleasuring:
> while it's in, it is after all, commanding and will not,
> just because somebody's edgy , withdraw . . . (CP, 352)

The logic of the body and the logic of weather, in this case the rain, Ammons realizes, have similar dynamics. From this logic of a convincing correspondence, which is essentially an exercise of the mind, Ammons returns to the reality of the present:

> . . . the days shorten down to a

> gap in the night, winter, though gray and vague not half
> dubious enough : I see sleet filled sky's dry freeze:
> I see diggings disheveled, bleak mounds . . . (CP, 352-353)

This final image of the landscape and weather to which Ammons returns pushing aside if not eliminating or at least suspending the sense of the body even while acknowledging the influence of the elemental forces is a pattern that he repeats in *The Snow Poems, Sphere, Tape* and *Glare* which is sufficient proof of the primacy of weather.

Collected Poems thus introduces the theme of the body and the contexts in which it appears. These contexts are largely the contexts of weather either elaborately dealt with or incorporated into the structure of the poem as passing references sketchily treated. From single images to lengthy stanzas, weather appears in all its variety though winter is the most often encountered condition that the reader witnesses in his writing. The sense of the self that Ammons builds up in his poetry is significantly through the sense of the body, which in turn is the result of the frames of reference of weather in which Ammons places it. The 'transfigurations of time and place' as Ammons would term it turn out to be largely of weather, which transfigures almost everything in the world of Ammons.

Tape, which Schneider called "a breakthrough"[2] is an extended discussion on the dynamics of writing situated within a very specific landscape with a powerful sense of the particular

offers a context for his preoccupation with the body as a physical entity. Writing, for Ammons is a psychological activity, always associated with the physical condition. The experience of the body is heightened, Ammons seems to convey, when placed in the framework of weather. The heightened consciousness of the body, which he accepts as part of writing, becomes more significant, and writing itself comes to be situated in a relation where it is deeply linked to weather.

Tape conveys the impression that the physical basis of existence is of paramount importance in one's understanding of experience. For Ammons, any activity mental or physical, once its temporality is acknowledged, is necessarily linked to the body. Consciousness is primarily the consciousness of the body and the coming together of weather, writing, and body has added significance when one realizes that all these are ruled by the logic of process that has always fascinated Ammons. *Tape* is as much about weather as it is about body and writing and the long poem is about writing the landscape and about writing the body, which might be subsumed under his preoccupation with writing about writing.

The function of weather in its relation to writing is echoed in the relation that he establishes between body and writing. Both act as a check to excessive theorization, and the technique throws light on the preferences that Ammons has always articulated. The problems of representing reality in writing are,

for Ammons, deeply related to the temporal consciousness that the body frequently produces. Body's subservience to temporality offers the poet the context to record the changes to which the body is subject to at regular intervals. Process, still an abiding preoccupation, becomes vital in the way body is treated in his poetry. The difficulties of writing, *Tape* reminds the reader, are not problems limited to philosophical questions pertaining to the representation of reality and its relation to language, but the problems of the body as a physical and direct presence, an experience hard to ignore.

The explicit references to weather and body induce a notion of temporality, a sense of time that seems to be situated at the other end of the spectrum which is denoted by an intellectual understanding of time mediated largely through philosophical traditions. The body is constructed in his writing in a manner, which acknowledges its complexity, a complexity that is a part of Ammons's scientific sensibility, influenced by his exposure to *Scientific American*, a journal, which as he admits, has influenced him profoundly. This knowledge of the complexity of the body as received through scientific knowledge, though admitted and thoroughly discussed in his writing, is rejected on the grounds that such a scientific understanding of the body is not available to any one at the level of direct experience. A tension is thus realized and exploited in his poetry between experience mediated through scientific knowledge and

experience minimally mediated by science. A dual vision thus can be discerned to be operating in his poetry, and this bifocal vision is part of his obsession with the role of the perspective in understanding and representing reality, and of the relative merits that the poet attributes to the positions possible.

The feeling of a complex reality disturbs Ammons, but his poetry also reveals this consolation that experience approached and understood at the most simple level is sufficient enough for poetry and for life. Consequently, his treatment of the body, like that of weather, results in a kind of writing which is at once both difficult and simple as it accommodates a view of life that is both abstract and concrete at the same time. This dual attitude of Ammons implies his awareness of two types of readers, one who relies on experience and the other on a sophisticated reading of reality.

His poetry is contemporary in the sense that it exhibits the feeling that reality is too complex to be embraced by any simple attitude, any approach to reality is bound to be fractured and fragmented and this realization of the defeat inherent in such an attitude becomes a dominant thought that informs most of his writing. Ammons discredits all experiences that are overtly intellectual or scientifically supported, and the distaste for such scientifically supported experiences surfaces quite often in his writing.

Ammons acknowledges the demystifying tendency of science, but such an attempt by science does not add much to the experience of day-to-day reality since the scientific approach goes beyond the level of the senses and thus is not directly available to the sense experience. The chemistry of the senses that Ammons incorporates into his writing is a sign of his sophistication, of his awareness of the complexity of the human body and of the existence of the evolutionary processes to which it is submitted. But Ammons insists that the understanding of chemical processes do not come in the way of our day-to-day experiences.

The biochemical understanding of the body induces in Ammons and consequently in his poetry a feeling of wonder, surprise and even pride, but he initiates a return, a return essentially to a set of experiences, happenings and situations that can very well exist without the support of any understanding of the dynamics of such physical incidents.

Tape, at the very beginning itself introduces the theme of the body in conjunction with weather. The limitations of writing are seen to be the limitations imposed by the body's weaknesses. It is the body's infirmity that sets the limits of his writing. The significance of the body as a physical entity to be respected and considered in one's reading of reality is obvious in the lines:

Why should the world be

bigger than what a man
can reach
and taste and strike &
burn & hunt & hold ? (T, 7)

What Ammons conveys here is a deep conviction in the primacy of the experience of the world as predominantly physical, which he stated in unambiguous terms in "On 'The Damned' ":

> Nature produced us. We were here with formed spines and backbones, with complex arterial systems, with enzymes and electrical charges long before we had names for it. So I feel deeply conditioned by nature. I expect to find, when I look around me, the sources of myself.[3]

Such a reading rejects intellectual pretensions and exercises, and underscores the belief in the significance of the sufficiency of the experiential level. Physical limitation is the reality that troubles Ammons and in *Tape* it often prevents the poet from his literary endeavours. In the earlier sections of *Tape*, his focus is not on an attempt to present a body in sickness, rather, limitations common to the body are more discussed and only later in the poem does Ammons try to present the body as exhausted, retired, sick and incapable of going on with the enterprise of writing. The idea of the body initially introduced as one of limitations that is often articulated by Ammons, can be traced to certain conventions, often considered classical. The limitations are not just personal; they are part of humanity at large and are hence less subjective. This attempt to create such

an impersonal beginning is later superseded by a sense of the body, which is not novel, through a series of poetic conventions. The focus essentially remains on the poet's body and no attempt is made to place it in the larger context of society or general patterns and principles of the body, assuring the status of a discipline.

Another emerging pattern that one sees in his writing is that, in the latter part of *Tape*, the relation between physical experience and the weather is strongly argued for, and the experience of the body is seen to be constructed solely as a response to weather. Thus, as his poetry progresses, body comes to be equated with the reality of weather, increasingly it is defined in terms of a response to it and such a reading results in situating the body in a cycle of process which falls into certain obsessive patterns in his poetry that are related to his preoccupation with change and time.

Often, after a powerful and elaborate description of the reality of weather, an equally extended treatment of the body begins, which one has to concede, is a bit dramatic. Body perceived at the level of molecules, membranes, functions, and enzymes, reflects the hectic processes that constitute a human body to which man for the most part of his life remains mostly oblivious. Ammons seems to argue that a minute-by-minute awareness of what's happening inside the body will never really

be available to the mind of man, and one does not need to have this awareness to enrich one's experience.

Ammons's preoccupation with the minute aspects of the human body, it is to be noted, is part of the larger preoccupation with the same minute aspects of the external world in which he is forced to live. Such an insistence on even seeing simple physical experience at the biochemical or microscopic level is a part of the scientific temperament and education that Ammons received in his life. Similarly his preference for the simple experience, unmediated through science is the result of a conviction that stems from what constitutes poetry. The admissibility of science as part of poetry is offered the counterweight, of a thought, that poetry can very well survive without it. Even his observation of a small wound is the articulation of a mind scientifically predisposed:

> we are
> sending several divisions
> & several kinds of
> divisions to help you
> and so on:
> catalysts, enzymes &
> membranes . . . (T, 20)

Such a passage is ironic in the light of a statement he made to Philip Fried:

> Meanwhile I was taking pre-med and science courses, and that's where the combination of poetry and science started. I

> was never aware that I was writing poetry with scientific terminology. I was just writing from where I was which was a mixture of science and poetry.[4]

The dramatic mode and the inflatory tone that Ammons employs here become an implicit critique of the usefulness of such approaches to the consciousness of daily life. His preference for the simple and the direct, results in seeing the mind as interference into the relatively simple activities of the body. The body which is nearer to experience is divorced from the reality of experience by the activities of the mind that try to impose a pattern upon it through a set of inventions which Ammons considers inimical to experience. The duality between mind and body runs in his poetry, an extension of the duality between experience and knowledge. In both these cases Ammons is very clear about his preferences. However complex the body may be when a scientific mind is brought to bear upon it, it is not central to the experience of the body as the body. It is an attitude that is more akin to romantic thought and less associated with a contemporary sensibility, which is often defined as a greater receptiveness to accommodate the ongoing dialogues in science.

Ammons values greatly the reality of weather, and it is only natural that a sustained discussion of the body at the immediately visible level is often placed in a context of weather. The body is often felt and experienced more acutely in the cold

climate of December and the frequent references to time and weather help the poet to fix it in a frame of temporality that adds to the physical notion of the body. Frequent references to weather help Ammons to create a notion of the body that is trapped in time and as a concrete experience, which qualifies any attempt to detemporalize it by superimposing on it, a pattern that belongs to other areas of knowledge. It is interesting to note that his preferences for reality, which he articulates in a self-conscious mood, are supported by the treatment of weather in concrete terms and are accompanied by a similar treatment of the body. The theoretical preferences are realized simultaneously in the two related themes of weather and body, and writing the body becomes body writing poetry.

Tape is punctuated with thoughts of the body, the limits of it, a realization too powerful to be suppressed. The thoughts of the body erupt continually and remind one that all activity, however intellectual it may be, remains ultimately physical. A recurrent pattern in Ammons's writing is to interrupt the explorations and expressions into the possibilities of reality by the reality of the body in weather as in the section on December 11 where thoughts about art that began with thoughts of weather are suddenly interrupted:

> I feel weak so
> much tape remains
> my back's getting sore:
> I don't sleep good

with this going on . . . (T, 38)

The hegemony attributed to the body reaches its culmination when even the act of writing is seen in terms of male sexual activity. Such an enterprise reverses the idea of writing promoted by the romantic ideology, which sees writing, however physical it might be in terms of its spontaneity, which even with its distaste for thought never attempted to see it in unpalatable terms. Such a culmination can be traced to a redefinition of the body undertaken by the romantic ideology, the attempt of which, was to return to the body and to assign to it a status denied to it by the ascendancy of Reason, which rejected everything that could be traced to the body. Romantic ideology, though in its celebration of the body has endorsed the sanctity of all bodily activities, has always desisted from glorifying the sex act in an uninhibited vocabulary. The idea of writing is constantly seen as closely related to, and interfered and interrupted by thoughts and feelings of the body that Ammons succeeds in conveying the message that writing is essentially a physical activity drastically deflating the concept of writing as an all mind no body phenomenon. In his writings, there is always an attempt to balance mental activity with the physical activity.

Thoughts about writing are often juxtaposed with thoughts about digestion, the argument being that, his interest in the energy transformations will ultimately materialize as

words and verse. There is inconsequentiality in the argument, and the humour is appealing. Ammons writes on the lunch he had, how the lunch will be transformed into energy that will produce some words for his poem which ultimately turns out to be a critique of the scientific endeavour to look at too closely and writing about the lunch becomes a context in which he anticipates the reproaches that he will have to suffer:

> transformations!
> metamorphoses!
> mitochondria!
> hell's bells! (T, 40)

The critique of intellect is further advanced by a return to the theme of the body:

> how my back hurts: even
> by concentrating, I can't
> feel any presence
> to my balls : missing: (T, 40)

The critique continues in the way in which Ammons tries to present a physical examination of his body. He fears that it could be called masturbatory, a word that smacks of thought and he overcomes such a censure that he musters the courage to touch it and exclaims:

> just to make sure?
> two cool tight weights!
> thank-you:
> thank you . . . (T, 40)

The drift of the argument is such that Ammons once again tries to emphasize that he's always ill at ease in all artistic and intellectual endeavours that deprecate the experience of existence as an experience of the body.

The self-conscious mood that Ammons exhibits in *Tape* is frequently interrupted by references to weather. Weather in such contexts is a reminder of the physical side of experience and its relevance and relation to all mental activities. The body frequently interrupts thoughts about poetic enterprises, as they are interrupted by weather. This justifies the analysis of the body in those contexts where they come together. Poetry is associated with weather and it is there as an influence on the thought. And self-conscious thoughts are distracted by thoughts and sensations of the body. Self-consciousness which is used as a term for a style of writing which is conscious of its activities, is also used in the ordinary sense of the term to include the body that the self-reflexive mode leads to the realization of the body too:

> I have won no battles & lost
> none:
> am engaging no
> realities: (T, 50)

This is interrupted by a sense that betrays the physical condition of writing:

> cause enough to stop &

tear cause enough
to sleep today, rest my
back & brain . . . (T, 50)

It is Ammons's preference for the particular as the best possible site for a study of process and manifestation of time that drives him to the idea of the body. The tendency to see existence as concrete, leads to an attempt to find an objective basis to life and an explanatory endeavour is taken up, though not in the register of poetry, which partakes of a tone not unlike that of a scientific discourse. Emotionalism is absent, and even emotion is held back and what follows is a picture of the human body not usually found in poetry:

we are
"held together"
minerals -such as
calcium-
selected , refined
& deposited to high
purities
give support:
specialized tissues
bind us to the bones . . .(T, 53)

The sophisticated picture of the body he presents here is part of his deep awareness of its complexity and is an attempt to "redeem the body."[5] With his desire to overturn the western mind and the western tradition in general, Ammons works against the Christian notion of the body, and observes:

> It is true that the body's only as good for as long as it can be. But it sure is incredible while it's there. The more you know about the body, the more astonishing it becomes. To just have it dismissed by somebody as being a piece of corruption compared to some incorporeal, everlasting spirit always made me somewhat ill. [6]

The attempt to correct the dominant notion of the body as something inferior impels Ammons to stress the complexity of the body, and the attempt is that of a specialist not from the world of poetry but that of a sensitive mind who had special interest in comparative anatomy. Some experiences described in *Tape* are not a part of felt life; rather they belong to a sphere from which feeling is eliminated. Experience should be, Ammons suggests, more palpable, and an attempt to approach it through ways other than simple experience smacks of intellectualism for which Ammons expresses his distaste.

It is illuminating to see this interest in the body and its anatomical peculiarities from the perspective of interrelatedness, a key concept, which assumes increasing significance as his writing matures. Ammons explores all forms of life and tests out the limits and definition of interrelatedness and expands it to include the earth and even goes beyond it. The other direction is to look into the body and try to understand its interconnectedness. Both these endeavours result in a sense of a fine balance, which explains the dynamics of process. Both life and death are seen as a fine balance and

the end of this fine balance is death. Life lived at the individual level is seen as part of the larger network to which it belongs. The influences informing this life go beyond it, Ammons reiterates often. Ammons mediates between the balances of the universe and the balances of the human body. Both anticipate and accommodate the inevitable decay and disintegration. The disintegration of the body is the failure of interrelatedness just as catastrophes on a larger scale are always the result of an ignorance of this interrelatedness and a lack of respect for it in the natural systems.

Process is, for Ammons, at once the result of a balance and a lack of balance. He treats the small worm and the universe, as worlds too vast to be exhausted by a single mind. Life itself comes to be explained as certain bodily activities. Ammons's awareness of the body shows great affinity to the Eastern definitions of the body that consider the activities of the human body not as tainted. The notion of the human body that Ammons believes in, is a part of his rejection of the western ideology. In reply to a question on the Christian idea of the body as depraved, Ammons told Schneider: "I was filled with a wonder at the attitude that some people would take toward the body and toward the spirit and feeling the way I thought about it was different from a lot of people... yes that's what I mean. And I was trying to reverse that."[7]

All the bodily activities are seen to be integral to existence and no attempt is made to reject, suppress, or eliminate certain irreverent qualities, to create a more acceptable idea of man as laid down by certain religious discourses. The reversal of the dominant discourse is clear when Ammons writes:

> If you have condemned the
> body, you have
> condemned a miraculous
> residence -
> temple
> we should to try to keep
> the right spirit in :
> the aggregates ! . . . (T, 54)

Asked to comment on these lines Ammons observed to Schneider:

> I thought that was interesting. The temple is the body and is sort of preferred to the spirit. We should try to make the spirit accommodate it, to be at least worthy of the temple it's in rather than what it is usually thought of the other way - the spirit is valuable and the body is just corruption.[8]

Schneider's comment that "Ammons's response to anatomical functioning is emotional and aesthetic"[9] is apt and it redeems his excursions to the world of science from being mere lectures, dull and abstract.

Death too comes to be treated in his poetry as just a deviation from the process that sustains life, no religious

thought is introduced, it exists in a plane of thought that takes its support and argument from notions supported by science not from philosophy so that, death begins, Ammons writes:

> . . .when mineral
> ash that could not be
> processed away) stiffens
> the cell walls
> so they lose flexibility
> & effect -then the balance
> turns
> to invasion and
> disintegration . . . (T, 54)

It is this process that binds together thoughts of reflexivity and body. Thoughts on poetry are thoughts about process which in turn become thoughts on the body so that the nothingness of the body to which process takes forward is echoed in the thinning of the diameter of the spool of the adding machine tape and the final disappearance is the completion of the process of writing and this is placed in the process of life, and the relation that Ammons has always insisted between the body and writing is reiterated:

> the disappearances (un
> noticed - in the streets
> seems always full,
> lively & young enough)
> into illness ,stiff bones
> strokes, graves: (T, 59)

It is to be borne in mind that in Ammons's poetry, the end of life is death, and is not something abstract or religious that offers consolation. The conclusion, Ammons prefers is secular. The end of life is physical, since Ammons employs images of sickness always understated.

The philosophic figure of the old man looking at life in a mood of reflection and introspection is absent in his writing; rather the reader is offered an image where no such thought is possible. It is essentially a physical condition that precludes the possibility of any such knowledge and the poetry of Ammons bundles life to certain images of pain, disease and coma. Ammons is cautious to resist abstractions often associated with writing, and this materializes in equating the ultimate concrete experience of sex with writing, often read as an all mind activity. The mystification often attributed to writing comes to be demystified and is intensely personal, rooted in the body, that all thoughts are banished that he can write:

> my innermost feeling is
> a silky pouring of
> semen, a rich
> disturbance
> in the groin,
> broken loose, flowing . . . (T , 64)

The innermost feeling which could be sex which flows out physically finds its echo in the innermost feeling of poetry flowing out through language and the connection is hardly

missed when Ammons speaks of language as "the rich pouring of verbal itch" (T, 65). Since the connection is already established, language and sex become personal, and language becomes a medium to express the most private and intensely personal experience.

Ammons argues by fixing body in a context of weather, that it is in time, subject to its dynamics, and that a transcendent view of the body is not feasible. He reminds the reader that body always sets the limit for writing. The idea of the body in time, defines the reality and the surroundings of writing, destabilizing the notion of writing as taking place above time. The romantic inspiration which signals such a move, is absent in Ammons's poetry, a thought he confesses:

> excuse me, I'm tired: &
> the cold drops-
> they say to 5 or 10 above
> tonight: (T, 71)

The physical reality of the body and its relation to weather are touched upon here, and the limitations of the body define the writer's image which is at variance with the image of the romantic writer.

Ammons's poetry by its very preference for the concrete and the simple does not take into consideration most of the

activities that the body undergoes. Most experiences are beyond our knowledge, a belief Ammons articulates when he admits:

> our existence is
> evidence
> of more
> than we can imagine: much
> we can't see
> is working right: (T, 124)

This acknowledgement of ignorance is more than just humility. In his interview with William Walsh Ammons observed:

> Who understands his own body? I mean gorillas have been walking around for two hundred and fifty thousand years with extremely complicated enzymic and other operations going on in their bloodstreams that they nothing about, which prevented them not from being gorillas. We're the same case.[10]

Ammons here does not just stress the complexity of existence, he touches upon the limits of human understanding and also points to a self-sufficiency that he attributes to simple perceivable experiences as the basis and scope of reality effectively questioning the hegemony of the mind which western tradition has always insisted.

It is in the context of weather that sickness comes to be treated and Ammons resists the tendency to emotionalism or to express a correspondence that might be called romantic fallacy. The section on December 30, which begins with clear references to weather and a journey, has at its centre the image of a man

falling unconscious on the road in a bout of fits. As *Tape* progresses the images of weather get increasingly tied up with sickness and a sense of the body. Body comes to be pursued more and more in the physical sense of the term and it is an ailing body, an ailment not brought about by age but more by weather. Weather becomes a reality physically perceived, as physical as sickness, and thoughts of writing increasingly mingle with the thoughts of the sick body making the act of writing more human and personal. Body is constructed in such sections of *Tape* in a clinical manner that little emotion is evoked and a physical ailment is seen as a concomitant of weather. Its references thus are to the present or immediate past and that past does not extend beyond yesterday, and this physical sense of the body induces a sense of complexity in the body which is abstract or directly non perceivable. Thus the body occasions two notions of time; time as immediate reality and body as a site for change, and changelessness over thousands of years, the result of an evolutionary thought informed by a knowledge of science.

Processes of weather and landscape are again paralleled by thoughts of bodily changes, and a constant flow of the energy of the universe is paralleled by such systems in the body, all made complex by the minute-by-minute account of the activities within the body placed against the changes that have occurred over a period of hundreds of years. The technique is the same,

time and process as immediate experience, placed against time and process as not immediate experience but nevertheless essential without which minute-by-minute changes would be impossible.

Scientific explorations of the universe in the poetry of Ammons are often interrupted by thoughts of the activities of the body, which receive a mock seriousness that debunks the impersonal and the too serious a tone undertaken by the poet towards the sense experiences of the body. Ammons seems to stress the idea that the physical experiences are enough for a common man. The dynamics of such physical experiences may be safely put aside without much diminishing of experience, on the contrary, it may hinder experience, experience like the one the poet underlines:

> energy transformations:
> how do
> porkchops make
> my body turn?
> energy conseved,weaves
> in & out . . . (T, 139)

These elaborate discussions which are probes into different levels of reality are not infrequently placed within the framework of a simple physical experience that by its very simplicity and self-sufficiency seems to discredit all attempts to scientifically place an experience. The attempt to study how images are

transformed into reality by the retina concludes with a realization:

> if we were at the
> mercy of what
> we understand,
> our eyes couldn't see:
> discovery is
> praise . . . (T, 140)

Ammons prefers experience to intellect. Though it is difficult to separate the two, he entertains such a possibility. For him, understanding and experience are often separate and not dependent on each other:

> while we can't
> understand, we can
> feel
> and
> that's a fine essence,
> astonishing . . . (T, 142)

The idea of the self-sufficiency of experience and of the body as a supreme reality for the individual is taken up in the lines that follow the declaration that he made:

> 1:26 p.m.
> I feel a little
> shivery:
> the cold's making -
> forgive me . . . (T,143)

This simple stark statement assumes great significance when Ammons follows it with a statement, which sees simple physical experience in terms of process, explained through knowledge and the scientific pose is mocked at in end of the section:

> but I just had a baked ham
> sandwich, glass of milk &
> coffee,
> that to be
> transformed into
> whatever ammunition
> it can: (T, 143)

In the section on January 2 which opens with the images of weather, Ammons proceeds to discuss his physical condition when he writes: "I feel stuffy again/ this morning / ragged vocal cords"(T, 156). A similar pattern is seen in the next section, which begins with weather where minute observation of the changes in the landscape is followed by the physical side of experience of the body:

> my cold's worse:
> in the chest:
> feel puffed &
> weak . but
> gotta keep moving . . . (T, 164)

The problems of writing as the long poem comes to an end are the problems of the body rather than of the mind. The problems and thoughts of reality, and the various solutions possible are

discussed in the context of weather and the body. This becomes a critique of the various theories of reality possible, and their uselessness is highlighted when placed against the reality of the body and of weather.

