

Mechanism

By A. R. Ammons

Honor a going thing, goldfinch, corporation, tree,
 morality: any working order,
 animate or inanimate: it

has managed directed balance,
 the incoming and outgoing energies are working right,
 some energy left to the mechanism,

some ash, enough energy held
 to maintain the order in repair,
 assure further consumption of entropy,

expending energy to strengthen order:
 honor the persisting reactor,
 the container of change, the moderator: the yellow

bird flashes black wing-bars
 in the new-leaving wild cherry bushes by the bay,
 startles the hawk with beauty,

fitting to a branch where
 flash vanishes into stillness,
 hawk addled by the sudden loss of sight:

honor the chemistries, platelets, hemoglobin kinetics,
 the light-sensitive iris, the enzymic intricacies
 of control,

the gastric transformations, seed
 dissolved to acrid liquors, synthesized into
 chirp, vitreous humor, knowledge,

blood compulsion, instinct: honor the
 unique genes,
 molecules that reproduce themselves, divide into

sets, the nucleic grain transmitted
 in slow change through ages of rising and falling form,
 some cells set aside for the special work, mind

or perception rising into orders of courtship,
 territorial rights, mind rising
 from the physical chemistries

to guarantee that genes will be exchanged, male
 and female met, the satisfactions cloaking a deeper
 racial satisfaction:

heat kept by a feathered skin:
the living alembic, body heat maintained (bunsen
burner under the flask)

so the chemistries can proceed, reaction rates
interdependent, self-adjusting, with optimum
efficiency—the vessel firm, the flame

staying: isolated, contained reactions! the precise and
necessary worked out of random, reproducible,
the handiwork redeemed from chance, while the

goldfinch, unconscious of the billion operations
that stay its form, flashes, chirping (not a
great songster) in the bay cherry bushes wild of leaf.

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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.

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