

Gravelly Run

By A. R. Ammons

I don't know somehow it seems sufficient
to see and hear whatever coming and going is,
losing the self to the victory
 of stones and trees,
of bending sandpit lakes, crescent
round groves of dwarf pine:

for it is not so much to know the self
as to know it as it is known
 by galaxy and cedar cone,
as if birth had never found it
and death could never end it:

the swamp's slow water comes
down Gravelly Run fanning the long
 stone-held algal
hair and narrowing roils between
the shoulders of the highway bridge:

holly grows on the banks in the woods there,
and the cedars' gothic-clustered
 spires could make
green religion in winter bones:

so I look and reflect, but the air's glass
jail seals each thing in its entity:

no use to make any philosophies here:
 I see no
god in the holly, hear no song from
the snowbroken weeds: Hegel is not the winter
yellow in the pines: the sunlight has never
heard of trees: surrendered self among
 unwelcoming forms: stranger,
hoist your burdens, get on down the road.

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The wonderfully varied poetry of A. R. Ammons reflects his lifelong interest in science; landscapes, animals, biological processes, and even the weather typically provide the raw materials for his philosophical meditations. An heir of the American transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau, who sought in nature clues to an ultimate metaphysical reality, he also has affinities with Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams. A self-deprecating, countrified humor marks both his short, personal lyrics and experimental longer poems. One longer poem, *Tape for the Turn of the Year*, was written entirely on adding-machine tape.