Theories, Ammons seems to convey, are significant and worth pursuing for the pure pleasure of pursuing and their reliability is thrown into doubt when confronted with experience, which does not get effaced or bypassed by theoretical positions. Experience is experience, and no amount of theory is capable of evading an experience and the reality of the body is again part of weather, the reality with which the section on January 6 opens:

> today is splendid again:
> sunny as to leave no
> clouds to be excused
> how I coughed . . . (T, 170)

From this sense of a time and place deeply bound to weather, Ammons returns to his body:

> . . . through black time -gaps
> & time emergencies
> last night:
> red- eyed . . . (T, 170)

The sense of one's body being trapped in time is again the thought in the section on January 7, which opens with a picture of the constantly changing reality of weather:

today is rainy:
started around 7 last nite:
a quiet
  warm rain,
musical in the gutterspouts: (T, 174)

The sense of change and time that this passage creates, is paralleled by the processes of the body. The constant references to the body in terms of weather persist to the end of *Tape*. Minor ailments are a part of the experience of weather and Ammons writes:

  I woke up a lot
coughing last night
and my awareness would
break into
the rain's song . . . (T, 174)

It is significant to note that the final image of the body that one comes across in *Tape* is again where the sense of the body is unmistakably linked to weather. In the section on January 10, the last section of *Tape*, which also begins with a record of weather, Ammons complains:

coughed a lot last night:
round
4.20 a.m. got up &
  took a shot of
  brandy
  numbed the tickle
some:

slept better : (T, 200)

And in the closing pages of *Tape*, Ammons articulates the danger of falling a prey to the dictates of the mind in the matters of the body, a realization that has always been crucial to the drift of the poem towards the concrete and the particular:

> have our minds taken us too
> far, out of nature, out of
> complete acceptance?
>
> we haven't remembered our
> bodies :
> let's touch ,patiently ,
> thoroughly . . . (T, 202)

The return to the body for Ammons is a return to time and place, a time and place where weather is a dominant mode of experience, and the discussions and realizations are possible only in the context of weather as the final section proves which begins with a framework, a framework essentially of weather.

Sphere, which Elizabeth DeRosa calls a poem of "cosmic and galactic particulars"[11], is one long meditation on the various levels at which interrelatedness defines one's life. Ammons was inspired by the photos of the earth taken from outer space. These photos urged Ammons to look at the idea of the earth as a metaphor which opened up for him the possibility of reconciling the problems of the one and the many, the concrete and the

abstract, and the high and the low; further they took forward the dialectics of weather and the body which started appearing towards the end of *Collected Poems*.

Weather becomes the larger reality in which the consciousness of the body becomes possible. The heightened interest in the body is more often limited to the unhealthy aspects of it, both in the sense of morality and a physiological condition to which a moral value is attached. From other observations of the society which is troubled by the problems of sickness and weakness, in a Whitmanesque fashion, Ammons swings to the local and the more personal experience of the body thus establishing the pattern of thought in *Sphere* which is a movement from the universal to the particular, from the high to the low, from the macroscopic to the microscopic. Willard Spiegelman's disparaging comment is unsympathetic as well as untrue:

> Increasingly in "Essay on Poetics" and *Sphere,* Ammons employs his conceptual machinery in the service of his interest in literature itself: for all his fascination with external nature, visible or not, Ammons has turned himself into a member of an imaginary philosophy department, lecturing his students not only on natural causes but also on aesthetics.[12]

Such a reading is possible only by a total disregard for the sense of the body that Ammons conveys in his writing and often in *Sphere* there is a movement from the macrocosm to the microcosm irrespective of the theme. In section17 of *Sphere,*

Ammons writes of the society with which he enters into a relation of empathy, where after the manner of Whitman the reader encounters a Democratic poet:

> . . . I
> know my own -the thrown peripheries, the stragglers ,
> the cheated maimed, afflicted (I know their eyes , pain's
> melting amazement) the weak , disoriented, the sick ,hurt ,
> the castaways, the
> needful need less: I know them: I love them . . . (S, 18)

From this broad social consciousness Ammons returns to the local and personal wherein the consciousness of the body is too powerful to be ignored:

> . . . come, I say ,with morning ,this is the exact
> specification
> of the account: the leg is inflamed: the tooth is aching
> the mind gathers and dissolves ,the water is both fast and
> deep ,the branches are picked clean . . . (S, 18)

The reality that Ammons presents here is part of weather, and the section that immediately follows substantiates the idea that the consciousness of the body is deeply entrenched in the seasons. The section begins with images of spring and zero degree climate. This sense of the reality of weather is immediately followed by a sense of the ailing body:

> . . . death is lake- space, crystal dusk:
> (a morning following, the poet still alive but with
> a headache , a tooth ache , a throatache, a jawache and

a backache forges on) . . . (S, 19)

The experience of the body is trapped in a landscape constantly changed by weather, a feeling conveyed in the image of the snow on the lawn which has "receded into numerous archipelago of small valleys"(S, 19). Ammons once again takes pains to reiterate that for him the body does not exist out of weather. One's impression of one's own body is deeply dependent on a landscape constantly made and unmade by the seasons.

The processes of the body are seen to be intertwined with the processes of the landscape which for Ammons are largely the changes brought about by the climate, a pattern repeated in section 42 where Ammons builds up the picture of weather in great detail which introduces the theme of the body along with it. The image of the poet waking up in the morning "fairly level with the tide" with the sensation of dust right in his throat is part of the reality of weather, a thought Ammons endorses, when he winds up the section with images of "ice on the windshield" which for Ammons are "the crusty vestments of day."

Throughout Ammons the feeling of old age is linked to weather, thus heightening the impression that weather activates the consciousness that creates its own images of the body, a technique obvious in section 66. After an elaborate discussion on the problems of a categorizing mind, and its relation to the problems of the one and the many which creates an impression

of abstraction and difficult reading, Ammons returns finally to the reality of the local, the particular, and the concrete in a passage that brings together weather and the body:

> . . . what,
> April 23rd and still not a daffodil : suddenly as if a
> bright bird had passed , one is old : one dozes forgetful of
> what one was for :a suspension of interrelationships . . .
> (S, 40)

Bodily sensations as determined by weather appear again in section 98 where Ammons introduces the consciousness of the body only in the final line of the section after painstakingly constructing an elaborate picture of the weather:

> The sun's still a ruddy burnishing fire in the lower
> branches of the
> tamarack: this afternoon I thought Jove had come to get
> me walked
> into a corridor of sunlight swimming showering with
> turning shoals
> of drift pollen . . . (S, 54)

The poet, trapped in this landscape of motion, suddenly becomes conscious of the body influenced by being a part of the landscape from which no escape is possible, a thought that Ammons articulates in unambiguous terms stressing the central theme of interrelatedness when he writes: "I sneezed: my / eyes watered: the intimacy was sufficient: nothing is separate"(S, 54). The same interrelatedness between the concrete and the

abstract, the universal and the particular, operates in *Sphere* through his images of the body. In section 141 the entire cycle of life - its beginnings and endings, is brought within the frame of discussion only to be finally localized and particularized to the images of the body of an old mother:

> . . . (the old mother ,thin- white thick-jawed ,feels her way but barefooted ,out to the mailbox: nothing : all the fucking finished, all the sweet terrifying children grown up and blown away, just the geraniums in the tire watered everyday, fussed at ,plucked:) let me tell you how I get up in the morning . . . (S , 73)

The return is to a reality of time and space thus signalling a return to the concrete, the personal and the local, which comes to be associated with the body.

The theme of the body in *Sphere* is thus linked to weather in a cluster of images that acts as a counterpoint to the universal problems abstractly treated in *Sphere*. Body and weather thus conjointly create an idea of an experience that is rooted in the senses, thus making *Sphere* more palpable and nearer to common experience for the reader. A sense of the body in weather becomes an event linking the near and the far, the mundane and the ethereal, the spiritual and the physical and is the logic that explains the larger structure of a long poem like *Sphere*.

The Snow Poems which Alex Albright calls a "chronicle of season's change, as well as one man's change at middle age" [13] shows the deepening dependency of the image of the body on the experience of the seasons. Ammons does not romanticize the body and the treatment of the body is not different from the treatment of the landscape in which it is placed. Both are characteristic of the strain of realism that becomes increasingly strong and important as his poetry matures.

In *The Snow Poems* Ammons explores the impact of weather and how it modifies our perception of reality. Weather, for Ammons, becomes a symbol of time and place, which one cannot escape. A sense of fate with its attendant notions of the inevitable and inseparable decides the impression of the body where one is forced to realize that biology is fate.

For Ammons, both body and weather are experiences easily related to the senses. Both are in a way resistant to the philosophical falsifications and modifications that one might create, and both stand for a reality hard to ignore, and connote a kind of timelessness in that the essential experience of weather and body, much has not changed; both resist theoretical experience and favour sense experience at its raw.

A sense of the body and age in the context of weather indirectly appears first in "Here I Sit Fifty in the", where an oblique style is adopted by Ammons with no body directly visible. But the poem is significant in that it brings together the

thoughts of aging and of the body in a context of weather and the seasons. The poem begins with a clear indication of age:

> Here I sit, fifty in the
> Mid-seventies, the 28th of the ninth cedar berries
> reddening a veil, vine leapage
> and leafage red or yellow . . . (SNP, 7)

The reality of age is deeply entrenched in the reality of weather and Ammons proceeds to look at the world out side:

> the sky mixed
> after pure days of rain,
> coolishness and windishness, most
> birds gone (SNP ,7)

It is within this notion of time and space defined by a constant change as weather that the realization of the poet's situation is articulated:

> (in a time of)
> failing powers, physical,
> sexual, intellectual, artistic,
> bellesletteristic, optimistic . . . (SNP, 7)

The body is not directly visible here but the theme is unmistakably one of body and of course of the mind, a consciousness that is modified and even heightened by a sense of place and time, which in turn is a sense of weather.

The same oblique reference to the body and age occurs in "Early October" where the sense of the age Ammons introduces at the end of a passage, which is essentially a passage on weather. The last line of the first stanza "I am at 50 Octobery" is only a buildup of the landscape in weather, which begins in the opening lines of the poem:

> Early October,
> fally, papery, yellowy,
> watery , raggedy,high
> skimmy clouds, brooky
> (last week's rains,
> now run off . . . (SNP, 14)

The poem carries further the sense of the body as transient and ephemeral:

> nothing to dwell on, astonishment right
> into startled grief,
> the rising of the settled knowledge that
> in a short time all here will
> clear and go (SNP, 14)

The passage applies well to both the sense of age and of the weather since the sameness of the underlying logic of weather and the body is already hinted at in the beginning of the poem. This passage on life, which smacks of philosophy, is replaced by an image of the seasonal changes:

> why speak of that now,
> the pears

hard green after frost's first smart
and apples purple-ruddy . . . (SNP, 15)

These references to weather serve to recognize the significance of the concrete and Ammons's priority of the concrete experience over the abstract.

The idea of the human body in Ammons's poetry occasionally appears as part of society, which for him is limited almost to a dozen people. Yet the images of people in his poetry are greatly related to the sense of the body, sickness, death and minor ailments and they appear in the context of weather as in "When In Early", where weather and the seasons form the frame work or setting in which the image of the body appears. After a long passage which charts the experience of weather of which Ammons wishes to "save a cubic mile" of the landscape "for August!" (SNP, 32), he recollects the experiences of the year and the body figures very powerfully in his thoughts:

. . . the inner ring
of relatives in trouble with
their teeth ,fixing ,lumbago,
so and so's cousin's pill
in the wrong end . . . (SNP, 32)

The reality of the body, Ammons has proved, is once again part of weather. Heightened by a sense of time and place which is a time and place greatly experienced as part of weather, body becomes not anything abstract and distant but so near and

powerful an experience like weather that the thought of eliminating its presence becomes futile.

Ammons repeats the technique of bringing together weather and the body in "The Arc", where a very elaborate description of the gastric distress felt by him is presented. The villain is a bolus of air for which Ammons offers advice, which is worth quoting since it shows the strain of realism that Ammons adopts in the construction of the image of the body:

> . . . lift your arms, your hands clasped
> behind your head and
> let go of your belly or heave out your
> chest . . . (SNP, 35)

Ammons conveys the realistic picture of the body in a realistic language with no attempt to mystify the body and the sense of realism is further intensified by the larger reality of weather with which he concludes the poem:

> . . . this morning, much
> warmer, over fifty, but
> cloudy and rainy in the afternoon
> with a falling of temperature down
> to where a few snow flakes flew and
> so today was mostly dark and lowering
> and blustery and nice (SNP, 36)

Ammons occasionally introduces the theme of the body in phrases but does not bother to elaborate it. "There The Light Of Human Reason" and "Hard Lard" are two such poems and the

first of these has two images of the tooth cavity, a reality of the body, an unpleasant one which appears in the midst of the definitions of the landscape of the mind and the landscape proper. Ammons concludes the poem with references to weather and does not elaborate the experience of weather in keeping with the sketchy presentation of the body that he employs in the poem. The poem concludes with an image of the rough day where the reference to weather creates a reality within which transient thoughts of the body occur.

"Hard Lard" is significant for another reason that this poem has very elaborate pictures of weather, of the maple seeds, of the passing seasons, and the world of weather and the seasons finally comes to an end with the words "hard fart", unmistakably a reference to the body. Ammons's concept of the body is more inclusive and less conventional in that it does not limit itself to the boundaries of morality. The "colossally unreadable book"[14] that *The Snow Poems* was to Ammons becomes unreadable for its inclusion of vulgarity.

The idea of the morally permissible zones of the body admissible in poetry is continually violated in his writing. The 'shameful' aspects of the body appear in his poetry with great immediacy that they too attain a status similar to weather and one has to accept the body with all its unpleasantness like the unpleasantness of weather. Weather and the body, by the ways in which they appear in Ammons's poetry, come to stand for a

reality that refuses to be willed away, and Ammons lays bare both body and weather in all their aspects rejecting the traditional notions of the palatable. The complexity of the body, like that of weather, includes the unpleasant aspects, which forms the theme of his writing. Weather and body by their vastness of variety come to reinforce each other in Ammons's poetry when he places these two experiences together. It is this sense of the body, which does not shy away from the most intimate dimensions that one witnesses in "Dawn Clear":

> you want to be
> bull fucked when
> mine is no longer
> than a penguin (SNP, 71)

The thought of sex is finally rounded off with the thoughts of the sun and snow on the garage roof suggesting the reality in which such thoughts are placed. The thoughts of sex and of the body come within the range of the reality triggered off by the sense of weather and the seasons. But Ammons does not stress the causative role of weather in igniting sexual passions; rather, he presents them in a pattern of disjunction, which is repeated in "In The Old", which begins with the references to the olden days in terms of the body though vaguely implied:

> In the old
> days
> of vaginal or coincidental,
> sprays (SNP, 73)

This sense of the body is interrupted by references to weather and the social activities, which are influenced by it:

> She said this afternoon that
> because of the snow squalls she
> might have to put a damper
> on her shopping expeditions. (SNP, 74)

In this context of weather, references to body reappear and images of pain and physical infirmity become more frequent towards the end of the poem:

> Namath, rib bruised, limped off the cold
> field today, Shea Stadium snowy, windy,
> four days before Christmas, Namath who
> broke all showing-them-how's expectations! (SNP, 74)

And the poem ends on an image of weather:

> it's after sun set
> cloudy
> cold and gray
> but tomorrow is
> to reach mid- thirties (SNP, 75)

Thoughts of the male body in the context of weather appear in the poem "Poetry Is The Smallest". The pattern is similar to "Hard Lard" and "Dawn Clear", where thoughts of weather either follow the thoughts on male anatomy or such observations on the male body are prefaced by elaborate descriptions of weather. Ammons builds up the minute-by-minute changes in the reality of weather when he observes:

a slice of clearing
widened over the ridge at sundown
and the sun stood in it in a minute,
And through the windows against
the walls it was very nice
say around four twenty ,
gold effluvia gone
by four twenty seven (SNP, 82)

This accurate passage where a record of weather in an exhaustive fashion is undertaken signifying a sharply perceptive consciousness concludes with a poet's image:

poet's friend of mine's
dick's so short
he can't pull it long enough
to pee straight with :
not to pee on
anybody by surprise
sideways he hunkers
into the urinal so far
he looks like to achieve ,
relief (SNP, 82)

The image of the poet that Ammons builds up here is not traditional but a shocking one and critics like DeRosa, and Peter Stitt have pointed out the graffiti of *The Snow Poems* and Steven Schneider's observations on *The Snow Poems* are relevant here:

> Surely American poets have talked about sex in a powerful and imaginative way. Ammons like Whitman before him, is not a

> genteel poet. He has demonstrated skill and exuberance in describing internal bodily processes and the sexual basis of life. The poet was feeling apparently reckless or fearless. [15]

Schneider's observation applies well to the image of the body that Ammons presents in "Poetry Is The Smallest". The body is presented in a language that belongs to the common sphere of language to reflect a common enough reality, a reality of the body, which in turn becomes a reality of weather. One witnesses in this poem what Helen Vendler calls "the coarse extending to the obscene"[16] which she calls "another of Ammons's mother tongues"[17] which reaches its culmination in *Glare*. Such a use of language, both in the treatment of weather and in the treatment of the body is unliterary thus contributing to the idea of the poet from which romantic baggage has been emptied of.

The technique of using vulgar language to suggest the preoccupation with the body in its more shameful aspects is witnessed in "Quilted Spreads" which, before it plunges into an experience of the body builds up an image of weather:

> quarter to ten and the sun's
> nothing, more in the south
> than east,
> leftover moon
>
> are you looking . . . (SNP, 106)

It is within this sense of weather, which marks the sense of time and space that Ammons makes a wish:

may a fart pule brown billows
about your earlobes

may your teeth acquire anal
longings and fly home

may your rump- grooving nose
plunge into the shot . . . (SNP, 106)

The violence of the images and the sense of repulsion are not lost in the picture of the landscape from which Ammons begins his train of thought, rather, the tone of an attempt to record the reality as clearly and precisely as possible is extended further into the ruminations on the body. The reader is part of the dialogue in the poem, a tendency very rare in Ammons when he discusses the body. Ammons looks at the body from the third person point of view or the first person narrative. Seldom does he make a statement where the reader is directly addressed, a technique more common in Beat Poetry where the morality of the reader is directly challenged and implicated. From these shocking physical images Ammons takes the reader through the thoughts of weather with the images of the "colorless, clear, / frigid polar life"(SNP, 107). The reality of the landscape, Ammons here seems to convey, is as unpleasant as the reality of the body.

Ammons continues in "Dung Ball, Round Grave Yard" the same technique where the image of the landscape rich in details

of weather is part of the impression of the body that Ammons constructs in the poem:

> the upland bog!
> a flat clearing
> means pond-water snowed under,
> and brown-shambled fringe
> broken high from
> by right cattails
> smart and clean as pricks (SNP, 112)

This is followed by a return to the experience of the body, which is rare in Ammons in that he refers to Sigmund Freud since such references point to a world away from the one of direct experience. Freud is implicated when Ammons writes:

> bog
> clearing
> prick freud
> ruined everything
> tops in scoring . . . (SNP, 112)

Ammons reproaches the intellectual attitude that rejects the experience of the body as primarily physical. Body ceases to be body in such an attitude. He does not attempt to elaborate his distaste for the intellectual attitude but returns to the image of weather:

> it looks like today
> though it commenced
> a year isn't going
> to amount to much

gray skies
meal- like gritty
snow enough
to make running whirls . . . (SNP, 112)

Weather, once again, along with the experience of the body, for Ammons, comes to stand for all that is against the abstract mode of experiencing reality. The uninhibited articulation of the images related to sex comes up in a context of weather again in "I See Downhill a Patch", where weather slowly emerges:

in a full radiance
the morning having broken from
the very skin of sun rise
bright and
unrelenting and here just
past now
the windows beam,
the floor scattered with
the falling lumber of light:
thousands in war have lost
their hands . . . (SNP, 115)

This 'innocent' landscape is suddenly disrupted by an image of sex bordering on the surreal:

She stuffed vulvas in the
cracks, hammered the main
labiums together with
vaginas and stapled
the clitorises up . . . (SNP,115)

This surrealistic passage is returned to the present and a conclusion in a language not of the surreal but of the real follows:

> . . . till it was
> to the point he
> couldn't get a thing in there .
> this is your spotty reporter
> folks (SNP ,115)

"The Stomach Is Quite" continues the pattern that Ammons adopted at times in his attempts to find a correspondence between the mind and the landscape. Body becomes a landscape in this poem and a journey metaphor is resorted to. For Ammons who has used such images of the journey through the world out side where weather is the dominant mode of experience, it is only logical that he explores the same possibilities in his preoccupation with the body. Writing on the remarkable nature of the body, Ammons notes:

> The stomach is quite
> a development
> on the esophagus and
> if cross-country is
> efficient . . . (SNP, 117)

The attention to the minute details, which has characterized his writing in general, is not absent when he writes of the intestines as representing some kind of "winding parlousness"(SNP, 115). The shameful aspects cannot be held away for long from

Ammons's preoccupation with the body and they appear though veiled:

> . . .appallingly
> pretentious blocks of
> paydirt
> it goes on trickling under
> there, eventually reappearing
> enunciating
> Big , BIG savings on all
> units (SNP, 117)

And the poem concludes with a repulsive but shockingly real image of the houseflies. This final return is also a return to the external world though the implications may be slightly strained. Human anatomy becomes the subject of poetry here, which is also a part of his belief of what constitutes poetry. On the relation between science and poetry and the question of the unpoetic nature of science Ammons told Jim Stahl:

> I don't know. I think things right in the center of the humanities can be very unpoetically treated, and I think you can go, on the other hand, to what is considered to be the antipoetic and find there the chief manifestation of poetry. I don't think that there is any kind of prescription or circumscription that should say to a person, "Look here and not there for poetry." [18]

Ammons here echoes Whitman and Wordsworth who have expressed their belief in the possibility of breaking down the boundaries of science and poetry.

The detailed objective buildup of the human anatomy in a poem where weather is a dominant presence, appears in "Nature As Waterfalls", where the reality of weather which Ammons builds up is the frame in which thoughts of the body are placed:

> . . . this not an
> evening land but a
> morning too early to make anything out:
> the ridge fills our moment
> and, time's fill, fills time:
>
> there is no news like snow news : (SNP, 120)

Ammons looks at the human body in a manner that is not out of place in a textbook of Anatomy for a layman. Technical terms are almost eliminated, and only those that are a part of a common vocabulary are admitted that the sense of a felt reality is not lost. This anatomy lesson of Ammons is in keeping with his early poems on the body, in that Ammons has not attempted an eliminatory practice, which would be in keeping with conventional images of man. Ammons's inclusiveness which he practices in the poem helps to create an image of man whose complexity stems from the very aspects which are considered ugly and are cleverly omitted from the image of man conceived in traditional thought which builds up a sanitized notion of the human being.

