

Daniel Tobin: On "Corsons Inlet"

Certainly, of all Ammons's early work, "Corsons Inlet" articulates most acutely his preoccupation with nature's "disorderly orders," as well as with what is so deeply yet elusively interfused in the whole widening scope of the field: the Overall. Walking among dunes along an inlet shore the poet finds liberation in a "release from forms / from the perpendiculars, / straight lines, blocks, boxes, binds of thought." The zig-zag motion of the poem's lines down the page are intended to mirror both the motions of the poet's mind as it moves through its "eddies of meaning" and the elusive scope of the seashore itself in all the shifting amplitude of its flux. Here, the poet is not so much released from forms as from fixed forms of thought and being. Instead, through "the overall wandering of mirroring mind" in which he traces the clarified ephemera of the shore, all the while "erecting no boundaries," he discerns "an order held / in constant change." Unwilling, however, to indulge in the kind of speculation that would affirm an abstraction at the expense of living particulars, he declares "Overall is beyond me." Clearly Ammons's "Overall" is not the same as Emerson's "Oversoul," an abstraction that prizes transcendence over an immanence teeming with generation and decay. What does get affirmed through the whole motion of the poem, however, is the process itself, what Alfred North Whitehead would have called the living "nexus of actual occasions" that compose reality. The ultimate reality of "Corsons Inlet" is, as the poem itself suggests, "a congregation / rich with entropy: nevertheless, separable, noticeable / as one event, / not chaos . . . a 'field' of action / with moving, incalculable center." Quoting these lines, Roger Gilbert goes on to make explicit Ammons's affinity to chaos theory: "complexity is not chaos." In short, the "ultimate reality" for Ammons is not an order defined from above and entirely knowable, but something at most "noticeable" amidst the shifting flow of reality--a field unified paradoxically by grace of its very diversity.

From the widest scope of the macrocosm to the most intimate glimpse of the microcosm, "Corsons Inlet" revels in a system at once seemingly infinite in diversity and continuous in its integrity. Nevertheless, for Ammons, there is no "finality of vision," for the creative process, like the ecological process of his dune-swept shore, depends likewise on "the wider forces," the "enlarging grasps of disorder," out of which order itself is momentarily fastened. In short, in a manner consistent with Coleridge's insight on the nature of imagination, though far more radical in his organicism, Ammons would recapture in his poetry the living dynamic of nature. He would reveal through the naturata of its forms the naturans of the whole system, an aspiration whose very impossibility bears witness to the inexhaustible flow of reality itself.

From *Complexities of Motion: New Essay on A.R. Ammons's Long Poems*. Ed. Steven P. Schneider. London: Associated University Presses, 1999. Copyright © 1999 by Associated University Presses.

Publication Status:

Excerpted Criticism ^[1]

Publication:

- Private group -

Criticism Target:

A. R. Ammons ^[2]

Author:

[Daniel Tobin](#) [3]

Poem:

[Corsons Inlet](#) [4]

Source URL: <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/daniel-tobin-corsons-inlet-0>

Links

[1] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/publication-status/excerpted-criticism>

[2] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/r-ammons>

[3] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/creator/daniel-tobin>

[4] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poem/corsons-inlet>