Ammons's preoccupation with the process and motion is obvious when he makes the statement at the end of the graphic picture of the internal organs and their function:

> larger hunks of guts (nice, necessary,
> so precisely made finally
> the mechanisms of holding
> and releasing
> man is a motion through
> variations on a tube (SNP ,121)

This statement is reinforced by the reality of weather, which conveys the impression of man as motion through the variations of weather. Though the correspondence is not forcefully stated or explicitly discussed, Ammons manages to leave the hint through the record of minute changes of weather suggesting the idea of weather as motion which by its spatial proximity makes the link fairly feasible.

The reference to Freud appears again in "When I Think Of The Poet" where the technique is a repeat of "Hard Lard" and "Nature As Waterfalls" where a passage on the body is preceded and followed by references to weather. In "When I Think Of The Poet", one reads:

> (some weeds
> that stand through winter
> collect
> snow blossoms
> bigger than their summer

blooms) (SNP, 130)

The image of the seasons is suddenly interrupted without any logical progression by a reference to sex and Sigmund Freud:

Sigmund took our
head out of
the clouds and
hung it between
our legs .
hello
in
there (SNP ,131)

This thought, which is a product of the intellect, is contrasted with the image of gum surgery that is more real, being nearer to the experience of the body. The return to the concrete begins with the phrase "gum surgery" and is further carried forward by the image of weather with which the poem ends:

a lot of sunshine today now falling in
gold vertical striping against
the
garage and breaking to
fall upon the roof
a glorious coldness and brightness
antibacterial as saliva
or vultureshit (SNP, 131)

"Produce And Fructify" brings together again images of the body and weather. But Ammons, though he lavishes a great deal of attention on weather, the images of the body are not

sufficiently well developed; the poem is significant in that Ammons has not let go of his technique of the earlier poems. At the very beginning of the poem itself Ammons offers a picture of weather:

> a snow so misty, melty,
> and thick
> only careful looking sees it:
> it does not resemble itself
> on garage or grayass . . . (SNP, 162)

It is in this reality that the sense of the body arises in an intense manner, though short-lived:

> . . . my
> teeth and victory stick
> dream of being
> hard on
> cavities (SNP, 162)

The private aspects of the body and the more visible sense of the body that Ammons explores in his poetry appear often after a strong sense of the landscape and the impact of weather. The preoccupation with the shameful aspects appears again in "The Temperature Rose 15 Degrees over" and such thoughts form an integral part of the awareness of the weather, which he displays:

> 10:10 a.m.: it has cleared
> up sunny and warmed to the thirties:
> the snow is not rushing in to melt
> but clumps have damp edges . . . (SNP, 176)

This is the context in which the sense of the body is experienced and admitted; a thought, which concludes the poem:

> on the walk a fart worked its
> way loose
> probing through like a variable
> long balloon
> till wind to wind it broke free
> so generous and satisfying (SNP, 177)

Ammons often gives attention to the minor ailments associated with the body and its disturbances are often incorporated into his writing. The poem "When One Is A Child One Lives" is very much a poem about the sense of the body, but it does not appear in isolation, rather, it is a part of the sense of the weather, a realization which Ammons conveys in his observations on weather and the external landscape with which he is confronted, observations that become part of the poem when he writes, "the weather cooled and calmed / into four-o'clock / sunny, nice"(SNP, 182). This image of weather is immediately followed by an image of sickness and old age though not explicitly stated:

> I look out
> the window
> but the only
> thing coming
> is another tooth out (SNP ,182)

Thoughts on aging, sickness, and discomfort, thoughts of the body in *The Snow Poems* are predominantly oriented towards the persona of the poet. Occasionally the reader is acknowledged and challenged and one such poem where the body figures is "You Can Tell", where thoughts of sex, of weather and of body merge. Weather is very much present in the poem; it is against the backdrop of weather that Ammons attempts a poem within the poem, though not obviously termed a sub poem, a dramatic presentation is adopted by Ammons which becomes a counterpoint to the mode employed in the larger narrative. Ammons introduces the theme of a quarrel between a wife and husband which erupts into a language of abuse where a profusion of images related to sex prevails:

> may hernias
> rot in your
> soup! the disgusting
> husband said:
> may
> cocksuckers ululate . . . (SNP, 210)

And the poem concludes with an image of worms, which finds an exhaustive expression later in his long poem *Garbage.*

"It's a Wonder the Body" exhibits a pattern very common in Ammons's writing, the pattern of an elaborate build-up of the image of the body in scientific terms, which is immediately disrupted by the reality of time and space. The images of time

and space for Ammons are connected with weather. He glorifies saliva in very scientific terms:

> wonderous devising
> containing
> water, mucin , protein, salts,
> and a starch-splitting
> enzyme
> that has been accorded little
> common knowledge . . . (SNP, 213)

This lecture on the body, is suddenly interrupted by a picture of "a gray warm day / with sprinkles / not met on concrete" (SNP, 213). This concluding image effectively erases the lesson of the body; the concrete takes over once again in Ammons's poetry.

Some poems of Ammons, which are predominantly on weather, have occasional images of the body though they are not dealt at length. "It is April 1" is a case in point, where amid elaborate descriptions of weather the phrase "34 bust" appears which conveys the impression of the body as constantly appearing along with thoughts of weather and underscores the feeling that thoughts on the body are inextricably linked to weather however transient it might be. Such a passing reference is again found in "It Doesn't Rain", where a detailed description of weather is followed by an oblique image, which refers to the body when Ammons writes, "I see into so much every day / said the Obstetrician" (SNP, 224). The idea of seeing, by its particular placing in the poem, applies both to the body and to the

weather. The image of peering into the female body is immediately cut off by a return to the experience of weather:

> mostly cloudy at sunrise but
> now turning clear blue in
> spots and a turning up and down
> of light . . . (SNP, 225)

The poem closes with an image of weather reinforcing the feeling that the sense of the body does not exist independent of the sense of weather. In "My Father Used To Tell of an" the memory of yesterday, which turns out to be the memory of weather is interrupted by the image of the poet's father who died "with not a leg to stand on"(SNP, 230). Ammons begins the poem with thoughts on "yesterday's snow" and concludes it with an image of today, which is also one of weather as the following lines testify:

> today's spanking bright blue
> (gold willows and green evergreens)
> and chilly ,a
> little fresh windy , great day for a walk (SNP ,231)

The sense of the body and its inevitable loss is a realization made possible and more painful by weather as in "Today Will Beat Anything" which begins, "Today will beat anything /a full day of clarity /up to seventy" (SNP, 242). This reality brings thoughts of the body not as an abstract statement

but sufficiently made palpable by a set of images that point to the physical existence of the body:

> . . . to think that
> one's body, including the
> back of one's hand, one's
> fingernails, the calves
> and ankles, the face, these
> things one's own, are also
> implicated and will die
> too . . . (SNP, 243)

This thought of the reality of the body is finally rounded off by an experience of the landscape:

> . . . the bushes are being
> sprayed from a distance green
> will the universe become
> forever dark:
> once in a lifetime (SNP, 243)

The sense of the loss of the body receives substantiation and finds expression for Ammons again in the reality of weather. The technique is repeated in "My Structure Is, Like the" where the stocktaking of weather admits the sudden awareness of the body which Ammons expresses: "I have teeth missing trailer trucks/ ride through" (SNP 257). The hyperbolic tone serves to intensify the reality of the experience that Ammons speaks of later in "Drip Drip" a long poem on the theme of the body. Here, as elsewhere, Ammons builds an image of weather in

metaphoric terms and similes for which he never had much fascination:

> drip drip
> the sky is drying
> hot snow
> the sky is like water
> standing in rowed field ! (SNP, 272)

The sense of the place is replaced by an image of the body in realistic terms focusing on the body fluids, that an escape from the reality of the body becomes as impossible as an escape from the landscape which is seen in terms of elemental phenomena in which it is placed; the association is difficult to miss when Ammons concludes: "mucus it cannot snoo/Vomit at forty too /gush" (SNP, 272). The reality of the body and the unpleasant aspects of it are placed side by side with weather, a reality equally unpleasant. Thus "Drip Drip" the last poem that considers the theme of the body becomes a fitting conclusion to the notion of the coexistence of the themes of body and weather that manifests as a spatial pattern in unambiguous terms. The vertical reality and linearity, the connotations of which having been sufficiently explored, Ammons in this poem opts for a different pattern which acknowledges the independence of weather from body and not vice versa.

The image of the body does not figure much in *Sumerian Vistas*, it is not a powerful presence, it appears only rarely, but

the attitude of Ammons has not changed. Ammons continues to see the body as an experience more physical than psychological or intellectual and the physical sense of the body that Ammons projects is largely due to the experience of the landscape in which he situates it which in turn heightens it. The occasional images of the body that the reader encounters are not images of sickness or impending death but the images of ordinary, normal insignificant moments, but nevertheless, moments placed in the midst of experiences of the landscape as when Ammons writes of a "high middling afternoon" with the rain around. In this experience of weather Ammons writes of "the wind getting to and up our coats /and even gently into our pants" (SV, 6). This experience of the body is part of the rain in the landscape and Ammons notes:

> . . . we would not be daunted,
> the rain also ,though sparsely and
> smallishly prickling us,
> it being forced forward stingingly by the gusts
> the evergreens and cloud rolled:
> we heard . . . (SV, 6)

The experience of the body is lightly touched upon but the relevance of the elaborate description of weather in this final image is significant for the close link between body and weather that Ammons acknowledges:

> . . . we noticed the
> forsythia standing half -out: we

> noticed the honeysuckle bushes filled
> with tiny green lotus temples where last
> week ice had hung cold and dry . . . (SV, 7)

Garbage, which Schneider calls a "long meditation on nature and mutability"[19], is the result of a very specific American experience. He continues his preoccupation with the body which he explored in great detail in *Tape* and *The Snow Poems*. The idea of the human body as a space where a regulation of the waste occurs every moment is further studied in *Garbage* where the setting of the poem itself is a world of garbage. Daniel Tobin's observation of "the celebration of waste in *Garbage* as yet another avatar of order in the wake of degeneration"[20] is to the point. The body comes to be considered as a waste and its progression becomes the progression of a gradual disintegration and decay, and the final disposal which goes beyond death, is also within the scope of *Garbage*.

The image of the body that emerges in *Garbage* has nothing abstract about it, it is not mediated by any philosophy other than the one warranted by a concrete observation of the facts that the body exhibits under the influence of the passage of time, and the view of life that Ammons advocates is not at all promising. The body as a physical experience, that Ammons tries to convey is more powerfully felt in a state of pain and disease rather than in a state of pleasure and this preoccupation turns *Garbage* into a dark vision of life. The constant flux of life is acknowledged and acceptance is the only

approach and consolation feasible, Ammons reiterates in *Garbage*. In *Garbage*, the sense of being trapped overrides all attempts to evade the consciousness of the body.

Garbage becomes a long and sustained treatment of the impression that Ammons has always conveyed, thought of reality as always physical, however hard one may try to distance it by a process of abstraction or intellectual discussion. The attitude Ammons entertains towards the body is highly dynamic and it is an aspect of his notion of reality.

Often in Ammons's descriptions of the body one can discern a progression. From a preoccupation with the poet's own body as disintegrating or as under the influence of an external landscape to an awareness of a larger world outside and of people suffering from pain and disease, the vision of Ammons widens in *Garbage* and there is a very powerful presence of the emotional problems that the poet had to experience on such occasions of disintegration. The intensity that is often conveyed is nearer to a religious experience and the sense of the self that he constructs on such occasions is subject to rapid transitions of moods and easy susceptibility to emotionalism, seldom under control, which the poet sees no reason to suppress or be ashamed of.

Garbage differs from his early writing in that it does not try to attempt to relate the experience of the body to the experience of writing, a pattern that defined the drift of thought

in *Tape* and some of the poems of *The Snow Poems*. The excited image of the self of his early poetry is replaced by a somewhat distanced image of the poet trying to record the problems of the body, the losses and the devastation that it has to undergo in a tone, which is always under control of the situation that Ammons is trying to describe. Old age and disease become the theme of *Garbage* and the significance is not to be missed that contemporary life tends to regard disease and old age as garbage. Though a direct relationship is not explicitly stated by Ammons the larger framework of *Garbage* within which these thoughts are considered makes it difficult to arrive at a variant reading.

The landscape of Ammons's early poetry, which has been almost uninhabited, is replaced by one, where one confronts men and women who are seldom happy and healthy. An impression of a tired feeling of existence is uppermost in the mind of the reader. As a result of this preoccupation with the idea of the human body as ravaged by diseases, life comes to be defined for Ammons in *Garbage* not in terms of some metaphysical or religious terms, rather it comes to be simply and forcefully explained as a variety of diseases which do not offer any space for any persistent or coherent thought of philosophy. *Garbage* with its central image of waste precludes the possibility of religious solutions in moments of physical weakness, and Daniel Tobin's observation is significant:

> To be sure, *Sphere* conjures images of cosmogony in ways that pique the religious imagination, but not so boldly as does *Garbage* where, from the outset, the waste mound that serves as the work's recurring center and conceit is pictured as a sacred pyramid up which garbage trucks circle as they "intone the morning", their garglings become unlikely prayers. [21]

Experiences of the body sooner or later, Ammons communicates, have to be the experience of disease. The loneliness that accompanies modern life, which is essentially a concomitant of an attitude which values life in terms of productivity and the utilitarian possibilities, is hinted at occasionally in *Garbage* though, a critique sufficiently elaborate and incisive is curiously absent. Ammons conveys the impression that body is sufficient, its primacy is always to be acknowledged, and consequently mind is superficial or extraneous to have a richer experience of life. Some continuity can be established between *Tape* and *Garbage* in that both try to situate the body in the context of weather. *Tape* is more personal where the body is the body of the poet trying to articulate his problems in poetry and the focus is directed towards the problems of writing and the role the body plays in it. *Garbage* does not address the question of the problem of writing and its relation to body, and in it Ammons is more concerned with the reality of a body which is not his own.

Body offers the poet yet another significant space to study the idea of process. As in his early writing his sick father appears, but it is his acquaintances and the sick people that he

meets in hospitals and old age homes who figure prominently in *Garbage,* and in a way they are a waste to him. Physical experience of the body, Ammons knows, defeats all attempts to theorize the body and the body thus becomes a reminder of the limits of thought. Body as process, drastically reduces the significance of other notions of process, except that of weather. The physical aspect of experience is stressed when he writes of the responses possible to process:

> . . . we rise in the morning
> to a crusty world headed nowhere ,doorless:
> our chests burn with anxiety and the river of
> anguish defines the rapids and straits in the pits of
> our stomachs . . . (G, 17)

Reality is ultimately physical for Ammons, and this realization runs throughout his treatment of process in *Garbage,* which adopts a notion of time that intensifies the experience of reality as greatly dependent on the body. Time comes to be understood as an experience of the body. The body is possible only in time, and no abstraction is entertained since this goes against the design that Ammons is trying to bring about in his poetry. Consequently, weather in *Garbage* is a device, which Ammons employs to enhance this feeling of the body as further being trapped in time in ways more than one. The preference for the body over the mind continues in *Garbage* though processes of the mind receive some attention. *Garbage* includes the idea of the processes of the mind to which he devotes some attention,

but the return is to the exterior, which is also a return either to the weather or to the body or to both. Often Ammons' poetry offers innumerable examples of these preferences in his expansive moods in a direct fashion. In the final evaluation, these examples help read the poem as one where process comes to mean not the process of the mind but that of the body.

A significant thought associated with the idea of process is the idea of visibility, which is contrary to the idea of abstraction, which by its very definition does not support the notion of visibility. It is the visibility of the process that fascinates the poet, which justifies the preoccupation with the body and weather. With his interest in the idea of experience as predominantly sensual with its consequent rejection of thought, it is only natural that Ammons is forced to return to the body and to weather continually, when he feels that discussions about the world of reality and theoretical speculations have crossed the limits set by such a notion of realty and experience. Ammons returns to celebrate the body and all it connotes. Such is the case in the lines that follow:

> mind having found its way through and marked
> out the course the intellect can be put by:
> one can turn to tongue, crotch, boob
> armpit , rock , slit . . . (G ,25)

It is significant to note that Ammons here brings together the body and the landscape together, two of his major

preoccupations. Passages which refer to the existence of the body as body often occur in the middle of some discussions which act as a counterweight to the expressions of reality that the poet undertakes occasionally and it is with this awareness of the body as a site of pain and suffering that some sections of *Garbage* begin. The sixth section of *Garbage* begins with a description of the body in pain:

> a pain in the knee or hip joint or warps and
> not in the leg muscles, and even strange , binding
> the twinges in the feet ought to cause you to include
> in the list of possibilities that the high
> arch in one of your feet has slipped . . . (G ,40)

From the image of the body in pain Ammons proceeds to look into the possibilities of the interrelationships that govern the body and the world, knowing very well the impossibility of isolating the active cause. The complexity of the network of life, Ammons admits, when he writes:

> thing are sustained by interrelations and
> variety but when something goes wrong who
> can isolate the active cause: an
> active ingredient often riding in a complex of
> contextual vectors . . . (G, 40)

The idea of relating the body to weather in which a sharper sense of the body may be available to the reader operates in his description of Ralf, suffering from terminal cancer of the brain. These incidents are packed with emotion, suffering and loss,

sorrow and sickness, and their place within the framework of weather adds to the pressure of time and the feeling of the body as part of the phenomena of weather and time. The temporal dimension of the experience is never lost sight of, rather the attention is constantly drawn to it that no attempt is made to transport the experience beyond the realm of the concrete. Weather thus intensifies the experience of time and the way the body is perceived and the meeting with Ralph is a trauma for the poet and the impression that it leaves on Ammons as the reader sees it, is greatly due to the impression of weather within which the experience is located. The poet is coming out of "Gordon Smith Hall on/a bright late May day, the blues /and greens outdoing each other" (G, 41), when a friend tells him to go and see Ralph in the car and the reality is simply stated without any attempt to circumlocution: "she said, but terminal cancer of the brain / and I said, terminal cancer of the brain and/ she said I found out a week ago" (G, 41). Ammons once again suggests that reality is so simple oppressive and crushing and that any attempt to evade it through language or any philosophy is doomed, Ammons realizes and writes:

> . . . departments grow haired and black haired
> and a shade away into white and dome- shine *at the top*
> the dissolve moves through tenure, or a job elsewhere,
> part-time, retirement, death . . . (G , 42)

It is in this context of the body that process comes to be discussed as unique. Since no two moments are the same, process is best understood as something irretrievable, further receiving an assurance from the body which as has been stressed moves on to its final disintegration that one can only say that "there never is / a department really, but a slow flow you can't step / in twice"(G, 42). The same grouping together of weather and the body continues later when after a discussion of the rain in the landscape the poet ventures out for a prophecy and this prophecy is not a very promising one since it builds up a future that holds 'promises' of sickness:

> I have seen the future; it just went by, put
> away : it advertises strokes, hip replacements,
> insulin shots ,sphygmomanometers or digital
> punches . . . (G ,46)

The image that Ammons presents here of old age, is complex and contemporary in that he has assimilated the medical advances that have come to influence old age and the quality of life in old age has definitely improved, Ammons consents implicitly, by his selection of this high-tech imagery but the body is never lost sight of when he admits: "there is an end to delays and /remedies, regimens and rehabs, another/ pathology interrupts following pathology"(G, 46). This feeling of irreparable decay which underlies and defines all existence which he voices, is a return to the experience of the body when he writes after

some abstract ruminations on reality and being: "existence records itself with the relief that existence/ ends/ that our windy houses crack their frames and spill" (G, 48). The body comes to be associated with decay and garbage in this long poem by its proximity not in theme alone but is also structurally supported since it occurs in spatial proximity. Helen Vendler's observation that in "*Garbage* Ammons's imagination is more actively committed to destruction than to transfiguration and restoration"[22] seems to be an accurate summing up of his realistic approach to the inevitable progression that the body is subjected to and the themes of garbage and bodily decay are interlaced in the poem consciously by Ammons as a strategy to efface the differences.

A literal search for the garbage in *Garbage* is often placed in the context of the thought of the body as inevitably subject to decay. The preoccupation with the body, Ammons powerfully suggests, is central to old age and in his observation of old age he presents thoughts and aspirations, however stupid they might be, which rely on the idea of the body. The "warm movement of a possibility to a cold acknowledgement" as Ammons terms this progression, is a depressing picture, a picture that takes its power from the thought of the immediate reality of the body which is subjected to "assaults on all sides of relapses and pains" (G, 53). This preoccupation with the body leads to the dissolution of its action in the context of old age

and Ammons does not treat death in its most crushing form namely the untimely death. Death in his poetry is a reality of middle age or even early old age but death does not walk in this world to crush the lives of the young and it is there along with age and the tone of acceptance that his poetry frequently conveys is a part of this quality of death as he sees and describes in his writing.

The journeys through the landscape that are not alien to him yield sights of sickness, old age, and physical infirmities which sustain the impression of pervasive decay and morbidity that comes to rule the world of *Garbage*. The framework of weather is mentioned at the beginning, the time is fixed as "early June morning in early June" and he proceeds to build up the image of weather and the people in the landscape. Correspondences are observed between people and weather when he notes:

> the people look a little ruffled, like yards
> trying to come out of icebound winters into
> springs, the old stocks still there ,the space
> of the new stuff not filled out . . . (G, 69)

From the merging of the landscape and people in weather, Ammons turns to look at the body of the people around him, and the sights are those of mutilation, pain, and deformity. Ammons, it is to be borne in mind does not attempt to romanticize or beautify the body. This is partly due to the

peculiar focus that he brings to bear on the body and the body's beauty is the beauty of the complexity and sophistication at the metabolic, anatomic, and evolutionary level not at the level of literary conventions. He desists from approaching the body through such conventions, most of which demand a grasp of the now, an admission of the importance of the present moment and an encouragement of a notion of time which forces the poet to see the present moment as precious. The transience of the body, to which Ammons's poetry constantly returns to, is framed within the idea of process and literary responses and conventions have no room or place in his writing and no echo of the accepted literary responses is to be found in his writing. The vocabulary that Ammons resorts to in his treatment of the body remains powerfully concrete:

> . . . affliction
> here, where the heavy woman, heavier than last
> fall, leans over to swish one knock knee past
> (check that rhyme)the other, affliction there
> where the wobbled- legged man leans over into his
> arm crutches, a four legged progression : aging
> women, drooped breasts under loose T-shirts
> toothless, big bellied, bald, broad-rumped,
> deaf . . . (G, 69)

Thoughts and images of the body continue to appear in the context of the seasons when Ammons writes of the hospital ward of diabetics where he finds his father. In a passage of great

control and precision prefaced by an image of winter Ammons writes: "(clematis which looks as dead and / drained in winter as baling wire transports in / spring such leaves and blooms!" (G, 91). The description of his father is a classic example of the extreme care Ammons takes in the presentation of details. With some striking images of a catheter leading to the fuel tank and the image of the father slumped in bed Ammons succeeds in acknowledging the reality of the body as something, which is difficult to ignore. This image of the body is part of a belief of Ammons which Helen Vendler terms an "awareness that everything in the universe loses function and is discarded as trash."[23] Death is the logical culmination of this image and it appears late though slightly personified. The void that accompanies old age, the narrowing circle of experience, the loneliness, and the innermost circle of the body as the only experience of old age, are Ammons's powerful preoccupations in *Garbage*. The loneliness he writes of is curiously socially non-specific and is objectified by the imagery that he uses:

> the world has starved to a single peak ,
> you and what you know alone ,with no one
> else in the world to nod recognizing what you
> say and recall without explanation . . . (G, 93)

It is in terms of landscape imagery that he articulates the condition of old age. His widening scope of experience acknowledges the narrowing circle of the experience of old age,

which attests the body as the most persistent condition of experience.

The preference for the concrete and the direct, results in the sudden presentation of the images of the body and sex. Thoughts about mind, conclusions about clarity and truth and of the accommodation of diverse experiences are suddenly intercepted by thoughts of sex:

> . . . some of these short guys are so
> well hung they'd give an inch off their dicks
> if they could put it under their heels
> and the skinny-hipped women ,double moons up front
> while with some of these big rears ,they don't
> have enough to stick your lips to . . . (G, 100)

The preoccupation with the body induces a condition of self-consciousness which questions the propriety of considering themes of the body to be part of poetry and he raises the question: "but who reports taking the leak or blithely oozing / a porch fart well, it seems okay to mention/constipation (the higher mortality) because / nobody ever goes" (G, 105). What constitutes the idea of self in Ammons is an understanding deeply rooted in the experience of the body. Ammons's preference for the physical appears in his definition of man, the tone is one of a lecture on anatomy and an anatomical basis to the definition is sought:

> . . . we're meat wrapped around
> knotchbone spine we can't untangle ourselves

productively from stalwart lacing, bone, artery,
nerve compact . . . (G ,105)

This 'low view of man' is a critique of a tradition that assigns baseness to any definition of man, which takes its meaning from the body. The picture of sickness returns later in his poetry when he discusses the image of an old history teacher in a state of senility and loneliness "sitting in a ward so and so muttering"(G, 112). These images of the body are frequently placed between discussions of the representation of reality, of classifying reality and the possibility of accommodating the contradictions that the motions of reality always generate. For Ammons "poetry is not logic /or knowledge or philosophy/ it is action"(G, 112). This is interrupted by the picture of the history teacher. Ammons acknowledges the priority of the body towards the end of *Garbage* where he calls mind the saviour which comes to one's rescue only if one admits its existence. The law of the mind is "the zombie land of totally present and the totally absent" though he concedes that "it absorbs the distractions from the actual." *Garbage* which ends with the discussion of the significance of feeling, emotion, and the quality of poetry, ends with a discussion in terms of the winter landscape:

if I reap the peripheries will I
get hard weed seed and dried roughage
like teasel and cattail and thrush above snow
in winter, pure design, lifeless in a painted hold (G, 121)

Garbage is about the processes of life, as they appear in modern life in the most powerful and compelling manner. The physical landscape of contemporary life that he begins exploring from his *Collected Poems* in a marginal and sketchy way receives an exhaustive treatment in this volume. The idea of process in contemporary life has nothing abstract about it; on the contrary, it is as physical as the garbage dumping sites that lie close to life. The immediate reality that Ammons conveys is the reality of the waste on which he places philosophical speculations on the processes that govern life. The idea of waste is accepted with its ecological associations strewn across the poem in the scenes of the landscape that are not unspoiled ones but which clearly bear the scars of modernity throwing up shadows of suspicion on the notions of unqualified progress. The process that governs change that brings about transformations whose indispensability makes life bearable comes to include in *Garbage* poetry and its transformative value of experiences of reality. *Garbage,* which begins with the physical surveillance of the landscape steeped in waste, enlarges itself in the course of its motion to accommodate and ponder into the similar conditions of waste existing in the mind and the possibilities of disposing of the waste in the mind. Both these garbage are found to be within the reaches of time and change and the garbage disposal by the municipal man is paralleled by the poet who disposes the waste through the fire of

poetry. The processes of the mind and the processes of the body are likened at a later stage and *Garbage* comes to signify an important meaning in the context of the human body, and how its dynamics will be toppled over a period of time to form the waste, a waste that finally makes death possible.

The figure in the landscape one came across in *Collected Poems* was the lonely figure in a socially nonspecific landscape exposed to winds, rain, and the seasons with rare encounters with other human beings. However, the figure in *Garbage* is driven by the enormity of the signs of modern life, of a feeling of being a part of the systems of modern life and also of a mechanization that has come to stay which depersonalizes and puts to doubt the promises of a clean and bright future. The figure is the figure of a family man and it is in this respect that the later figure differs. Though occasionally, the figure in the early poetry has glimpses, and displays insights into the problems of this universe as increasingly ecological and environmental, sustaining treatments are few with the exception of "Extremes And Moderations".

Death has not disappeared from *Garbage;* it is seen as a part and as a necessary prerequisite both of life and garbage. Garbage comes to define life and it comes to define death too. One encounters death in the form of squirrels, chipmunks, and cats, which rot in the landscape. These manageable wastes are managed by weather and the balances of ecosystems in the form

of cats and crows, buzzards and vultures. The meditation on the dissociation of the body, which began as personal experience, grows here to view life in various forms and its various stages of disappearance. The romantic self is no more visible when one reaches *Garbage*, it fades into the image of a man, thoroughly realistic, who situates himself amidst the debris of modern urban life and the romantic critique is seen to be continuing in an implicit way but it is the social man that is uppermost in the reader's consciousness in *Garbage*. Process comes to mean the death of the body as a rhythm to which resistance is neither meaningful nor advised. Process in *Garbage*, Ammons reiterates, means an interrelatedness of all forms of life, which demands a respect for the same and an indifference to the hierarchies created by various value systems. With the idea of the physical presence of process in the landscape Ammons moves to the process of the mind and to the entertaining of the possibility of seeing poetry itself as a process akin to the transformations that come to rule the physical waste produced by modern life. No attempt is made to construct an alternative sphere of life. In his later poetry, Ammons realizes the inefficacy of imaginative escapes. It underscores the only life we have and is thus more realistic. Though the poem is titled *Garbage*, the homeliness and often the physical aspect of the term are conveyed to the reader through the journeys through the garbage piles of America and *Garbage* is equally about poetry,

body, and even sex. The observation of the world's indifference to the phrase "garbage disposal" becomes both a critique of modern life and a departure point for the poet to ruminate on the complex levels of meanings associated with the term. That the intellectual exercise itself might be garbage is also hinted at and the body comes to be preferred over intellectual activities. Such a judgment is in turn undermined by a sustained treatment of the body itself as garbage and all existence and all stages of existence, thus Ammons conveys, becomes garbage sooner or later. The vision of man in the landscape that Ammons puts forward in *Garbage* is realistic but not bleak. It is nearer to Eastern philosophy with its meditations on process, a cool acceptance of those changes as inevitable and the experience of a peace with oneself, ideas not very common to Western Thought. The notion of time that *Garbage* conveys, though linear, does not carry the connotations of tragedy; death is very much here but little sorrow is admitted since it is part of the transformations that Ammons accepts as inevitable. The fluidity of reality is the major thought in *Garbage*, the attempt is to recapture and explain this reality but the focus is not on the loss but always on the becoming that so convincingly explains life. The 'is' is not significant in *Garbage*, and it never was in Ammons.

The garb of reality is always a garb in process and it is also the garb of age which comes to define the idea of process

especially the idea of the body, be it human or otherwise. Age brings with it the idea of time and life and all amount to garbage in the end. Yet this void that looms large in his writing does not strike the reader as pessimistic, the terminal notion that is associated with death does not receive much stress in his writing that the reader's thought is not kept for long on the morbidity of death. The environmental sense of *Garbage* is due to the landscape that he allows in the poem but is also due to the frequent references to this disposable nature of waste. Biologically degradable is the watchword of the poem, and the landscape that he presents is ominous in that it carries telltale signs of the waste that do not go away but simply are very much there as a reminder and remainder of the contemporary life that has overstepped its bounds. Implicated in the writing are the processes of the mind that create such waste, a hallmark of the mindset that ignores the future in its obsession with the present. A physical presence of the body is curiously nonphysical in that it decomposes into its components, which makes further life possible. *Garbage* is an ode to the lowly forms of life that sustain the cycles of life, they are the vehicles of change, they breakup life to make life possible and the sustained interest in the minute thus receives further justification in that they are significant in the healthy forms of life. As a counterpoint to these rhythms of life and renewal, Ammons presents his awareness of the forces that threaten

these rhythms. The multiplicity of reality comes to accommodate the diverse and the conflicting presences that make up modern life, gone is the romantic landscape and its quietude, instead, in its place, is a life that doesn't promise much and an awareness of the point of no return that doesn't leave room for any simple solutions to modern life haunts Ammons. The failure of romantic solutions thus becomes the mark of the 'progress' that life has made.

The obsession with the body, which first appeared in "So I said I Am Ezra", the first poem of *Collected Poems,* continues in *Brink Road,* and the sense of the body that Ammons allows here is anatomical rather than poetic. A sense of constant degeneration and decay underlies Ammons's perception of the body in the universe, human or otherwise. The notion of the inevitability that he attaches to the idea of the body is greatly due to the context in which it appears, a context of weather or the seasons, which heightens this consciousness of the body as constantly being marked by time, disease, old age, and finally death. This constant reminder of progressive decay indicates a tragic view of life that Ammons expresses aptly when he writes in "Greeting Verses" "a worm cores this world's doing" (BR, 18). The echoes of *Hamlet* are hard to miss, the morbidity of which reappears in "Capabilities", where Ammons writes of the sense of the body again in the last line of the poem where the idea of the body fluids often treated as a shameful aspect, a cultural

construct, is declared without any sense of shame in the image of the "remarkable sucked fizzy drinks burning the mucous" (BR, 32). This reality is a physical reality and goes well with a notion of experience where the sense of the concrete, which accompanies it, is of paramount importance in Ammons's worldview.

The body is again the theme in "Prey", where Ammons writes of an old man:

> The old man in a shimmy , his arms
> blotched bruises inches barefoot
> down the hall his head ticking
> in the deep stoop:
> the orderly slowed . . . (BR, 56)

These two poems set the attitude towards the body that *Brink Road* will take up. "Silvering Shadow" is the first poem of *Brink Road* where the theme of the body is placed in the context of weather in a direct fashion, and Ammons in the first three stanzas of the poem develops the setting:

> The frail-green woods bubble and peep, goldfinches
> thickening the branch-splayed heights.
> spring is here: warmer by the paling
> fence but nearly too cool
> in the open when lake wind sheets up over lawn's
> swell . . . (BR, 63)

After having fixed the frame of experience, as one of seasons, Ammons proceeds to look at "the bulgings and oozings of cancer

wards, the girl / stricken responsible after generous sex" (BR, 63). Ultimate reality for Ammons is the reality that is conveyed and experienced by the body, a feeling that he takes up in "Killing Stuff On" where elaborate descriptions of the landscape which for Ammons are defined largely by the impressions on it of the seasons and he concludes the poem with a response to this same landscape, a response not of the mind but of the body:

> . . . things shape
> themselves : still in the short-run , when
> I hear geese going over this late, my heart
> Swerves, my throat jumps, late , late. (BR, 105)

These lines reinforce the primacy of the body in Ammons's writing by suggesting that process and change are nothing but experience of the responses of the body. The process as a concept and an experience that includes the processes of the body elaborated in *Tape* and *The Snow Poems* is echoed in "An Improvisation For The Killers Of Meat" where Ammons writes of the metabolic process:

> the guts dwell slowly
> on a big feed
> holding it back for the membranes
> to nibbling polish away
> or rush a small order through to
> appease the responsive liver:
> the fat resides
> behind . . . (BR, 121)

The entire poem reads very much like a page from a textbook of anatomy, and Ammons limits the use of the scientific terminology that would make the experience of the body unreal, a caution that he takes, in keeping with his preference for common experience, a preference which Ammons makes very clear in "Marginals." Ammons here presents a picture of old women in which the idea of the body as it is commonly understood and experienced, is never lost sight of. Ammons takes pains to place the experience of the body in a context of weather when he writes:

> Some of these old widow women around here are roving
> loners: no matter how deep the snow or bitterly near
> zero the air, they are long- gaited out in their boots
> of a morning and gone . . . (BR,142)

The passage, in unambiguous terms, places the experience of the body in a context of weather and he elaborates the image of old age, which turns out to be an image of the body:

> . . . one's high hip spins outward
> every step, and one's eyes set ahead just above the
> trees,. . .
> .....
> I don't know where they go , probably not out to eat ,
> because they often don't have their teeth in . . . (BR, 142)

In "Beautiful Woman" Ammons does not resort to an elaborate build up of the seasons or of the body but tries to

present the body in a condensed and convincing manner as in a haiku poem. The poem is short enough to be quoted in full:

> The spring
> in
>
> her step
> has
>
> turned to
> fall (BR, 150)

What Ammons resorts to, is a technique of minimal expression and the poem is a fine example of how the seasons and the body come together in vital and refreshing ways in Ammons's imagination.

One encounters the same haiku technique in "Standing", where Ammons writes of a young woman standing on the bridge looking into the water throwing "rocks of old snow". The seasons here, are just mentioned in passing, in a single phrase "old snow" and the image of the body of the woman is conveyed in the poem in the posture in which he sees her:

> A young woman
> on the bridge tosses
> rocks of old snow
>
> over the rail and leans to
> watch them
> streak

down into the gorge . . . (BR , 155)

These are just glimpses into the body and the weather and they are more in the manner of a Pound poem, with echoes of William Carlos Williams, but Ammons's preoccupation with the relation between the body and weather and its dynamics of perception still lingers here though the technique of an elaborate build up is supplanted by a single image, for which Ammons refuses to assign the status of a narrative.

"Summer Place", the last poem of *Brink Road,* has a number of images of the body, and Ammons here conveys a sense of transgression. This image of the body transgresses the limits of morality in that Ammons here writes of the most private spaces and experiences, which are often termed 'immoral'. "Summer Place" in this sense, advances the theory of the body in that, Ammons here does not succumb to the sense of shame when he discusses private sexual activities, and rather a sense of exhilaration and confidence greets the reader:

> . . . it just takes on prevalence:
> masturbation is handy, cheap, and clean: it engorges
> itself on phantasy, the line between the imagination
> and the seminal vesicle direct . . . (BR, 202)

Ammons does not stop here but makes the image and experience of the body more graphic:

> . . . hit the right image
> and you come immediately: the scrotum is the conjurer's

> bag of stones , bones , trinkets that are spilled out
> and sorted through till the sought image turns up,
> inflaming in its finding . . . (BR , 202)

Later in the poem, Ammons writes in a similar vein, but he does so only after having conveyed a sense of the day where weather matters through the image of the "Fucking Little Raindrops Today Day 7-13" (BR, 223). Here, in a language of vulgarity, body and weather come together and in this context of weather Ammons writes:

> if I touch your balls, you never forget me if
> I nip your clit , I will forever appear as an imagination
> in your thoughts: if I only touch the fringe of the
> hairy aura around your balls, so they shrink and,
> crinkling , cringe, a ghostly spook will be on you
> haunting . . . (BR, 223)

The uninhibited candour which Ammons displays here which marked *Tape* and *The Snow Poems*, is taken up later in a much more exhaustive manner in his last work *Glare* where he reminds one of Allen Ginsberg in his confessional mindset.

The function of sex and weather in Ammons's poetry is similar; both try to relate the reader to the physical experience, which acts as a check, when the poem indulges too much in abstractions and philosophic speculations. Ammons sees both weather and sex as affecting the body where minimal intervention by philosophic positions is permitted allowing Ammons a context to understand experience as directly as

possible unmediated by the theoretical positions and a return to the present often in Ammons is both a return to weather and to the experience of the body. It is in the context of weather that often body comes to be experienced thus mutually reinforcing the immediacy of experience that Ammons attaches to both these concepts.

Ammons tries to explore the relationship between weather and the body in the context of writing but there are a large number of poems where Ammons limits his definition of the body to an impact caused by weather, where no attempt is made by him to mystify the experience of sex, a treatment which is extended to his representation of weather. The biological basis of the body, which Ammons explored in *Tape,* disappears in *Glare* and what is attempted is a recourse to the foundation of the body in relation to sex and libido that the reality of the presentation becomes more palpable and accessible to the reader. It lingers in the mind of the reader more as an experience rather than as a thought, a shortcoming rarely Ammons succumbs to in certain passages of *Tape.* The 'crudity' of the experience is the strength of these passages and no attempt is made to sanitize his impressions of the body and sex that the realism of many of the sections of *Glare* with regard to his treatment of sex parallels his responses to the experience of weather.

For Ammons, sex is an intense experience and it is part of his exploration of the idea of process, which comes to be experienced in one's life. Thus sex, like weather, becomes significant in Ammons's writing for the way in which it extends the scope of his poetry by admitting into it a more rich and complex understanding of process. Ammons conveys the impression that weather intensifies the experience of the body and *Glare* is full of passages, which try to convey the impression that the experience of the body in terms of sex is also deeply rooted in an experience of weather. Weather heightens the experience of the body as it intensifies all other experiences. This is not to say that Ammons is interested only in exploring the relationship between weather and the body in terms of sex. It is in the context of weather that Ammons tries to understand other experiences of the body like sickness and even death. Just as images of weather contribute a strain of realism to his preoccupation with the poetic form, body too becomes more real by its association with weather.

"Strip" the first part of *Glare*, continues to show his interest in the concrete and the abstract and this is often achieved by images of the body and sex which act as a counterpoint to the weightier philosophical discussions which appear in the sixth section of *Glare* where Ammons initiates a discussion on the possibilities of energy. The various processes through which energy is transformed, the beginnings of life, the

various forms of hierarchical order find expression in his poetry along with occasional thoughts of self-consciousness. The inadequacy of the representation of such thoughts in language suddenly shifts to an image of sex, which debunks the seriousness of the discussion, stressing the reality of the body as more relevant and more immediate to life:

> . . . there really is a
> pecking order of peckers: measly
> peckered guys feel like covering up
> in showers, and swingers clunk about
> like metronomes . . . (GL,19)

Various hierarchies might exist in this universe but what strikes as real and the most pressing to the reader, is this image of sex and of the body which is not a distant reality but one that is so near that its presence cannot be ignored. This kind of an attitude towards the body places his treatment of the body in a category akin to the way in which weather is treated and the function of both body and weather remains the same. The same technique is seen later in the discussion of knowledge and love in an abstract style which is interrupted by the theme of the body which cancels the seriousness of the tone and theme that Ammons painstakingly builds up and this conveys the intention of deliberately building up and breaking down of the world of words which is paralleled by the external landscape which is constantly made and dissolved by weather. Weather and the body thus come to stand for a kind of reality that refuses to be

controlled, constantly defeating all attempts to be indifferent to it by remaining in the world of language. The impact of knowledge and love makes him admit:

> . . . everything befalls
> so little outlasts : learning much
> you open up realms to know, but who
> knows little knows little to know : (GL, 31)

The juggling with words is immediately disrupted by the thought of the body, which is rather elaborately described. Ammons looks into the functions of the body in a very graphic way that the reality of the earlier discussion of the possibilities of knowing becomes insignificant and sidelined when he writes:

> I had to wee wee but in the bathroom
> .....
> just had to concentrate
> like hell but one drop let to another
> till a tinkle made plenty of room
> for the bolus . . . (GL, 31)

Leonard Scigaj is right when he sees in *Glare* "an ever present sense of the corporeality of the human body as the origin of sensation and perception whether it be in aches and pains or preoccupations with sexuality."[24] The same technique of placing the concrete against the abstract is employed in section 12 where the poet is absorbed in the discussion of the problems of writing, where his thoughts centre on Wallace Stevens:

> I have heard great novelists

in all languages were not good writers:
is that what guarantees Stevens' s
greatness . . . (GL, 36)

These thoughts on writing and language are suddenly interrupted by an observation of the Cro-Magnon women:

. . . I guess
the women were a little hairier: I wouldn't
mind some light chest hair about
the bases of their boobs . . . (GL ,36)

The return to the image of the body deflates the seriousness of the abstract thoughts hitherto followed, and the mode of humour that Ammons employs in such passages furthers the interrogation of the relevance of the discussions on language and reality. The attempt to define reality in terms of language is looked upon with suspicion, and it surfaces in his thoughts on Socrates, whom Ammons sees as one who destroyed the worlds looking for definition. The thoughts on the problems of representation are interrupted by the images of the body:

. . . by the time such narrowing
locates a carcass, the carcass has
no stomach for meaning: by the time
anything gets that narrow, little
is in it . . . (GL ,40)

This rejection of the definition, and his priority for the experience of body are clear when Ammons writes:

. . . what is beauty:

you don't know , don't ask: I could
say it is when your pecker rises:
ask your fucking pecker what it
thinks ;and beat it bad till it
spits at you . . . (GL, 40)

The shortcomings of language in understanding reality are echoed when Ammons admits: "nothing have been / explained in 2500 years, we best look/ to some other mode of explanation" (GL, 40). This rejection of the dominant and conventional ways of approaching reality is a persistent thought, which he expressed to Jim Stahl:

> We seem to have taken the view that the truth is to be discovered by the use of discursive rational intellect. And we do discover some small things along the way, but you would think after 2500 years we would begin to wonder whether or not the framework provided by the discursive in defining intellect is sufficient to encounter what we think as reality. We certainly have had enough of explaining away reality, because we've have gotten nowhere, as far as I can tell, in 2500 years.[25]

With such an awareness of the inefficacy of the rational, Ammons falls back to the experience of the body as a more reliable source for understanding reality:

. . . counting
on the wrist is a classic: smelling
bad turns you away; touching someone
creates belief. . . (GL, 41)

The philosophy that evolves out of this preference for the body, Ammons believes, is a counter weight to the exercises in

language that create images that have nothing in common with the reality that one experiences. The rejection of language is complete when he closes the argument:

> ...The solid world eats
> and shifts, I mean, shits, runs in
> and out of waves, plays pinochle,
> and never says a world... (GL,41)

The consciousness of the body which is heightened in the presence of weather is a part of section 20, where images of sickness, pain and suffering are placed in a landscape of weather and of the present, which serve to remind one, of the significance of the place and time in one's understanding of one's body. Ammons realizes, " it's so cold this morning: there's / a downy clicking bark: there's / starfrost on the windshield" (GL, 59). It is in this reality of weather that Ammons writes of the body:

> . . . I take all these pills, every
> morning it's because I have been
> sick some: well I think I lost a few
> brain cells in one or two of those
> episodes. . . (GL, 59)

The reality of the body is still driven home when Ammons writes "I / think my vocabulary doesn't access / the way it used to" (GL, 59). The reality of language is also the reality of the body.

The way Ammons treats the body is to a great extent clinical and disinterested, and the emotional connotations that usually stem from the weakness of the body, namely, the feelings of sorrow and helplessness seldom make their appearance. There seems to be a focus, almost exclusive, on the bodily experience, that mind seems to be blotted out of his poetry. Such an elimination of thought is also partially justified by his images of old age where the physical infirmities make it impossible for sustained intellectual exercises to be undertaken. Ammons comments on the tragic quality of life in section 21:

> . . .misery comes
> up with an image or two that blots
> out frail peripheries of joy: wait ,
> wait : give it a little time . . . (GL, 62)

The poet, to show the reality of life, entertains a sudden return to the thought of the body and sex:

> happy thoughts: sharply conceive:
> engaged as we are with sex these
> sexless days -everybody afraid of
> everybody else- . . . (GL, 62)

The reality that Ammons underscores here is the reality of the body not as something abstract or hard to feel or to experience. Often, Ammons indulges in the problems of writing, and these discussions of the problems of writing are often interrupted by the physical difficulties not only associated with writing but also

problems that are a part of aging. In section 27, in the middle of an elaborate description of the problems of personal as well as social misery and its significance to his writing, firmly kept within a framework of weather, Ammons suddenly becomes conscious of his body which makes him note:

> . . . walking
> is good, but the knee joint in my
> deveined leg hurts(the whole leg
> swells in the heat) . . . (GL ,79)

The pressing reality that Ammons tries to convey is the reality of the body, which makes thought sometimes impossible and even irrelevant making the correspondence between the function of the body and the function of weather in Ammons's writing very much similar.

The discussion of poetry as it is seen in the commercial market and bookstalls is interrupted by an image of sex, or an image of the body, sometimes humorous, sometimes serious, which is glaringly obvious in section 34 where such a discussion is suddenly interrupted by an image of the body which can be termed vulgar. The image of the body frequently intervenes in the poem to create a sense of a break in the poem:

> . . . I feel like saying,
> please excuse me, but are you sure
> it would be all right if I mounted
> you . . . (GL, 96)

This is followed by an image of weather and snow though not in very direct and explicit imagery. But weather and body, as in many sections, here too, come together to discredit the reality of language and the discussions associated with it in connection with its use in poetry.

The preoccupation of Ammons with the images of body and sex is also significant for yet another reason. Ammons employs these images to underscore his distaste of certain romantic ways of seeing poetry as a mystical and mysterious activity, which does not yield to reason and a rational analysis, because of its belief in certain moments which are beyond time and space from which it draws its inspiration and its existence. Against this definition of poetry Ammons places his own version of what poetry is in terms of an experience, which most readers might find repulsive. Ammons uses the images of the body to unravel the dynamics of writing, the result is curious; traditional readings of poetry, and the hierarchical superiority of the mind in the dualism of the mind and body are overturned by Ammons.

The images that Ammons employs offend the sense of the reader with regard to the limits of weather and consequently the limits of morality. Further, the use of the images of the body as a fitting metaphor for poetry deeply stresses the idea of process saving poetry from the world of abstraction and the notion of transcendental time or timelessness often associated with art.

Thus the purpose of the body in Ammons becomes two fold, it helps him to attack the conventional images and ideas associated with poetry, it also helps him to continue his explorations into the idea of process through poetry which sees the act of writing from the space of a body, a body exposed to loss and pain. The problems are the problems of the body; they are employed only to assign the role and place of the poet to a world where all men live, thus denying uniqueness to the poetic figure. Ammons tries to convince the reader that the poet is as much subject to process as any other person. The unassailable status of the poet in the event is found to be false and *Glare* carries further the image of the body and tries to question the sanctity of poetry both by redefining poetry and by allowing themes which were denied the status of a theme fit for poetry.

The demystifying of poetic activity continues in *Glare* when he compares it to smegma where the sexual tone of argument becomes obvious. The semen image of *Tape* here comes to be associated with waste, a theme explored in *Garbage* and the self-conscious and self- reflexive mood of Ammons interrupts to write, "I do not see/ How the technique of poetry could be / reduced farther than this" (GL, 116). The dynamics of writing and body gets uncomfortably close here when Ammons carries the idea of writing to areas not usually associated with poetry.

The microscopic vision of Ammons, which delineates the landscape in weather, is seen at work in the way it elaborates the theme in concrete and often revolting images, which are suddenly interrupted by the thought of weather. In Ammons abstract thoughts lead to concrete imagery soon, which might be taken as a failure of such abstract thoughts to be sustained for long. Ammons's microscopic vision of the body is suddenly cut short by the image of weather:

> . . . we have
> weather enough this morning without
> a forecast (snow mid Nov) the upper
> branches of the great trees weightily
> woggle . . . (GL ,117)

Ammons, when he thinks he has indulged too much in very minute description of anything, especially whenever it strikes him as becoming a threat and a hindrance to a direct palpable experience, introduces the image of weather. The body is admitted into his writing for the sense of immediacy that it conveys to the reader. But he does not allow scientific or pedantic definitions to decide the drift of the poem. Whenever Ammons feels that he has lost touch with experience, he brings into his poems an image of weather.

Definitions of poetry that Ammons offers are often linked to weather by their spatial proximity on the page thus linking poetry and the body in the context of weather intensifying the

significance of this sensuous experience as the basis of sex, body, poetry, and weather. Ammons seems to suggest by such linkages, that the experience of all these ideas is physical, a thought not unusual for a poet, who is interested in the exploration of the coming together of things.

The reality of the body in Ammons is so powerful that it is linked to his memory in passages where a recollection of the past or childhood experience is attempted. A good case in point is section 43, where one finds Ammons discussing his last thirty-one years, the various stages through which he passed; from being a poet to a professor at Cornell University. This relaxed tone of discussion, which gradually becomes a reflection on the past is interrupted by an image of the poet afflicted with " blood poisoning from / an ingrown toenail not operated on / right" (GL, 121). The reality is again one of the body which becomes a check on the flights into the past. Body thus becomes a metaphor for the present, of the present experience that recaptures the interest and attention of the poet so fully that thought comes to be dismissed. Such a pattern becomes more obvious and logical in that these images of the body that Ammons presents are not images of health and ease; on the contrary, these images of suffering, pain, sickness and old age convey the picture of a mind preoccupied with them which effectively qualifies all attempts to create a sustained discussion of any intellectual activity for a considerable period of time.

The idea of weather and the body continues in section 47, which begins with an image of the "battalions of leaves routed by the wind" (GL, 131). The anthropomorphic qualities of the wind cannot be missed and the logic is further extended in the comparison, which is in terms of sexual imagery when Ammons writes of "smegma flakes off the chilled penis" (GL, 131). Weather, as influencing the body, not just the body of thought, finds fitting expression in the final phrase 'chilled penis' and the image receives further justification when Ammons realizes that "fall has come / and all the banal transitions are / running their changes"(GL, 131).

In Ammons's poetry the images of the private parts of the body and experiences associated with them are immediately interrupted by the image of weather. A picture of weather is central to section 47:

> the sky whatever : taken a day at
> a time, I can tell you the way
> the sun first tipped the treetops gold
> this morning . . . (GL, 132)

Into this image of the external landscape he introduces abruptly the theme of sex:

> . . . the way we found,
> some of us, our dicks on waking hard,
> and we hungry and all-what a
> great opportunity for roaring
> exultation . . . (GL ,132)

The fusing of sex and weather conveys the impression that you wake into your body as much as you wake into weather, the logic of the argument already made early in the opening lines itself by a careful correspondence between leaves in the wind and smegma flakes from the penis and the section ends with an image of the instability of the landscape in terms of change and process:

> I, for example, mistake this place
> as a place for ease, when the place
> itself shifts, boils, drowns, shakes
> worse than a teenager . . . (GL, 132)

The link between the landscape and the body suggested by the association with the teenager is continuous with Ammons's preoccupation to find the correspondence among weather and body and writing; the intensity of experience, the priority of the body over thought, and teenage connotations add to the effect of immediacy that Ammons wants to convey to poetry and weather.

Glare abounds with themes and images of sex. This long poem surpasses his other works with its images of the poet's own body. He musters enough courage to gaze at himself trespassing the familiar, palatable, and the moral zones of his body, to fall into a confessional mode that he greatly dislikes, which is ridiculed and critiqued by the presence of humour. The preoccupation of Ammons with the body, especially the

irreverent, which echoes Allen Ginsberg , is free from the rebellious stance and anger of the Beat Generation. Ammons, early in his writing had expressed his belief in the Whitmanesque vision of the body, which rejected the Christian notion of the body, which sees it as fallen and depraved. Ammons restores to the body respectability and worthiness, which are usually considered the prerogatives of the mind. Body, like the mind, is treated with a clinical and scientific disposition as a space where so many emotions have their source and none of them to be ashamed of. The reality of life that Ammons conveys is predominantly the reality of the body, or to be more precise, the reality of sex, an equation cleverly bypassed by the mind, which is heir to traditional patterns of explanation.

Glare, thus extends the scope of process to include the most private spaces and concepts and offers an equally valid perspective to look at oneself and the world in which one lives. The search for a form adequate to tackle and capture the fluid reality takes Ammons to the idea of sex or experience of sex as a form, which might help his attempt for a wider scope of experience. Sex, like weather, becomes a mark of concrete experience against which abstractions are pitted. The process of growing up comes to be linked to sex, another form of process both as a condition of life and as an activity. The processes of the mind come to be inextricably linked to the process of sex,

which Ammons sees as an experience of the body once again making clear his preference for the concrete.

Ammons's distaste for the interventions of the human mind is clear in section 53, perhaps his most expansive and honest passage that will not be out of place in the most confessional school of writing. Section 53 of *Glare* is a very powerful description of his experience of growing up with such candour that the reader may feel that the poet is indulging in a confessional mode. Ammons looks into his sexuality, which he tries to see it as physiological rather than psychological:

> I found through exercise of my 11-or
> 12-year old sexual rights that my
> glans penis wasn't free of the skin
> which kept tearing a little from time
> to time . . . (GL,143)

This physiological stocktaking of the sexual experience is immediately disturbed by the self-conscious attitude and Ammons admits:

> . . . this
> is probably the beginning of my
> confessional phase: you see ,I am
> just as low down good for nothing as
> you are, maybe lower . . . (GL ,144)

The self-conscious mood that Ammons allows here destroys the illusion of honesty that the poet is building up by a graphic description of the private experience, often considered a taboo

by the dominant morality which is one of repression and confessional poetry differs from this kind of writing in that it does not admit any kind of an introspective attitude into the dynamics of writing which in a way creates a sense of reality often felt to be more real than the one proposed by society. The critique is directed against the reader who might place him as a confessional poet who is essentially an enterprise of the intellect. The passage under discussion destroys the logic of the confessional school of poetry.

Ammons who has acknowledged the reality of the body often uses the tension between the abstract thought and the concrete reality that is presented by the image of the body. Problems which have a very wide scope and nature, even those of the universe themselves sometimes come to be immediately interrupted by the image of the body in its most private states that the reality of abstract discussions becomes suspect. His poetry exploits the tension between the concrete and the abstract in which the concrete most often signifies weather or the body. The dynamics of the world, which attracts the poet, receives a grand treatment in section 78 which looks into the idea of the universe as indifferent to human conditions, a thought which he expresses:

> It is hilarious how sad the world is: I mean,
> for us : the planet itself, of course, rolls
> on free crushing over our surmises and tribulations
> what is sad is sad . . . (GL, 214)

Such general observations on life, abstract and philosophical, Ammons fears, exist in the realm of thought and are hence consequently unavailable to experience that he has to set them off by an image of reality more palpable and sometimes even offensive. The repulsive images employed by Ammons have the effect of shaking up the reader that no doubt is left as to the reality of the experience. The preference of Ammons for the concrete and his belief in the image of the body suddenly take control that he describes the minute in the body:

> . . . the microbe ridged crevices of smegma
> the tongue of some will swirl the velvety
> precincts of the little bead or some will
> slurp as if the clabber of paradise lumps of
> cum . . . (GL , 215)

This is Ammons at his 'lowest', and it substantiates Robert Gilbert's argument that in "Ammons there had always been a marked propensity for the bawdy and the lowdown but in *Glare* he gives those impulses fuller rein than ever before."[26] The "polar opposite" that Ammons speaks of is the desire for the concrete, either as weather, sex or body or a combination of these placed against the world of thought and a world manufactured out of it. The fabricated quality of the reality of these thoughts is highlighted by the relatively more spontaneous and less conventional images of the processes of the body. From his thoughts about the process and of the universe Ammons suddenly returns to an image of the body

though in humorous terms. From a closer look into the beginnings of the origin of the planet, his imagination suddenly becomes local and to some extent personal and more concrete and records the image of the female body that suddenly catches his attention once more reinforcing the importance of the present in his poetry. He writes about the woman he meets at a party:

> . . . there
> she goes ,that flimsy skirt, those legs,
> clicking down the hall to the restroom to
> piddle that pussy, Lord ,have mercy . . . (GL, 216)

Such rapid transitions to the images of the body play a very important role by retaining the interest in the physical and local reality. Thought seems to be absent in such images of reality. The sense of wonder that the thought of the origins of the universe instills in him and the tone of seriousness, reverence, and the philosophical mood that it evokes is suddenly replaced by an earthy observation which pulls back the reader to a more comfortable and appealing reality. This reality is conveyed by the image of the day with which he concludes the section:

> I have nowhere
> to
> go and all
> day to get there (GL , 217)

The same rejection of the philosophical possibilities occurs where religion is the theme. The discussion of the significance of religion in childhood comes to be discussed in the context of a set of images of the body, which are images of pain setting up a frame of reality hard to ignore. In a mood of reflection Ammons returns to his childhood experience of religion. Established religious sentiments are gently mocked at in his writing and rather than the transcendental reality of established religions, Ammons looks for a belief in the reality of the present, which is a reality of the body, rather than the one mediated by religious discourses. The picture of the body which he presents, is a powerful one:

> a hip pain, a swollen gum, eyes that stick dry
> at night, an ingrown toenail ,a skin blemish,
> precancerous , I tell you, I feel like shoot ,
> I feel like wasted space . . . (GL, 220)

This image of the body firmly fixes the time referent of the experience from which the poet takes a trip to the past to recapture the experience of religion. A religious experience of process is not a part of his writing nor is the possibility of the renewal religiously understood. Ammons belittles the reality of the religious experience and he ends the section with reference to the body, an excretory aspect of the body is focused which is often looked upon with contempt and shame by Christianity. Whatever significance could have been due to the religious

experience is destroyed effectively by Ammons by the words "BLADDER PROBLEMS" which he prints in bold capital letters with which the section ends. Ammons wants to assert the fact that no escape is possible from the body convey and all other experiences are less pressing in the face of the immediate reality of the body. This return to the body is also a victory for the present time and space in which existence is most powerfully experience.

The dynamics of rejecting the abstract in favour of a concrete experience often in the image of the body controls the drift of the thought in section 97 where Ammons establishes the reality of weather and describes his physical response to it:

> . . . I didn't have on an
> undershirt under my summer shirt, and I was
> cold, cold out among the geraniums, radishes
> called white- lightning, plums, onions,
> strawberries . . . (GL, 252)

From this physical image Ammons proceeds to look into the DNA in man, which makes difficult reading, an exploration suddenly cut short by the image of the female body that evokes desire in him. Ammons employs a humorous treatment, the tone of which dissolves the seriousness that he builds up in the section with his discussions of DNA.

In Ammons's writing, one finds the tendency of a conscious and cautious building up of a seriousness that

results from a discussion of the philosophy or the possibilities of reality or the concerns of biology only to be debunked by some plain image either from weather or from the body or from a combination of these two existing in a causal relation. This preference for the plain, a hierarchy of reality, which is personally valid for Ammons, decides the conclusion of the section:

> one woman, I remember so squdged down and fat,
> I thought her buttocks and cunt never come
> unglued, and yet they thought one could be
> overtaken by a brutal need to get in there and
> see what it was like . . .(GL, 253)

This image of the body as he sees it, presented in a humorous and confessional manner though highly patriarchal is immediately interrupted by the image of "big morning" which is an oblique reference to weather. Body, weather, and sex once more come together in Ammons, enhancing the impact of its reality and thereby qualifying the reality of discussions of concepts, religious and scientific.

Ammons's poetry is, by and large, free of society and the occasional pictures of society that he allows into his poems conclude not with the conclusions drawn from social experience but mainly from the personal sphere of the human body. Discussions of the marketplace, snobbery, commerce and taxation come to rest, not on a general statement on life as it is

lived in the social sphere, but on a consciousness, which is drastically reductionist in the present climate of suspicion aimed at all totalizing attempts, of the body, of which he writes: "we shouldn't worry so / much about consciousness as consciousness by / the conscious: eczema, noxzema, and psoriasis" (GL, 255).

In Ammons, the discussion of society comes to be interrupted by sex or thoughts on sex or body, whenever his writing stays too long in the world of discussion be it poetry or society. Thoughts on the nature of reality are suddenly cut short by experiences more concrete than the one proposed by such flights of the mind. The concrete for Ammons thus comes to interrupt and stay in the text of his poems as body, weather or sex all held together by time and process. Section 99 with its references to the computer, taxes, conduct, layoff suddenly strikes a note of discord and discontinuity, a discontinuity caused by the image of the physical reality of the body, which is very much in the present:

> . . . pity
> we cannot fuck ourselves, although we can get
> off ourselves: and there are vibrators and
> rodding balls: something can be done . . . (GL, 257)

Such sudden disruptions of the discussion of weightier matters which have a larger scope, are disrupted by the images of sex and body which create the impression that the mechanisms of

society are less palpable and less important than the experience of the body. Thoughts of the experience of the body discredit the thoughts of a larger concern, once again making it clear the futility of the grand endeavours of social criticism. The difficulty of maintaining social criticism to a considerable extent in poetry is presented by Ammons in section 102 where after a powerful presentation of the

> . . .people lying around in,
> the streets: too many undernourished: too
> many hurt spiritually: too many slaughtered
> in the interest of too much unity . . . (GL, 262)

he concludes with the realization that "illusions have worn so thin." This seeing through the illusion is succinctly presented by an image of "LIVER & LOIN" which he presents in bold capital letters, which is a return to the reality of the body after his attempts at social criticism.

Ammons's treatment of the body does not try to substitute the lament of a sense of loss that accompanies old age by some wisdom that may be seen as compensation. Ammons refuses to associate wisdom with old age. This refusal comes from a strain of realism, which focuses on the problems of the body and of the mind, which effectively preclude the possibility of a mind, let alone wisdom.

The conventional treatment of old age in terms of grace, offering a larger scope of experience, comes to be qualified in his writing. The sense of the body becomes very powerful in the later sections of *Glare* which are entirely devoted to the theme of the body where no abstract thought is entertained. One such section is section 110 where Ammons writes of constipation and hemorrhoids, a reality of old age that Ammons refuses to gloss over. Such passages echo other sections in *Glare* and especially *The Snow Poems* where weather alone is the theme admitting no discussion of the reality that might hinder the objective reality that Ammons has portrayed in such passages.

The exclusive passages on weather and the body are alike in that they are driven by a logic of reality which cannot be ignored, however hard one may try to find an escape from it through abstract philosophical positions. From the exclusive passage on body in section 110 Ammons returns to the concept of weather and its influence on the body in section 112, which begins with clear markers of the landscape, and time, which are markers of the seasons:

> . . . it's summer
> and the days are agetting shorter up on the
> north end of the west ridge where the sun sets
> you can see, making it off . . . (GL ,282)

It is within this consciousness of weather that Ammons becomes acutely conscious of the sensations of the body,

physically and psychically, by the presence of the changes in the climate:

> . . . nights will be long &
> brittle cold. . .
> .....
> I dare say the pain
> in my hip joint and humerus is- well not very
> funny: the swelling in the ankles promises
> plenty: and a network of other ailments is
> so complicated balancing one ailment
> tilts another . . . (GL , 282)

With this sorry and grim picture of old age the poet can only hope that the tranquility of old age can only be the result of "milligrams" implying that peace in the old days is not spontaneous but the result of medicines. Within this physical reality, Ammons tries to attempt a picture of the social reality, which is crowded with the images of violence of civilians dying:

> . . . civilians in mass graves, some with holes
> in their drawers for raping: wd we have no
> more heroes, no skinny escapees, nobody to weep
> over, no generals accepting the fates of
> thousands into their strategies: (GL, 282)

This social reality too has images of the body and of sex and it comes to a close with an image of weather: "NEVER HAS THE GRASS BEEN / SO WELL WATERED / RAIN WATERED, I MEAN" (GL, 282). The manner these images of weather are presented serves to intensify and substantiate the significance

that Ammons has attached to the experience of weather. It conveys the impression of a closure in terms of weather. This image of weather is one of the final images of Ammons where the human body and weather come together offering substantiation to the argument that the physical aspect of life for him remained linked inextricably and inalienably to weather and to the body in all its stages and manifestations. The commitment to the present, which Ammons held on to the end of his life, was part of his lifelong conviction in the need to observe and represent the realities of weather and the body.

Chapter 6

The Last Translation

> The next year my eighteen-month-old brother Elbert died. I remember that. The next year a brother was born dead. I remember the day of his birth. It was raining hard.[1]
>
> "Autobiographical Note" A. R. Ammons

Ammons's poetry is marked by the secular treatment of death. He does not accept the religious consolation that the soul is immortal. For him death is a logical culmination of the processes initiated at the moment of birth. His observations on death are more physical and less abstract as they are made against a landscape characterized by changes brought about by weather. These changes mediate the experience of death by offering a set of visual images, which for the most part are images of weather.

The preoccupation with death in his poetry, as in his life, begins early in "In Strasbourg", the second poem of *Collected Poems*. "In Strasbourg" is unique since it evokes a sense of history, something that is quite rare in Ammons, and it marks the beginning of the significance of weather and the seasons and their bearing on the theme of death. Ammons considers the image of destruction and violence at a particular point in the

history of human civilization as taking place against the cycle of the seasons and he opens the poem with an image of time set in "Strasbourg in 1349 / in the summer and the whole year" (CP, 2). Once the context of the experience is fixed in a real time and space, though in the distant past, Ammons introduces the theme of death, which appeared as plague, a very powerful reality that struck at a point in history and at a place away from the American experience. The figurative treatment of death in this poem is unique, since it is a phenomenon limited to his early writing, which induces a dramatic note when he writes, "Death walked on both sides of the sea / tasting Christian and Saracen flesh / and took another turn about the Sea"(CP, 2). Ammons continues with the personification of death and conveys a graphic picture of it, which materializes in the image of a woman:

> In a blackgown and scarlet cape she went
> skipping across the sea
> freeing ships to rear and fly in the wind
> with their cargoes of dead . . . (CP, 2)

Death, though personified, Ammons takes pains to situate it in a place where the sense of the landscape is physically conveyed by the subtle images of the sea, summer, wind, and a sense of time is conveyed by the reference to the "whole year" in the second line of the poem. Anthropomorphic imagination and personification continue a little later in the poem:

and death throwing her head about lifted
the skirts of her gown
and danced wildly
The rich Jews are burning on loose platforms
in1349
and death jumps into the fire
setting the flames wild . . . (CP, 3)

The image of death as a woman in a black gown and scarlet cape, "dancing wildly, lifting her skirt", is discarded at the end of the poem where Ammons makes a return to the present, which for him is a return to the morning, and no attempt is made to elaborately portray the details of the day. "In Strasbourg" foreshadows the treatment of death in his later poetry in that death in this poem appears with images of weather and a return of the present is also hinted at, though the present that Ammons allows here has a sketchy existence. The return to the present is also a return from imagination, a thought that persists very powerfully in Ammons's later writing where weather becomes the reality of the present.

Ammons, in his early poetry is preoccupied with the images of the death of the self and his preoccupation with it finds expression in "Rack" where the loss of the self and the loss of the poetic voice form the theme. Such a death, for Ammons, is a part of the sense of the landscape in which he contextualizes it. This intensely private poem about a private death is sufficiently externalized by a set of images of the

landscape, that the sense of a world beyond one's mind is conveyed, balancing the impression of the poem as one, which has for its theme not a purely esoteric experience. The reality of the landscape is significant in the moment of death, a feeling Ammons conveys when he notes:

> As I look across the fields the sun
> big in my eyes I see the hills
> the great black unwasting silence and
> know I must go out beyond the hills . . . (CP, 6)

It is within this reality of time and space, though an obsession with the consciousness of time as minutes and hours, a quality of his later poetry absent here, that Ammons writes of his death: " I am broken over the earth / so little remains / for the silent offering of my death" (CP, 6). Death, for Ammons, comes to be linked to the landscape, though the landscape, at this stage of his career, is not solely defined by the presence of weather, as it comes to be defined in his later writing. Death, literal or figurative, presented within the framework of history or outside it comes to be linked to the landscape though the idea of weather as the most significant aspect that controls the experience of the landscape becomes relevant only towards the end of *Collected Poems*. The experience of weather as a background to the drama of human death as a powerful aspect assumes significance towards the end of *Collected Poems*

"Dawn In 1098", another poem on death, considers a historical moment of great importance though the implications of history are not central to the final impression that the poem projects. The event is not overtly historicized since the causes and effects of the particular moment are not incorporated into the poem. This poem continues the tendency to personify, where morning appears as a "woman who blushes openly", and the drama of death at night and the dawn coming to life descending on the eastern hills with "the morning in his hands" remain romantic enough that the attention is drawn away from the more common and more realistic experiences of the morning.

Ammons's later poetry resists the tendency to personification, a more objective mode informs his later writing. The movement to the present is not fully achieved since the images that Ammons employs are more poetic rather than real; the unreality of the image and of the experience charts a progression from the 'unreality' of the past to the 'unreality' of the present. Such defamiliarization of the present is a part of the romantic temperament, which his later poetry effectively counters by a style, and a strong sense of the real pervades it.

Ammons imagines of his own death in "Dying In A Mirthful Place", where as in one of his early poems "Whaleboat Struck", the poet suggests not only the inseparability of death from the landscape but his preference for his death in a landscape of his desire. The title itself is indicative of the

significance of the importance of the landscape and this imagined death as in "The Whaleboat Struck", an early poem, is inseparable from the landscape. Death here is personified as "In Strasbourg" where he writes of a conversation that he had with death on the problem of propriety:

> the wine the lovely wine
> and turning to death said
> I thought you knew propriety
> Death embarrassed stuttered . . . (CP, 12 - 13)

From the image of death Ammons escapes to the landscape where he would like his death to happen:

> So I watched the lips
> and hurried away to a hill in Arizona
> where in the soil was such a noiseless
> mirth and death . . . (CP, 13)

The poem concludes with the thoughts of the landscape in the morning, stressing the preoccupation with time and the landscape defined by it.

The image of death in his early poems is more imagined than real, and Ammons is so self-centered in his romantic imagination that he does not look beyond himself. He is at the centre of these imaginary flights; he writes of death in colourful terms the reality of which is nearer to the romantic world rather than the post romantic twentieth-century war torn reality. Landscape and the sense it imparts do not effectively disrupt

these flights though they point to a different reality. And the disjunctive function of the landscape, that is, of disrupting all thoughts appears only in the later poems of *Collected Poems*.

Death, in his early poetry, becomes an experience, which is much nearer to the one presented by Emily Dickinson, and the event of death in the context of weather appears at the end of "Having Been Interstellar", where the sense of time created by Ammons is by recourse to weather. The image of death appears obliquely in the final line of the poem, "To stone he left a stone". The reality of death is linked to the image of weather, an image not far away from the poem, an image Ammons builds up when he writes:

> he turned in himself
> helplessly as in sleep
> and went out into the growth of rains
> and when the rains
> taking him
> had gone away in spring . . . (CP, 20)

Death, for Ammons, is fused with the experience of the seasons, a thought that appears in "Song". As in "Having Been Interstellar", Ammons imagines death against the background of the seasons:

> The environment lost no self-possession.
> In spring, termites with tickling feet
> aereated my veins.
> A gall- nesting wren took my breath . . . (CP, 35)

For Ammons, a feeling of the disappearance of body is integrated into an image of the seasons, which he conveys when he writes of the termites finally finding the heart in summer. This sense of the seasons continues to the end of the poem where Ammons concludes with a sense of the landscape from which the presence of the seasons is not eliminated:

> No sign shows the place,
> all these seasons since,
> but a hump of sod below the leaves
> where chipmunks dig. (CP, 35)

The imagined death becomes more concrete and sufficiently externalized by Ammons's constant attempt to place it in a landscape where death defined by references to the seasons makes clear Ammons's preoccupation with process. Death is placed in the larger segments of time, which are conceptually and experientially old fashioned, which go well with the theme of death as it is treated in these poems. The link between death and the landscape in the seasons is characterised by change and process as expressly stated in "Interval" where Ammons writes of the cycles and the rhythm of the seasons:

> The world is bright after the rain
> for rain washes death out of the land and hides it far
> beneath the soil and it returns again cleansed with life
> and so all is a circle

and nothing is separable . . . (CP, 36)

Such statements are rare in Ammons and are a symbol of the growing need for objectivity in his treatment of death and a justification of the significance of weather and the landscape in moments of death. The closing lines of the poem reveal a technique that persists to the end of his career:

> A wind rising of one in time blowing the feather away
> forsaken I woke
> and the golden bird had flown away and the sun
> had moved the shadows over me so I rose and walked on
> (CP, 36)

Ammons here uses weather, which is beyond the control of imaginative exercises, as a symbol of the return to the present, a waking up into reality. The image of the sun which figures as a symbol of weather and the landscape appears here though the connection is not overtly stated.

The same pattern of linking together the idea of death and the landscape is the logic of "Look For My White Self" where he writes:

> there is the mountain
> even now my blue
> ghost may be
> singing on that height of snow. (CP, 38)

For Ammons, the inseparability of the experience of death from the landscape is defined by weather and the seasons. This

inseparability of the experience of death from the landscape runs through "Batso", written in the pattern of a journey, which begins, with an image of weather in which the entire experience is framed:

> After two gray sunless days of warm
> nor'easter windy rains the sun breaking
> clear this morning, over the bayside
> field the sparrow hawk foraging in the
> oval air . . . (CP, 50)

It is in such a sense of time and place that Ammons writes of a journey, a journey to a cemetery where the image of the dead lying in the cemetery is an image conceived in terms of the morning sun:

> stopping at a pinerise to see the
> cemetery of the French family death
> after more than a century light as
> the morning sun ,where, Thomas French ,
> a year older than his wife lies since
> 1844 . . . (CP, 51)

From this moment in the past, steeped in history, Ammons returns to the present where the sense of place is powerfully controlled by a sense of time bound by weather and the seasons:

> . . . wasps drunk with fall
> warmth , a beautiful November noon by
> the grist mill and the meal honed

wood , the carriage house and small
seats . . . (CP, 52)

"Batso" offers a classic example of Ammons's technique. The poem begins in the present where weather is a dominant impression and then moves on to a variety of topics including death and returns to the present again, which suggests an interest in a landscape bound by the rhythms of the seasons. The reality of memory and abstract intellectual activity comes to be qualified by a 'greater' and more immediate reality of the seasons in which Ammons is inescapably trapped.

Ammons occasionally resorts to a sketchy treatment of weather, which does not extend beyond a single image, but such single images appear fused with an image of death. In "Open", a poem where the dominant theme is one of body, Ammons writes, "the sun will burst, death is certain." Such a picture brings together the inevitability of both death and the sun as realities one cannot evade or escape. The single image becomes a fitting example of how inevitable the image of weather for Ammons is in his treatment of death. These poems on death are not related to a specific situation nor are these part of a personal experience that the poet underwent; the poems are as general as they can be.

"Christmas Eve" continues Ammons's preoccupation with death in the context of weather and it is the first personal poem on death where Ammons writes of his dead mother and

thoughts on his mother appear along with his thoughts on weather:

> put up Christmas tree this afternoon:
> fell
> asleep in big chair: woke up at
> 3:12 and it
> was snowing outside ,was white! (CP, 112)

The image of his mother grows in his mind in this experience of weather:

> my mother is dead: she is
> deep in the ground, changed: if she
> rises dust will blow all over the place and
> she will stand there shining ,
> smiling . . . (CP, 112)

The memory of his mother's death is linked to the landscape in snow, which makes the experience of death more concrete and real. Ammons, it is to be noted here, that though he places the experience in the framework of Christmas Eve, he does not rely on the consolations that one might expect from such a situation. Of his rejection of religion, which came quite early, Ammons told Philip Fried:

> Going to college, I began to enquire into this religious background, which was very strong and severe, and I got it more and more on a rational and historic level, which moved me intellectually from those positions that my family and

> aunts and uncles would have taken to be natural. So I was already in exile in that country.[2]

Such a condition of exile results in a kind of poetry in which moments of death receive no consolation from Christian thought and makes Helen Vendler's observation that "Ammons's poetry is free from disabling religious or ideological nostalgia"[3] true.

"Nelly Myers" a powerfully moving elegy on the black servant of his childhood of the same name, has the poet recollecting the olden days where the memory of the woman is bound up with the memory of weather which he describes as "the bright clear days" when she was with him which he realizes "can never be restored"(CP, 124). The sense of the loss that Ammons conveys here comes to be associated with the peculiarities of the days where the experience of the loss itself becomes an experience of weather. The experience of death is an experience of weather. Of the experience of loss and its relation to time, Ammons told Schneider:

> The fact that you come into this world and it's all there. You don't know any world where anyone is missing. But as you get older you are constantly confronted with this difference between being alive in a limited period and this expanse of vast nothingness that people disappear into, including yourself, never, as far as I'm concerned to return .[4]

Ammons does not approach the sense of loss that he touches upon here through Christianity as in "Nelly Myers" or "Christmas Eve". Frank J. Lepkowski's observation that

Ammons's poetry is "overtly Christian in its early phase" [5], is the result of a hasty reading of the poet.

"First Carolina Said Song", repeats the same pattern where the poem is in the form of an experience recounted by an aunt who recollects her grandmother's funeral, which finally becomes an experience of the seasons:

> . . . great grandma's funeral
> down there in
> Green Sea Country
> and there came upon this
> awfullest rainstorm
> you ever saw in your whole life . . . (CP, 155)

Death here becomes a part of the landscape in which Ammons places himself and a profound sense of the landscape and its rhythms informs his sense of death and the poem concludes with an image of the land where the great grandmother was buried. Death becomes a powerful physical reality in Ammons, largely due to the constant references to time and space, which for Ammons are greatly conveyed through the impact of the seasons. The earliest memories as in "Nelly Myers" for Ammons, are linked to the landscape, with all the freshness of memory, to a recollection of the experience of weather. The concrete sense that death conveys in this poem as in "Nelly Myers" is largely due to the constant reminders that Ammons plants in the poem, reminders of the sense experiences that accompany thoughts of death, which are reminders of weather. Ammons, towards the

end of *Collected Poems,* returns to the technique of voicing general statements on death, thoughts which are set off by a sense of the concrete, local and particular brought into the poem by the images of the season. In "Summer Session" Ammons writes, "death that reaches towards you has / spared none"(CP, 250). This truth is placed against the reality of the seasons when in the next line a sense of time as the seasons is obliquely touched upon by Ammons in the image of time when "the boughs ripen and birds fall out "around here like plums" (CP, 250). And at the end of "Summer Session" where the sense of the seasons is always in the background, Ammons's thoughts on death crowd the poem when he thinks of the small children and the decades to come and he writes, "by that time / we, you and I, will have been dead / so long"(CP, 253). Death either as that happened in the past or as a possibility in the future remains for Ammons inalienably associated with the experience of the seasons.

General observations on death such as those one came across in "Summer Session" reappear in "Play" where Ammons does not attempt an elaborate picture of the seasons but resorts to thumbnail impressions:

> Nothing's is going to become of anyone
> except death:
> .....
> grave accommodates
> swell rambunctiousness &

ruin's not
compromised by magnificence. . . (CP, 272)

This grand statement is interrupted by an image of the "apple branch ... in bloom"(CP, 273). This simple image of weather drastically alters the impression and drift of the poem, rescues it from being a merely philosophic and abstract piece. The poem does not lose its relation to the immediate reality, a relation which Ammons has always valued much.

The reverse technique of the elaborate pictures of reality placed against thoughts of death merely touched upon, is the logic in "Sharp Lookout", which till the final four lines of the poem is a line by line elaboration of weather:

Rain still falls, the wind moves
the maple branches to
gestures and patterns reasonable:
the stream deals with rocks
and hollows, slowing or dashing,
in ways apparently regular . . . (CP, 324)

This deep sense of the process, which is linked to weather, is followed by thoughts of death:

. . . I've not been able
today to form evidence of any
trend countering our prospects
for a moderate life and a safe death. (CP, 324)

Such a conclusion emerges out of the pictures of the landscape that Ammons has built up in the poem, which impart a sense of concreteness to the image.

Death in *Collected Poems* elicits a variety of responses. From the intensely personal "Nelly Myers" and the poems where the memory of his mother is powerful and indelible, to the poems which are general statements on death with no particular situations to relate to, weather is an inseparable image that modifies the reader's experience of death making the experience, a more palpable and therefore graspable reality, an experience to which Ammons returned continually to the end of his career.

In *Sphere* death is inextricably linked with his idea of process, and time is most often treated in a set of references to weather which imparts a sense of the concrete to the experience of death. Death does not remain an idea abstractly conceived of in his poetry, rather, it is situated in the temporal and spatial plane which makes death an experience one can easily relate oneself to. The sense of immediacy that Ammons imparts to the experience of death is enormously dependent on the physical circumstances in which it is imagined. The general philosophic statements on death appear in his poetry in the context of weather thus attempting to make a more concrete reality and this is true of *Sphere* where the first image of death is linked to the image of the seasons in section 6 of *Sphere*. Thoughts of death arise from thoughts of weather when Ammons writes:

> . . . dirty old
> man hawking order and clarity :but if he would not
> be dark, what a brightness! though I am not enjoying the
> first day of spring very much, it is not with me as it is
> with my friend George ,spending his first spring in
> the grave . . . (S,13)

The experience of memory and the memory of experience are for Ammons memories of death that strike as graphic presence of weather. The recollection of death is also a recollection of the seasons. The present and the past come to be linked to the seasons and to the image of death, imagined or real. For Ammons the idea of the death of the body is related to weather and the present and consequently made more real and concrete. In section 79 he describes his death:

> . . . then the little
> breath will die : then the locks , so many ,will cast ;to
> that late funeral of my late self , no weepers will come ,
> hushing attendant ,twelve foot accompanist . . . (S, 45)

This drama ends with a return to the present, which Ammons sees as an experience of weather:

> . . . then the small
> self will taste the ruin that has been my only food:(one
> whose home is afire wanders) . just now it's 7:15 and
> thunderstormy , blue deepened evening green , somewhat
> windy,
> rain a likely solution . . . (S, 45)

The solution for such flights of imagination for Ammons is in the end of such flights realized by the intrusion of reality in the form of weather.

The pattern of fusing the memory of death and a present fraught with weather opens section 83 where, Ammons with a mind, which furnishes "a clear sky" and a "smart wind", realizes that "there is more death behind / than ahead" (S 48). From this painful realization Ammons proceeds to articulate the loss of the "sixteen year old self and with it the well and wellsweep, chinaberry tree, the mother and father" (S, 48), and this stocktaking of loss is brought back to the present, to the image of the seasons:

> . . . the pecan tree is still standing, the same one big,
> the lean growths and the lean shades vanished: more death
> done
> than to do, except that memory grows ,accumulating strata
> of
> change ,and the eyes close on a plenitude . . . (S,48)

The progression is once again towards the more concrete reality of weather when Ammons writes:

> . . . I am tired of raw
> nuts and berries and staying up late freezing with no
> television :you cant keep visions selective enough: they
> fill up with reality . . . (S, 48)

From an image of the landscape to an image of the awareness of weather, death for Ammons is trapped in it. The circle is complete.

Death in *The Snow Poems* is an integral part of the landscape in which it appears. Though severely criticized by Elizabeth Janet DeRosa for its harping on weather, death is a powerful thought in it and critics like DeRosa and Hayden Carruth miss the point when they fail to consider the presence of the dark theme of death. General observations on death and the physical realty that it signifies both are for Ammons inseparable from the time and space that makes the reality one of painful immediacy in a time and space where the most dominant impression is one determined by weather. *The Snow Poems* does not differ from the earlier works in its treatment of death, rather the significance of weather in defining the experience of death which the reader sensed as early as in *Collected Poems*, reaches a point where the thought of death apart from the framework of weather becomes an impossibility. Weather imparts a sense of the concrete, change, time, and process that death seems to emerge from it or at least is rendered more real. As in *Sphere*, memory of death, here too, is linked to certain moments in the landscape, which for Ammons are moments of the seasons. Death thus becomes an experience very much in time.

The theme of death is only a passing thought in "The Snow Is Fine Sightless Today" but it is the reality with which the poem concludes when Ammons realizes that "when a father dies / the sky comes unlooped from the stars" (SNP, 67). Though only lightly touched upon, this reality of death is deeply rooted in an experience of weather which Ammons builds up right from the first line of the poem where the images of snow, winter, allusions to Christmas create a graphic picture of the landscape too powerful to be left behind in the final impression of the poem and of death in particular. Death is a part of the structural unity of the poem in a very personal way. Helen Vendler sees the poem as having two dimensions "the outside dimension of weather reports and the inside which comprises the poet turning fifty and his father's death."[6] These dimensions mutually reinforce the poems of *The Snow Poems.*

"The Hen Pheasant Streaks Out Of", which immediately follows "The Snow is Fine Sightless Today", explores various possibilities of death and life and throws up a series of questions where no specific instance from the memory functions as a springboard. What is presented by Ammons is the onward progression of life towards death, though the immediacy of the experience, which would be possible if envisaged as emanating from a particular experience, is missing here. The questions and doubts of Ammons, set the tone of the poem, though they are

occasionally interrupted by words related to weather. The focus is on the question that Ammons raises:

> is life a
> show ,death
> corrects
> or is
> death a
> show life
> corrects . . . (SNP, 68)

From this question, which has great philosophic implications, Ammons moves into a softer mood, and the tone shifts accordingly to one of advice:

> as you go into life (some say they
> wish they were alive or dead) you must
> forget where you are going
> which is into death . . . (SNP, 68)

The poem ends in a style typical of Ammons where the sense of a strain of realism closes the poem, which stresses the unreality of the fantasy mode that Ammons adopts in his treatment of death, which he admits:

> when I look death
> in the eye
> my pavilions quiver
> and my crystal battlements
> and walls of high castle
> dance in the afternoon breeze . . . (SNP, 70)

The take-over of realism, which this passage initiates, is complete with the poet once again reverting to the local and the particular when he writes, "suppose to get cold tonight" (SNP, 70), which expresses his thoughts of weather. The sense of the real in which the poet is trapped is conveyed through a set of images related to the seasons. The immediate reality for Ammons, as he has reiterated, is the pressure of weather though the presentation may vary from a single line to a minute-by-minute account of this natural phenomenon, which becomes a world in itself. In varying degrees, the movement of an Ammons poem is towards the particular, mostly achieved by the presence of the images of the landscape bound by weather.

"I Come From A Snowy World" has the same technique where thoughts of death are admitted only well after the reality of the seasons is sufficiently established that the reality of death though it remains at the level of a mere comment is linked to the experience of the seasons thus partaking of the more concrete reality of the seasons with in which such thoughts are presented. Images of the sun, of winter, of clouds, of wind, of snow and references to the temperature are the reality in which Ammons places the realization:

(not death
but life can
be
missed) (SNP, 79)

From this general statement on life and death Ammons moves on to a picture and experience of the landscape, which is defined by weather:

> the squall comes on
> from the west
> across the lake
> with the sun
> behind it
> suffusing it,
> oblivion melting
> everything . . . (SNP, 79-80)

And the poem closes with an image of the seasons, a reality strong enough to create the final impression of the poem as one which returns and ends in the present rooted in weather where "snow / ghosts stand up/ and walk off the roof" (SNP, 80).

"Christmas Eve Morning" is written in the same pattern where thoughts about death, which are more universal, are incorporated into the poem amidst images of weather. The particular experience of weather has no signs of death; it is just an experience of the weather of Christmas Eve morning:

> Christmas Eve morning
> a sifting of snow
> blurry clouds
> with near clear spans of western blue
> still at nine
> nothing coming through . . . (SNP, 83)

It is within such a reality sufficiently particularized that thought of death appears though it is not logically linked to the experience of weather:

> you fear the grave
> so much it is
> possible before life is
> done with you you
> will beg for it (SNP, 83)

Ammons switches from this general statement to weather, and the elaborate picture that he adds to the image of weather, stresses the reality of the landscape and consequently sets off the general statement on death:

> then the sifting thins into a sheen of
> micro lights, pain crystal flints
> twinkling down like fog- fussy bugs through
> beams of early sun,
> derived not from clouds but a haze
> that barely pales the sky
> weather is continuo . . . (SNP, 83)

Such elaborate descriptions of the landscape are the products of a hypersensitive mind that takes in all the changes that happen in the landscape, a mind disturbed and influenced by the minute aspects of time. The narrowing into the particular becomes visible when the theme of death is introduced later. Ammons's thoughts are linked to a particular situation making death a more concrete experience and a more personal one:

buried yesterday afternoon
today Uncle Emory
begins his first
full day in
the grave . . . (SNP, 84)

Ammons roots this personal experience in a landscape, where weather is a powerful presence:

but what a brilliant
finish to the snow storm
[another due tonight]
so much sun I sat with the jade
plant half an hour
.....
there direct light caused icicles
to form out of hung snow . . . (SNP, 85)

The experience of death, and the image of the body in the grave, though not very well developed by Ammons, exist not just as an abstract statement but become more palpable by his attempt to situate these in the present by a careful and detailed picture of time and space in which death becomes possible. Death of a person familiar to Ammons is a graphic reality for him from which philosophy is eliminated, and what is conveyed is an experience where thoughts are irrelevant, instead in its place the reality of the present experienced primarily through the senses is focused by Ammons which achieves the effect of the primacy of the concrete as perceived through the senses.

The details of this death do not form a part of the poem, rather, attention is lavished upon the surroundings, there is no story, and the eye is trained on the details of the present. Weather, here, conveys an experience within which other thoughts happen and such a position explains the seemingly inordinate attention that Ammons spends on weather, which seems to be out of place when one scrutinizes the treatment of death.

"A Seventeen Morning" exhibits a similar tendency where the picture of weather in great detail decides the larger pattern of the poem. It is within this frame of weather that Ammons builds up a refrain, a refrain of death:

look at
the people
in the
graveyard (SNP ,99)

This refrain incorporates variations in the final lines that point to weather and the landscape in a way, an extension of the theme of death of "Christmas Eve Morning". If in "Christmas Eve Morning" the body in the graveyard is an image which Ammons uses to point to the past and the present, a technique repeated in "A Seventeen Morning", the idea of the dead knowing nothing, a common enough traditional literary device which is absent in the earlier poem, plays a very significant role here when Ammons writes:

they the

don't seem to sweet north wind
mind (SNP, 99)

The technique, one has to admit is old, but the language that Ammons uses is contemporary enough and the feeling of unreality that would be inevitably attached to a literary device is effectively surmounted by the use of a language that is more conversational and casual. Ammons rejects the literary tone and the absence of seriousness and the connotations of a lack of sincerity that come along with the use of a literary device. The two-column presentation of the poem disappears to the end and Ammons concludes with a picture of the climate without leaving out the minute details. The reality of death comes to be effaced by the reality of weather endorsing the crucial significance that it plays in his poetry.

The different stages of growing up in "When One Is A Child One Lives" are connected by the thought of death. Such a preoccupation with death is suddenly interrupted by the present:

a windy, almost flashingly
changeable morning, the
clouds ripping across
influxes of light . . . (SNP ,180)

The final impact of the poem is not different from the one that Ammons often develops, in that, the thought of death comes to be sidelined and even erased by the thoughts of weather.

Abstract thoughts on death are sufficiently disengaged from any specific experience; they lack the support of the local habitation and a name and are hence consequently less retained than the physical reality of the present that Ammons purposefully foregrounds. The final impression that Ammons wants to convey is one of dominance of weather and not of death, and "You Can't Imitate", another poem of the same period, mixes general statements on death amidst the reality of weather. Ammons plants sufficient referents of time which construct the nature of the landscape:

> (the thicket floor
> a manuscript patches
> of snow illuminate)
> yours truly
> yours treely (SNP ,200)

Confronted with such a landscape, he thinks of death:

> why kill
> yourself when
> you can
> die
> without
> your help (SNP, 200)

The thought of death, is prefaced with references to weather in the phrase "windy week", and it is against the background of this "windy week" that he closes the poem with thoughts of death:

thousand years the grave may
not be its
goal but that is
where it lands (SNP, 200)

What Ammons attempts here is a philosophic tone, an attempt to produce a statement of universal scope, to introduce the note of tragedy, however faint it turns out to be, which is lost in the more pressing problems of facing the present, a pattern Ammons uses in "Temperature Fell", where within the greater theme of weather and the seasons, Ammons writes of the moment in which the thoughts of death crowd his mind and he speaks of the morning which "was a morning, like / any other for anything"(SNP, 204). From this very specific point in time Ammons broods on the problems of death where the image of death fuses with the image of the landscape:

choose short term goals and having
realized them ,wait for the grave
wandering afloat the landscape
to find you
have long range . . . (SNP, 205)

Death, the inevitable conclusion emerges:

you will complete no work
but you will,
eyes on the sky, stumble astonished
into the grave
your work left

to others, an inheritance (SNP, 205)

Ammons does not indulge in the philosophic poses too long to sever the ties with the reality of weather and he returns to it and allows it to take over, that the final impression is of an experience of weather:

a little past four
it has turned so clear
the sky bright blue
cold (SNP ,206)

An intensely personal poem, "My Father Used To Tell Of An", is written in the similar pattern which reflects Ammons's childhood experience. The poem, a moving elegy on his father in which thoughts of death appear in the image "he died with not a leg to stand on", an understatement, is interrupted by an image of weather:

yesterday afternoon it snowed &
I scribbled: 'more'
Uncertain (showery)glory,
flurry some sunshine
ground dry . . . (SNP, 230)

The poem does not return to the image of the death of his father but ends with an image of the day, which for Ammons remains linked to the peculiarities of the season:

today's spanking bright blue
[gold willows and green evergreens]

and chilly a
little fresh windy, great day for a walk. (SNP, 231)

The poem "Snow" stands apart from other poems in *The Snow Poems* because of its morbid obsession with the body in the grave undergoing changes. Ammons attempts a description where these transformations are treated in a concrete manner that the impression of the body as the centre of attention even in the state of death is clearly conveyed. This focus on the body in its various stages of transformation is placed in the larger framework of weather. Ammons begins the poem with an image of snow, a single word line, and within such a reality of weather Ammons imagines the human body:

. . . roots explore the
forehead and settle in the
ears, while the burrowing
beetle swims through or
around the eye(like a planet)
while the water rises . . . (SNP, 265)

The tone of humour, which Ammons conveys in the image of the planet, is taken up later when he writes of death:

. . . as we
enter into death we slip
out of it
like wrapping off the
chocolate . . . (SNP, 265)

From this humorous tone Ammons returns to the technique of representing the minute details of the aftermath of death through a set of images from which weather is not far away:

> wooden boxes eventually "give"
> the rain finds a hole and bores
> through milling the bones and mound
> gravel . . . (SNP, 266)

From such thoughts on the impact of weather on the body, though imagined, he returns to the weather and the presence of a more immediate reality is described at length:

> four days of clouds, two days
> of rain, the temperature
> steadily falling, this morning
> before dawn and the rain ran into
> deep temperatures that popped
> it white. . . (SNP, 266)

Death appears in the middle of this report of the day but is swiftly erased again by the concluding lines of the poem:

> all day the snow snowed in
> vain
> nothing but green in the
> grass nothing but leaves
> in the trees. (SNP, 267)

In Ammons's poetry the experience of death is linked to the sense of place. The sense of place is sometimes slight,

sometimes strong, but it contributes to a sense of temporality, a temporality defined by weather and the experience of death comes to be modified and even defined by it. The sense of being trapped in death, for Ammons, is made more real by a sense of being trapped in an experience of life, which in turn is an experience of the seasons in all its variety and inexhaustibility. For Ammons, the reality of death is the reality of weather.

The preoccupation with death in *Sumerian Vistas* which Leonard Scigaj calls a "somber meditation on human finitude"[7] is placed in the context of weather. In the "Ridge Farm" section of *Sumerian Vistas* Ammons presents thoughts of death, which come to him in the experience of weather. The context of weather is elaborated when he writes:

> slice 30 degrees off the summer
> summit eighty and the windy ridge
> that's left can change your summer
> clothes . . . (SV, 18)

This physical experience of the climate is a sense of time and place which takes Ammons to the thought of death and he realizes: " It's April and / glory is still uncertain and / death not" (SV, 18). Ammons jumps from a particular experience, an experience of time which he builds up later in the poem to the thought of death that Steven Schneider's charting of the poem is apt:

> This long discursive poem incorporates the array of Ammons's poetic voices: droll humorist, poet-scientist, metaformalist, and philosopher. It jumps from recording changes in local weather and meditations on poetic form to phenomenological and ultimately spiritual concerns in the same breezy, yet not flippant manner of many of his early long poems most especially *Tape for the Turn of the Year, Sphere*, and "Hibernaculum."[8]

From the sense of the weather Ammons moves towards a sense of the landscape again defined by weather:

> air is so clear and the
> sky fine blue this morning,
> small showers having given
> fringes to the front coming
> through last night . . . (SV, 18)

The sense of death as placed along with the thoughts of the experience of the weather in the landscape appears again, later in section 28 of the "Ridge Farm" where Ammons begins with a sense of the rushing of time, a feeling strongly conveyed through the images of the climate:

> yesterday was one day ,today is
> another ,tomorrow still one more :
> the creeps:
> the sun is bright but can never
> squint fine enough to count time
> by my span . . . (SV, 22)

This acute sense of time leads Ammons to the thoughts of death, thoughts, reminiscent of Keats:

. . . everyone knows
that when we die we wake up
elsewhere from the dream life into
life . . . (SV, 22)

The coming together of the seasons and thoughts of death persists in "Tombstones" the second part of *Sumerian vistas* where he employs a powerful experience of the weather and the seasons prior to his introduction of the thoughts of death:

. . . spring
speaks green
and fall burns out with cold
into winter's black writing
a mockingbird sings to whole graveyard . . . (S V, 48)

Thoughts of the graveyard and seasons fuse again in "Chiseled Clouds", a poem that appears in the third part of *Sumerian Vistas*. The sense of the weather and the seasons is present though oblique when Ammons writes of a "simple cemetery" which wipes out almost all his people where the experience of death is a part of the "silver cathedral of the afternoon sky" (SV, 64). This final image that *Sumerian Vistas* offers is ample proof that Ammons has not let go of his preoccupation with the experience of death deeply rooted in a landscape defined by the impressions of weather and the seasons.

Brink Road retains most of the persistent thoughts associated with death, thoughts which can be traced to his earliest poems where weather is a significant phenomenon that mediates the experience of death. As in the theme of the body, some of the early poems of *Brink Road* focus on the idea of death with only sketchy references to the weather or the seasons or the landscape. "Regards Regardless" is a case in point where Ammons writes of the absence that death brings and early in the poem he admits:

> . . . age edges
> us aside; we vacate offices [such as
> listening for the loud, dull oriole
> in May] . . . (BR,16)

A sense of loss and a touch of sadness prevail in the poem when Ammons writes:

> the chairs
> empty, our voices in none of the rooms :
> well, it was enough, even if nothing
> came of it . . . (BR, 16)

The experience of death and the final departure are placed in a context of weather though there is only a single image of weather, an image of the "loud dull oriole in May" and though Ammons does not care to fill the poem with the details of the seasons, the technique of introducing the theme of weather, however vague and underdeveloped it might be, in moments of

significant experience is repeated here. Ammons writes of his obsession with death in "Mind Stone":

> . . . if I dwell surprisingly
> on ashes, shadings away into death, it's to keep
> the colors down, anchoring glass white mountings to the
> blue bottoms of storms . . . (BR, 19)

Ammons's obsession with death here mingles with a set of images where weather figures underscoring the idea that death for Ammons, the thought of it is always accompanied by a sense of time and place which in turn is an experience of weather, an impression that he conveys in the next stanza:

> . . . at least, going out to watch the
> canopies of rain held down like dust by the unlimited
> particles of descen: oh,yes, it hasn't been easy -blue bright
> -open days overtly radiant . . . (BR, 19)

The reality of death here is as real as the reality of the weather to which the poet is exposed, an impression that Ammons creates in "Good Morning, This Morning". The technique adopted is different since Ammons does not elaborate on the theme of weather or of the landscape though it is present in the suggestive title. Death is the dominant theme here and it is evident in the way the poem begins with its idea of death as "very common" but not, "100% effective" (BR, 26). This matter of fact casual tone is reminiscent of John Donne's poems on death and the reader realizes the presence of nature when Ammons writes:

> . . . nature
> is just here, a lovely if careless
> spread, and its dynamics, seen
> to and smoothed out, can be
> suggestive . . . (BR, 26)

Landscape is very much a part of the poem and it introduces a sense of the concrete experience which offers a counterpoint to the discussions and abstract thought that Ammons incorporates into the poem and the sense of realism that he strains to achieve deters him from attributing any human emotion to the landscape.

A sense of the body undergoing rapid decomposition along with some abstract thoughts on death forms the theme of "Pit Lines" and the reader is confronted with a catalogue:

> . . . the flimsiest remnant, a scrap
> of bridal veil or a pocket watch fob,
> makes it to the grave, surrender
> after surrender having mowed down the fields
> and worn out the stagehands . . . (BR, 62)

The poem concludes with a sketchy picture of the landscape, when Ammons writes, "the hills aren't / indifferent, they are too neutral for this"(BR, 62). The landscape once again has proved to be most significant. The poet has no choice but to return to it.

In "Microinscriptions" Ammons reverses the technique and presents a minute description, not just of the surroundings

wherein the poet finds himself, but an ecological sense similar to *Garbage* and "Extremes and Moderations". In "Microinscriptions" Ammons displays his scholarship of the ecosystems, the awareness of the changes brought about by the sudden changes in the Arctic region, the question of interrelatedness and interdependence and consequently the fragile existence that man is subject to. The poem begins with the suggestion of a vast canvas when he writes:

> The fall of deep bottom arctic water down
> the Atlantic midrib a glacial inch a
> month, the high assimilations of the free wandering jet
> stream ,these places we look to for durance
> or dwelling motion . . . (BR, 65)

Ammons continues these elaborations, and the thought of death is finally admitted in the last line of the poem where Ammons realizes that "trying to share final pain- we hold on" (BR, 66).

If in "Microinscriptions" from elaborate description of the landscape Ammons turns to the thought of death, in the later poem "The Crystal Tree" the landscape is only obliquely referred to and Ammons directs his attention to the thoughts of death, thoughts slightly obscure. Ammons begins with an attitude that is possible towards nature when he reflects on a possibility:

> May we tinker with the nature define &
> adopt , adjust her procedures, till
> we can make a nature

that unwinds us at last from
the coils of nature . . . (BR, 93)

From this possible attitude towards nature, Ammons proceeds to the reality of death and the rationalizations man has always placed against it:

. . . that
we may not die , or that we
may build what keeping itself
perfect cannot die . . . (BR ,93)

Ammons even imagines a victory over death when he concludes:

this the will arisen on an orb's skin
where death's transmission's
nearest absolute ,
a single victory from it our
widest claim . . . (BR, 94)

Ammons continues to place his obsession with death in the context of weather in "Painlessness To Pain Is Paradise" where he writes of a man:

he's waited with white
October clouds like these often before
but when one white cloud shades another
gray , has he ever noticed that. (BR, 100)

And later in the same poem he writes:

. . . and though he's
studied many fall's mottled casts, has he plucked
the wires of wines frost skins leaf- free : scrawny

notes ! . . . (BR, 100)

Experience thus for Ammons comes to be essentially linked to weather and the seasons in the last two lines of the poem where a "last-minute instruction, / a glassy light and, beyond, with in that, dimly a brighter"(BR, 100) defines the experience of death.

Death is again a part of the landscape in "Walking About In The Evening". Though Ammons does not go into the details of death, the association between the idea of landscape and the idea of death is too obvious to be missed in the first two stanzas:

> The brook's slab gray dry except
> for flickers at a sloped slate's
> narrows : all this gold , though a man just
> down the street died young today . . . (BR ,110)

The poem ends with the thought of the man, but the landscape is still present in his thoughts when he writes of the brooks:

> . . . catching sundown, and that it runs smooth or
> bend evenly for a change: but brooks
> pay no mind: and, anyway ,
> may be the flickering shells about a magic
> that will spell this man over millennia
> back to a perfect reconstitution in light . (BR, 110)

Thoughts of death appear often mingled with thoughts of the landscape bound by weather as in "Picking Where Out Of When":

> relax a couple of weeks, the cones clear off:
> they may to an early thunderstorm even gold fringe
> puddles with dense flotillas and, afterwards,
> dry into rings' finest meshings . . . (BR , 128)

It is in this context of weather that Ammons writes of a man who prepared his graveyard and waited for his death. Though the man is not placed directly in this landscape the landscape opens the train of thought of death thus endorsing the significance of weather-beaten landscapes sometimes direct sometimes indirect in his treatment of death. "Picking Where Out Of When" is the last poem of *Brink Road* where Ammons offers a picture of death. The where and when, for Ammons are always a part of weather, in the experience of death or body or wind or animal life and *Brink Road* thus repeats most of the patterns of obsession that begin in his *Collected Poems*. Death may be timeless but for Ammons it is never experienced in isolation; it is so fused with the consciousness of the landscape that it is always within time.

In *Glare* the preoccupation with the thought and experience of death is present but it is not very persistent. Ammons's thoughts on death are for the most part associated with specific situations as in his early works and only very rarely does he approach the experience of death as something abstract, and general statements on death are very rare in *Glare* stressing once more Ammons's preoccupation with the sense of

the local, the particular and the concrete which has greatly defined his poetry. And in the earliest images of death and impending death in the form of cancer, the background of weather bound landscape is only indirectly and sketchily presented. The first direct reference to death in the context of weather appears in section 68 where Ammons is in an autobiographical mood. A sense of time informs the memory of death, which is to a large extent a sense of weather:

> I phoned my sister [there is only one, now]
> last night; she lives in N C where clear
> skies (which we didn't have here) enabled her
> to see the blue-blur comet : she said you could
> tell it wasn't a star: said it was
> over by the Dipper handle . . . (GL,189)

Though the thought of death is not sufficiently strong or elaborate, Ammons places it in an experience of the landscape where the peculiarities of the landscape form a part of the thought of death, and memory of death, however faint, remains linked to weather. Ammons never tries to think of a life beyond, and he does not seem to believe in it. In his interview with Steven Schneider Ammons made clear his belief:

> Those concerns occupy our few years here, and then we were never here before and we will never be again. It doesn't compute I think that's why there are so many inventions about what becomes of us when we are dead. It's very hard to imagine that nothing happens. And yet I'm quite convinced that that's the situation, that the universe as far as I can see has no dynamic need for a batch of leftover souls. [9]

With such a belief Ammons has no use of religion especially Christianity with its concept of the immortal soul. God too loses meaning when one accepts the idea that nothing remains after death. Ammons refuses to approach death through religion and much of the religious readings have no empirical evidence and whenever religious frame works are used by Ammons he does not stress their importance but focuses on the here and now and the concrete experience, that metaphysical considerations are ruled out.

The memory of loss and the memory of death come together in a later section of *Glare* where Ammons's thoughts on the death of his mother are deeply rooted in an experience of the day, which turns out to be an experience of the weather. Extreme emotions and psychological breakdown are absent; Ammons takes care to place the experience of the memory of his mother in the experience of the landscape and thoughts of mother are introduced into the poem only after he builds up an image of the present. A profound sense of the seasons and a rapidly changing climate are the impressions that Ammons projects:

> . . . (a little
> extra humidity over, say, recent days has
> turned the streets into rivers, and embankments
> into rubble, and this morning it all turned
> into snow- the pink tulip trees luminous
> under their clusters of white; the crabapple
> blossoms, though, ready to radiate, frozen

> out of their sockets, could be ,and everywhere
> gushy mush cushions the walkways : it is, of
> course Mother's Day, May 11 . . . (GL, 208)

The precise picture of rapidly changing weather is the cause for his thoughts on the death of his mother which Ammons calls 46 years old, which is pretty distant from the present; it becomes an experience very near to him, an impression partly enhanced by the physical reality of the present that Ammons builds up in which he allows himself thoughts of his mother's death:

> . . . a good day for
> corsages' metallic glaze and fern lace: my
> mother is dead and gone ,a death 46 years old,
> but a death as close as the next cell of my
> brain . . . (GL, 208)

This thought of death is the last important one that one finds in his writing. *Glare*, his last work, which Robert Gilbert calls the " bounded space of mortality"[10] does not reveal any change from his later works in his treatment of death; it remains deeply fused with the experience of the landscape's kinesis and transience which is essentially an experience of weather and the seasons. The death of his two brothers which he described as the "insecurities"[11] haunted Ammons to the end of his life and caused the "strict change"[12] that occurred in his life. Ammons never outgrew the first impression of death that he received. The sharp eye, which retained the first image of death in the landscape never left him.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: The Terrible Dependency

> . . . the
> low showers narrowed into washouts
> the happy variabilities day to day
> winding round the deep variabilities of
> season (reason ,treason):the year
> cycles . . .
>
> "8:45 A. M. - Doorbell Rings: Wife" A.R. Ammons[1]

The study has proved that weather is a significant experience that mediates all the major preoccupations of Ammons's poetry. The "meteorological conditioning"[2] of his poetry that Richard Howard hinted at as early as1969, is a sign of his rejection of transcendental aspirations. The idea that the world is not the result of consciousness alone is most often conveyed in his writing through images of weather and "the recalcitrance of the external world"[3], which he experienced as part of his farmer background is most easily manifested as weather. The ordeal of living on a farm that Ammons experienced results in a poetry that constantly entertains a notion of temporality and reality that is predominantly experienced as weather.

The analysis of the image of wind shows a progression from the romantic to the post romantic. A transition from the overt use of empathy to a rejection of it is the characteristic

impression that Ammons's poetry creates. His progression from an anthropomorphic imagination to a rejection of it is most discernible in his attitude to wind. The rejection of the romantic impulse is further seen in the disappearance of the dialogue poems on wind, which characterize his early poetry. The subjective dimension of the wind as an entity mostly defined by the peculiarities of a unique self is an impression that coincides with the romantic phase.

Wind in the early poetry is highly individualized, its relation to the larger sphere of reality is weak and no attempt is made by Ammons to sustain it since he is under the pressure of the dictates of a romantic consciousness which makes wind a powerful indication of Ammons's progress. Wind as a meteorological reality, supported by specific geographical details is a later phenomenon. The slow evolution of the presence of the landscape is accompanied by the gradual toning down of the emotional element. The image of wind which is less unique and more a part of the objective reality that Ammons builds up in his later poetry is sufficient proof of his post romantic temperament that takes over his later writings.

The early poetry remains romantic though Ammons occasionally introduces certain thoughts that are alien to romantic sensibility but are seldom developed. The impulse to reject romantic propositions, which becomes dominant in the later Ammons is thus traceable, though in the germinal form, to

the early Ammons. He proceeds from the experience of wind as a subjective reality to that of wind as an elemental force. For early Ammons, wind is relevant for the subjective processes that it produces that it comes to stand for; for the later Ammons it is understood and communicated as a part of the larger processes of nature, which suggests the trajectory of the poet.

The intensely personal image of the wind that Ammons conveys in his early poetry blots out the world outside. A gradual disappearance of the intense personal drama associated with the wind typifies later Ammons, and in its place the reader is offered an image of wind as part of the processes of nature, which is more realistically and less emotionally approached.

The rejection of emotionalism in his attitude towards wind which Ammons shows, as his career advances is yet another proof of his rejection of the romantic ideology. The sociable nature of wind which his early poetry foregrounds is discarded. Susceptibility to strong emotions, which Ammons displays in his early poems on wind, gradually gives way to an image of wind in his later poetry which does not give much room for an excessive display of emotions. Ammons's shifting of the attitude to wind is thus part of the aesthetics, which demanded a strong rejection of the violent emotions in poetry.

Wind as an experience that offers poetic inspiration, a feature of his early poetry, is rejected later in his writing. The study has further proved that the rejection occurs in the early

poems too, though it is not a dominant thought. Wind in his later poetry ceases to be a being and is more a part of the dialectics of motion and stasis. From the idea of wind as a source of experience available to a unique sensitive self, Ammons proceeds to acknowledge the reality of wind as increasingly free and disengaged from the clutches of a subjective consciousness, and to approach it as a part of the natural forces which can be endorsed by a more than subjective notion. The deromanticized wind thus becomes the manifestation of a deromanticized mind.

Wind as an extension of the ego, and as a boost to the ego, where correspondences are taken for granted, and are essentially romantic, occurs only in the early wind poems. The egotistical presentations and positions that Ammons conveys, again the fall out of a romantic consciousness which is linked to the image and experience of wind, disappear as the focus is shifted away from the ego to the world outside.

Wind as his writing progresses, becomes less identified with the image of the romantic poet. It comes to be more and more experienced as part of weather and the seasons. Personifications of wind and the dialogues of the poet with wind are strictly limited to his early poems where they exist as symptoms of a romantic disposition.

Ammons's early poetry entertains the idea of the ego as the central focus of experience, a thought that his later poetry

emphatically rejects. This shift in the attitude is the result of a growing awareness of the importance of the environment and the treatment of wind raises questions about the egocentric stance that the romantic ideology has promoted. The suspicion of the egocentric stance demands and effects a revision of the romantic reading of wind in his later poetry.

The study has proved further that wind for Ammons is a powerful experience of motion, which is very much a motion of the world, and part of a highly specific geography. Much of the realism of Ammons's later poetry is largely traceable to the motions of the wind. The intelligibility of his later writing, the cautious avoidance of the esoteric, and the suspicion of the romantic excess, work together to create an image of wind, which strikes the reader as not distant from the one that he himself has often experienced.

Wind in his early poetry supports the received image of the romantic poet as a lonely figure in a landscape though it is sketched vaguely there. The outlines of the landscape grow sharper along with the image of wind, creating the impression of realism that Ammons never strived to achieve in his early poetry. The realism which characterizes his later writing is the result of the image of wind, which is a composite one largely defined by the absorption of the minute details of the impact of wind on the landscape which becomes powerful from "Saliences" and which persists to the end of *Glare*.

Ammons shifts his attitude from the image of wind as a romantic projection to a meteorological definition of it. This shift is a drift towards the world outside where Ammons traces his fascination with wind to the patterns that wind realizes on the landscape. Such an attitude presupposes a more objective consciousness, which as the later poems of *Collected Poems* indicate is the result of a post-romantic consciousness. Wind, which is part of weather and the landscape that accommodates it, is in his later poetry a convenient image to look at the notion of interrelatedness in a more objective fashion. The visibility that Ammons allows to wind is the result of an increasing willingness to see wind as part of weather, which is a thought traceable to the need to distance oneself from the romantic consciousness.

The study has further realized that the sense of temporality that Ammons associates with wind in his later writings is largely due to an attempt to define the experience of wind as a part of the experience of weather, making wind a part of process and its attendant notions of temporality. The directionless wind of his early poetry gains a direction and is made a part of a more concrete and contemporary experience with a drive for precision, which is more a norm of realism. From a timelessness to an acute sense of time, the image of wind changes in Ammons, and the changes thus effected are

being increasingly seen as part of landscape, weather, and the seasons.

The rejection of the romantic associations of wind, which becomes noted from the later poems of *Collected Poems* is found extending to *Tape* where the logic of the diary mode prevails in the experience of wind. The strangeness of wind is progressively lost, as the strain of realism gets stronger. Consequently, as part of an attempt to present wind in a realistic mode, Ammons incorporates other human voices thus endorsing the reality of wind as more than a subjective experience. Wind is more an atmospheric reality, a meteorological one rather than a 'subjective invention'. Occasionally wind becomes part of the experience of the landscape in which animal life is observed. The treatment of wind becomes understated, which is the reverse of a romantic impulse that dominates the early poems which hyperbolically approach the experience of wind. The link between wind and weather gets stronger as his writing progresses and it becomes more and more a context to explore the questions of reality with a larger scope than the one related to personal existence.

The preoccupation with precision characterizes the wind of *Sphere* and *Diversifications*. Subtle changes in the landscape are traced to wind, and the clinical tone that becomes prominent in the last poems of *Collected Poems* continues to the end of *Diversifications* and wind is a source of patterns of reality

that suggests constant change. Ammons pushes further the association between wind and weather in *The Snow Poems* maintaining the strain of realism and resisting all romantic tendencies. Wind is an experience sufficiently localized as a part of the weather of a particular place.

Ammons manages the rejection of the romantic experience of wind by elaborating on a notion of temporality that he begins in *Collected Poems*. It is further intensified by a more exhaustive and contemporary notion of temporality, which depends heavily on the fractions of time, and is related to the fluctuations in temperature. The impression of realism that the image of wind conveys becomes increasingly linked to the environmental dimensions in the middle poems of *The Snow Poems*, which reject the transcendental possibilities of wind. Wind as a part of weather, which Ammons stresses, becomes a concrete experience, which counterpoints the abstractions that one finds in his writing. In his later poetry wind is part of a day-to-day experience with none of the strangeness of the Ezra poems. The vocabulary too, has clanged accordingly, suggesting a shift away from the romantic temperament.

Personal meanings associated with wind become less and less important as it gets more and more defined by weather with its insistence on the particular and the concrete, suggesting the dominance of realism, which persists in *Glare*.

Ammons's fascination for the animal world is largely because of his interest in weather. The world of animals that he presents is one very familiar to the readers, the incidents and images being largely domestic. The complex animal world that Ammons builds up is deeply integrated into the processes of weather, creating a complex web of dependence of the animal life even on the subtle changes of the landscape caused by weather. As with the image of wind, a progression can be traced in Ammons's presentation of the animal world.

In the early poems, the animal world is admitted, but is only of secondary importance. The ego is at the centre of his early poetry, and the animal world is admitted not for its own sake but as something that exists for the sake of man. From this anthropocentric reading Ammons moves away to a broader vision where the ego becomes less important in the worldview. The emphasis on the landscape with its various interdependent ecological systems assumes increasing significance. The impression of a constant record of the changes in the landscape is at once a record of the changes brought about by weather and animal life. This world of the animal life as it progresses is the result of a less and less egocentric exercise, and realism becomes the dominant mode of perception. The world vision of Ammons, which is greatly dependent on the idea of interrelatedness and interconnectedness, becomes obvious for him in the experiences of the animal world around.

The idea of process becomes more comprehensive and exhaustive with Ammons's preoccupation with the animal world. The motions of reality become the motions of the animal world. The deep sense of the subtle changes that his poetry conveys, is the result of his preoccupation with the animal world, and consequently, his notion of reality becomes many sided.

Ammons's interest in the minute world of insects is linked to his fascination for the process of weather. It is a deep and lasting phenomenon; it comes to define all animal life that he encounters in the world outside. Death in the animal world, too, is seen as influenced by weather and his obsession with the decaying carcasses of squirrels, rats, moles, and chipmunks is the result of his obsession with weather.

The presence of the images of animals in a context of weather creates a real experience of time, not as an abstract condition, but as one experienced most powerfully through the senses. The charges of abstractionism and intellectualism that critics have raised against Ammons do not hold, the study has shown, because of his attitude to the animal world. Ammons eliminates thought from his images of animal life, and he discards all experiences that are not available to the senses. The visual images that dominate his construction of the animal life are continuous with the rejection of the abstract.

The experience of weather thus becomes more concrete since Ammons constantly links it to the responses of the animals and insects. Occasionally Ammons writes of animals with which he had a close association. These images are often images from the past but the immediacy of the experience that Ammons conveys is largely due to the memories of weather, which are predominantly sense impressions. The severity of weather becomes for Ammons the severity of animal life. The images of weather, and the rapid transitions in it, are reflected in Ammons's poetry by a graphic record of the life in it. The very interest in the insignificant events becomes the force of his writing. Ammons's poems on animals are deeply rooted in an experience of weather, which conveys the impression that the inescapability of weather is not limited to the world of human beings alone.

Ammons's insistence on the non-cultural quality of his poetry is extended to the portrayal of animal life. A few agrarian pictures appear in his writing, but these belong to his early poetry and are later replaced by images that are available and possible to the urban landscape. Often, backyard is the setting of the animal world that he presents. The particularity of the place is typically American, and the experiences are not unique and the reader is helped by a sense of familiarity.

The strong sense of the particular in Ammons's poetry and the concreteness that he conveys are to a larger measure

the result of the images of the animal life trapped in a place that is constantly subject to the fluctuations in weather. The place does not change much, it remains the same but Ammons realizes that change happens though sameness is the apparent impression that a place creates at first glance. Ammons has realized from the experiences of animal life bound by weather that sameness and difference are possible in the same landscape. For him, animal life offers ample images of the nature of weather and the seasons but he resists a romantic treatment of birds or animal life that he encounters in the landscape. Ammons rejects empathy and he refuses to burden his poems with philosophical positions. His thrust is on creating an impression of the experience as real as possible. The photographic reality that Ammons conveys in the pictures of animal life does not allow the subjective impressions and the presence of a well-developed persona. Ammons's sense of realism does not approve of an overtly biological approach to the animal life around. He resists such an approach since it does not come within the vicinity of the immediate reality, which for Ammons is one dependent on sense experiences. The same pressure of realism prevents Ammons from mystifying the animal life around him. Transcendental meanings are carefully avoided and the images of animal life that Ammons presents are images that have a sufficiently strong sense of the particular.

Ammons's early poetry presents a very impressionable consciousness as the images of animal life evoke, though occasionally, a number of extreme responses like horror and terror. This emotional susceptibility is an aspect strictly limited to his early poetry. The lonely figure of his early poetry, which is the product of a romantic sensibility, is heightened by images of animal life in the landscape. They also suggest a loneliness which gives way to an impression of being comfortable in the world outside while coolly observing it and noting down its changes. Ammons observes animal life more than human life. Human society is sparingly admitted and Ammons indulges in the experiences of animal life which enhance the idea of event and process. The uniqueness of every moment, which Ammons believes in, becomes experiential in these images of animal life, which being locked in the experience of weather suggest a constantly changing reality that is never completely repeated. The transition from the more subjective responses to the animal world to the more impersonal observations of it becomes a sign of the growing awareness of the existence of the larger world outside. The increasing awareness of the importance of such impersonal observations is a pattern that is common to Ammons's ideas of wind, animal world and the body. Such a widening of vision is invariably placed in the growing significance of weather. As the experience of weather in the landscape becomes more powerful, the ego becomes

increasingly less important allowing a condition that would accommodate better appreciation of the subtle interconnectedness of the forms of life around. The centrality of man in his relation to nature, which is argued ardently in his early poetry, is replaced by a more balanced view, which attempts to reverse and redefine most of the 'natural' orders that man has erected in the name of progress. Ammons's poetry progresses from the romantic text to an ecologically oriented worldview, and this progression is underscored by his presentations of animal world, in a world of weather.

The act of writing and thoughts on writing are constantly linked to the experience of weather and the landscape, setting up a tension between the activities of life and the happenings in the landscape in which Ammons is placed. The context of weather offers Ammons the themes for writing, which he is constantly conscious of. Creativity for Ammons is linked to thoughts of weather. Ammons explores in the context of weather problems of writing, language, reality, articulation, and the limits of representation. Weather and the seasons are found to be reminders of reality, and they exercise enormous control over the thoughts on poetry. As in the case of the preoccupation with death, in writing too, the study has proved that Ammons begins in a moment in the present. The changes in the landscape caused by weather suggest the presence of a world outside, which is hard to elude, and which forms the beginning of his

thoughts on writing. The thoughts on writing in Ammons's poetry are juxtaposed with thoughts of weather and much of the tension that he projects in his writing is the tension between abstract thoughts on reality and writing placed against the concrete experience of weather.

Thoughts of writing that Ammons presents, are thoughts at variance with the romantic ideology. The self-conscious attitude that Ammons exhibits consistently in his writing can safely be termed post romantic in that neither an access to a revelation nor a language particular to revelation is admitted into his writing. The rejection of empathy, the impression of being alive to the questions of the representation of reality, the difficulties of actuality and the self-conscious quality of his writing make it impossible to support the image of the romantic Ammons.

The question of form, both specific and general, which is a central obsession in *Tape* and *Glare* is present in all his works in varying degrees as this study has proved, and this further invalidates the attempt to sustain the image of Ammons as the poet of the Romantic Sublime. Further, Ammons's poetry was seen, though rarely, to be articulating questions of critical reception of the relative merits of various genres, and these questions were placed in the context of weather.

The predominance of weather is a symptom of his aesthetics in action since weather stands for the concrete

experience that constantly aborts the attempts to impose a theoretical framework on experience. The experience of weather becomes a powerful reminder of the limitations of philosophy, and the idiocy of the attempts to transform and recapture experience in language is constantly brought home by the reality of weather, which continually punctuates such attempts. These questions always placed against the experience of weather suggest in Ammons's poetry an opposition between weather and writing, which becomes an opposition between actuality and imagination.

The idea of the poet as a part of the reality around, not as someone above it not even in moments of creation, is conveyed by Ammons by his frequent references to weather which build up post romantic notions of writing and the poet. The study has traced the self-conscious quality of Ammons's writing to poems as early as "Joshua Tree" and "Grass Miracles", where the preoccupation with the problems of form defines the overall impressions that the poems create.

The idea of the unique romantic self is criticized at a very early stage of Ammons's writing and the preoccupation with the link between weather and writing, though faint, begins early in his writing. The appearance of the long poem in Ammons, coincides with the full-blown self-conscious aspects of writing where weather is the reality in which the poem and its self-conscious mood become possible. The questions associated with

the form and scope of the lyric are continually disrupted by the references to the reality of weather. Ammons is so preoccupied with weather that the questions of reality are often seen in terms of weather.

The last poems of *Collected Poems* hold a crucial position, and become a turning point since the relation between weather and writing is directly and forcefully stated. The self -conscious aspect of writing, from this point onwards becomes a condition predominantly defined by its relation to weather, which persists to the end of Ammons's career suggesting the significance of weather and the post romantic tendencies in Ammons's poetry.

Ammons's attempts to define poetry are always placed in the context of weather. Writing becomes an activity constrained by the experience of the body not as site for empathy but as bound by weather and time. The temporality of writing, that Ammons conveys, is the temporality of weather. Such a definition of writing goes against the romantic and transcendental readings of writing which suggest a timeless experience. The desire for the concrete experience is a constant thought in his aesthetics that abstract discussions seldom reach their logical conclusion since these are interrupted by the concrete reality of weather.

The scientific experiences and explanations that fascinate Ammons are interrupted by simple experiences, and these simple experiences are for Ammons experiences of weather.

Ammons who is preoccupied with the difficulty of representing reality, which he links to weather, makes weather the reality. The rejection of the outlandish and the difficult, a part of his aesthetics, Ammons discusses in the context of weather. The discussions of other writers' attitudes to reality and aesthetics, a part of his self -conscious poetry, are also interrupted by the reality of weather. The self -conscious poetry of Ammons often explores the possibility of treating weather as a theme for poetry and such thoughts on the theme of weather are framed within the immediate reality, which for Ammons is an experience of weather.

Weather offers Ammons the context to shift from the difficulties of writing, mental and physical, caused by weather to the deeper questions of reality. Ammons proceeds from the specific merits of literary forms to the more general forms that language offers, and this progression is constantly accompanied by weather. Formal and thematic concerns both directly and indirectly point to the experience of weather in his writing. Ammons's poetry constantly moves from the processes of weather to the processes of writing and back to the experience of weather. Weather triggers off and defines the references to the function and the dynamics of poetry, the attitudes feasible in writing, and the critique of various types of writing. The "wordy mentality" of Ammons turns out to be the mentality of weather.

For Ammons, body is an experience deeply rooted in the landscape. This rooting of the body in the landscape and a search for correspondences between the body and the landscape in the early Ammons are largely metaphorical. But such attempts to place the body in relation to the landscape are an early indication of the awareness of some possible interface between the two, and the first image of the body in his poetry, it is found, is linked to a temporality that is mostly one of weather. The morbid obsession with the body begins very early in his poetry and the images of the body, when they appear, are related to weather even in his early writing. Ammons's early poetry of the body is one of empathy where the separateness of the body is lost in the landscape. The use of empathy is a passing phenomenon, which disappears as his poetry matures, and the notion of the body as separate from the landscape yet dependent on it characterizes most of his later writing.

Ammons's notion of the body, as it appears in his early poetry, is least conventional in that it refuses to see the human body as tainted or depraved. Whitmanesque assertions of the body appear early, and contrary to the Christian thought, Ammons's poetry builds up a corrective vision by seeing the body as a complex mechanism that has achieved a high degree of sophistication. Ammons's poems particularly the later ones, foreground the body. The sense of realism that runs through Ammons takes over very soon, and consequently, an interest in

the more visible aspects of the body becomes stronger. The inescapable reality of the body is part of his poetry.

The image of the body that Ammons builds up in his poetry is realistic since he brings within the scope of his poetry, the images of an ailing body, such as the diseases that are common and negligible which are part of the day-to-day reality, to the more fatal ones like diabetes, cancer, stroke, aneurysm etc.

The processes of the body are frequently disturbed by the images of weather so that the sense of the physical reality of the body is enhanced. The temporality and the spatiality of weather heighten the temporality of the body. That the physical reality of the body is a constraint to writing which is a major thought of *Tape*, appears in varying degrees in all the works of Ammons and persists to the last book length poem *Glare*.

The obsession with the body fluids with their connotations of flow is constantly paralleled by the flow of the natural process. Ammons's interest in the body goes beyond the romantic sensibility since his notion of the body is supported by scientific knowledge, but the rejection of the mind in favour of reflexes and spontaneity might be subsumed under the romantic.

The particular anatomical consciousness of the body that Ammons exhibits, brings within its scope both the male and the female body though Ammons's attitude towards the female body

is not free from the patriarchal mindset. Ammons is often irreverent towards the female body. He is often a voyeur, but the sense of voyeurism in his later poetry especially in *Glare* is directed at himself and the shockingly candid writing of "Summer Session" which though not a sustained treatment of sexuality becomes more candid in "Hibernaculum". From the experience of the awakening of sexuality in the poet, and from the adolescent male body that broods both on itself and on the female body to the peculiarities of the body as it grows old with its inconveniences, and the visual patterns of losses both physical and physiological, Ammons's image of the body grows, and all these images are placed within the experience of the physical reality of weather.

The treatment of the body in the poetry of Ammons is found to be similar to the treatment of death in that both are placed against the experiences of weather which are sometimes elaborately treated with only a passing mention of the body. Sometimes the buildup of the image of the body is elaborate with the mention of weather being slight.

The bifocal vision of the body, that is the vision of the body as a biochemical and metabolic reality is placed along with the experience of the body as a mixture of sense experiences, and both are found to be placed against the sense impressions of weather to which the body readily responds. Ammons often takes the scientific explanations and approaches to the logical

extreme and underscores the idiocy of such ventures. Bodily responses to the experience of weather are immediate and easily felt, which make the reality of weather as pressingly felt as the body.

Ammons's sense of humour is most powerful when he indulges in the intensely private experiences and aspects of the body. His obsession with the male and female genitalia especially the male, which is often very much in the confessional way, conveys a powerful impression of humour that is alien to confessional poetry. The humorous treatment of the body is seen to be frequently interrupted by the images of weather that Ammons conveys the impression of the reality of weather as setting the limits of humour.

The excremental vision of the human body that Ammons conveys in some of his poems is supported by scientific knowledge, which makes the experience not readily available to the senses. In such poems, weather, which disrupts the structure of such poems, facilitates a return to the real time and real place, and thereby implicitly sets up a hierarchy of reality. His poetry refuses to see the very simple tactile experiences of the body and the more complex internal workings of the body, in a space free from the images of weather.

Ammons's images of the body are images where death is an impending and inevitable reality. The humorous treatment of the body is balanced by a painful awareness of the

progressive disintegration occurring every moment especially in old age, and this creates a dismal picture of man. The impression of the society that Ammons allows in his poetry is largely the impression of the presences of human body other than that of himself. From a completely absorbed state in oneself to a wider understanding of the human body both of himself and of others, Ammons's poetry matures and this progression is constantly linked to the experience of weather, which becomes the framework in which all the other experiences are placed.

The final image of the body that Ammons builds up in *Glare* is a complex one with its frank descriptions of the male organ, masturbation, sexual intercourse, minor ailments, incidental and central to old age, demeaning comments on the female body, images of smegma flying in the wind, toothache, and bladder problems, images made still more complex and rich by the experience of weather in which these images either begin or end. The bodying of weather, for Ammons becomes weathering the body.

Ammons's notion of death is an experience of weather. This association with weather is part of the realism of the poetry of Ammons. The romantic treatment of death, which Ammons succumbs to in his early poems, carries traces of the images of the landscape and weather, though the impression of a significant presence is not felt in the early Ammons. The very

rare sense of history makes one or two appearances and as his poetry progresses, history in the collective sense of the term disappears, and is replaced by a sense of the image of death which is part of weather. Personal memory of death in Ammons is linked to the images of weather. The disappearance of personification, a symptom of the growing need of realism in the treatment of death, is accompanied by a placing of death in a more concrete and familiar reality.

With the exception of a few early poems, Ammons locates the experience of death in a weather bound landscape. It makes the experience of death more real and less strange. The strangeness of the image of death in the very early poems disappears consequent upon his observation of the landscape. Even in poems where religious setting is acknowledged, the focus is on weather and the landscape, and not on a religious handling of the situation. The poems of intense loss on the death of his mother, father, and acquaintances appear in the context of weather. The occasional general statement on death that Ammons introduces in his poetry is often disrupted by a sense of the particular that Ammons manages, by a reference to the weather and the landscape in which he finds himself.

The occasional imaginary escapes are frequently punctuated by the experiences of weather suggesting the pressure of reality. Ammons imagines his death in his poetry and this is counterpointed by the images of a landscape, which

is familiar and recognizable and thus the feeling of the unreal is greatly mitigated. The frequent oscillations characterize Ammons's writings on death like his thoughts on writing where the final return is to weather.

Observations on death, both general and particular, are placed in the experience of weather and death; weather and landscape get integrated from *The Snow Poems* onwards and thoughts of weather constantly interrupt to orient the experience of death to a temporal reality, and the immediacy of which is the immediacy of weather. Occasionally, Ammons's poetry on death, employs a fantasy mode, the efficacy of which is implicitly critiqued and modified by the presence of weather, and is treated realistically.

General statements on death are either the result of a very concrete experience or observations not related to specific situations. In both the cases such statements are related in Ammons's poetry to the sense of the landscape bound by weather and the seasons. The occasional humour that Ammons indulges in his treatment of death is balanced by a reality of the weather, which interrupts the humour and becomes a critique of such humorous treatments.

From passing references to human death placed in elaborate descriptions of the landscape in weather, to elaborate descriptions of human death faintly interrupted by sketchy pictures of weather, weather remains significant and the

powerful sense of the particular and the concrete is behind the last image of death in his poetry which is an image of his dead mother which is also an image of weather.

Weather thus becomes a convenient experience for Ammons, which helps him to further many of his preoccupations. The rejection of the transcendental, for Ammons, becomes possible and is communicated by the frequent presence of weather images. The experience of weather in which the notion of writing, body, animal world, and death come to be placed often results in a poetry which is more palpable, concrete and least abstract. As a result, the impression of a cold and cerebral poet comes to be toned down almost to the point of its disappearance. More than scientific themes proper, a general scientific temperament marks his writing, which is responsible for the impression of realism that Ammons conveys. The "savage will to transcendence"[4] that Harold Bloom pointed out is rejected in his later poetry and is largely conveyed through the experience of weather. Weather is for Ammons the majors and minors of the substance of life and a close look at the image of weather shows that it is the experience in which other experiences are placed. Weather thus becomes an experience that allows Ammons to convey his rejection of the romantic notions of wind, the romantic poet, and writing. The rejection of an excess of emotion by the logic of weather, which constantly interrupts, and which does not

allow much latitude for a display of emotions, is central to his poetry. The very drawbacks, which Bloom and a number of critics pointed out, turn out to be the strength of his writing. Most of these drawbacks are the result of the critics' attempts to straightjacket Ammons into the romantic or the transcendental school.

Ammons died in 2001. In many ways his poetry is paradoxical. Never able to get rid of the defeat of the south, his poetry is characterized by a total disregard for the historical dimensions. Acutely conscious of the questions to be addressed, he kept away from the definable issues of the time. Troubled by a sense of the inefficacy of words and the primacy of things over words and the marginality of a verbal consciousness and the status of words as very near to religion, Ammons wrote a poetry that was more secular than religious. An ardent admirer of Shelley, he shied away from his revolutionary spirit. A man who never believed in strong feeling, his poetry was balanced by a scientific temper. He admitted committed poetry as only a condition that happened along with writing. The economic roots of agrarian reality, which Ammons was acutely conscious of, never surfaced in his writing. The city troubled Ammons but he was sober enough not to believe in a pastoral return. A deep sense of the process troubled him both as a writer and as a farmer, and he mediated between the two.

Ammons was doubtful of the efficacy of imagination, though it was a way of life in his childhood that was torn by the pressures of depression. But his poetry constantly suggests a mind on guard against the free flights of imagination, suggesting a tension between imagination and reality that manifested itself as the question of the abstract and the concrete, the one and the many, the high and the low, the general and the particular and man and nature.

Ammons constructed a place for poetry, which was free from the loud voice of history. The voices that echoed there were those of the frogs, the twigs, the squirrels, the pheasants, the mouse, and other animals in various stages of life and death. Troubled by Hellfire sermons, which he never forgot he expounded a view that went against the Christian ideology of the body. The sense of the natural forces that were the only true company for this farmer boy, which transfigured his childhood and early poetry, was enhanced by the navy man who suddenly became conscious of the dynamics of things in themselves.

He believed that the occasional poems on science that he wrote were never a conscious attempt to convey a scientific attitude and he assigned them to the realm of daily usage. A professor at Cornell University, he enjoyed his position in the academia but was troubled by the questions of the centre and

the periphery which extended themselves to his environmental consciousness that was to characterize his later writing.

Ammons considered his poetry a "kind of an astonishing pilgrimage from the wind to the earth."[5] It is also a pilgrimage through weather. Weather is part of his world where he has always lived, both in his writing and in his life. Ammons was absolutely true when he said that, "you live or die by the weather"[6], a statement true of his poetry too.

Notes

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Majors and the Minors of the Substance

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NB 2974