

**الوعي البيئي في الشعر الأمريكي:
دراسة في قصائد مختارة للشاعر أي آر أمونز**

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**Ecological Consciousness in American Poetry:A
Study in Selected Poems by R. Ammons**

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المستخلص

تُناقش هذه الورقة البحثية موضوع الوعي البيئي في الشعر الأمريكي وبصورة خاصة في قصائد الشاعر آرشي راندولف أمونز. وتهدف الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على المنظورات البيئية لأمونز في قصائد مختارة بما في ذلك: قصيدة التقيب وقصيدة الفلك - شكل الحركة، وقصيدة القمامة، وقصيدة الفاصلة، تسعى الدراسة إلى تقصي مواضيع واهتمامات بيئية مثل العلاقة بين الإنسان والطبيعة، وتمثل الإنسان مع عالم الطبيعة وغيرها في شعر أمونز. كذلك وتوضح الدراسة مفهوم الشعر البيئي وتقدم نبذة مختصرة عن تطوره التاريخي في أمريكا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البيئة، الوعي،

الطبيعة، الإنسان، الترابط

Abstract

The present paper discusses the theme of ecological consciousness in American poetry with reference to the poetry of A.R. Ammons. It aims at highlighting Ammons's ecological perspectives in selected poems including: Prospecting, Sphere- the form of a Motion, Garbage, and Interval. The paper examines ecological themes and concerns such as the relationship between man and nature, the identification with the natural world, the one-many problem and the circle of life in Ammons's poetry. It also illustrates the notion of eco-poetry and presents a brief introduction to its historical development in America .

Keywords: ecology, consciousness, nature, man, interconnectedness.

I. Introduction

American eco-poetry finds its roots through nature-centered poetry that goes back to the 17th century America. In fact, human's attitudes toward the non-human vary overages. The European immigrants, who crossed the Atlantic and came to America, brought with them their own beliefs and ideas about man, life and nature. Roderick Nash, a professor of history at the University of California Santa Barbra, states that nature in the old world was associated with "the supernatural and monstrous" (1929: 10). According to the European traditions and folk beliefs, the untouched wildness is a place that is inhabited by evil, and not to be approached by man .

The preoccupation in ecology and the relationship between man and nature is a central theme that is utilized by many American poets. The evolution of the American culture from Puritanism, to Humanism, to Romanticism, and finally to Modernism and Postmodernism, was synchronized with growing ecological concerns and attitudes in poetry. Many American poets not only express an affinity with the natural world but also condemn man's domination over it. The poetry that is concerned with presenting ecological messages and emphasizing the interdependence between man and environment is called eco-poetry .

In his book *Ecopoetry: a Critical Introduction*, J. Scott Bryson defines eco-poetry in terms of three characteristics. The first one is its eco-centric viewpoint that recognizes the interdependent relationship of the world. Bryson points out that the relationship between the human and nonhuman worlds is interconnected. The second feature is "a humble appreciation of wilderness". Because eco-poetry follows an eco-centric perspective, it shows how little control human beings have over the wilderness of nature. Bryson's third feature of eco-poetry is its inclusion to "an intense skepticism concerning hyper rationality, a skepticism that usually leads to an indictment of an over technologized modern world, and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe" (2002: 6 .(

The 18th century witnessed novel thoughts toward nature in America. The age of Enlightenment brought about change in human's relationship with the world of nature. The deist ideology does not only hold that everything in this life is in perfect order, but it also promotes people's magnification and veneration toward nature. Deism, unlike Puritanism, emphasizes that the observation of the natural world is the key element to determine the existence of God. Accordingly, since God exists in nature, then it is viewed as sacred (Abrahamsen, 2018: 277.(

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In the late 19th century and with the evolution of the philosophical movement known as transcendentalism, the idea of the existence of spiritual power in the natural world gets to become more powerful in America. According to transcendentalism, the inherent goodness of human and nature is a major belief. This movement emerged in America due to the influence of the German and English Romanticism basically founded by Immanuel Kant and David Hume. Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American philosopher and a poet, has a longer hand in establishing and spreading transcendentalism in America. In his lectures, he emphasizes the divine significance of nature and confirms a spiritual link between the soul and nature (Emerson, 1971: 18 .(

In the twentieth century, interest in nature and environment increased with the increasing risks of climate change and the pollution of the industries which inflicted land and oceans. Several American poets in the twentieth century like Ammons, Frost, Bly and Jeffers, emphasize the importance of the non-human world. They condemned the man-centered perception and considered it the reason beyond the destruction of the natural environment. These poets who belong to the generation of the sixties have an ecological tendency in their poems. They hold that man's domination and exploitive instincts over nature are not acceptable and that nature has the right to exist free from human's assumptions.

II. The Life and Literary Career of A. R. Ammons

Archie Randolph Ammons was born on the 18th of February, 1926 in a farmhouse that is located in the southeast of Whiteville, North Carolina, the United States. As a child, he looked "big, jaundiced and ugly" (Lehman, 1996, 2) as he described himself. He grew up in the midst of the Great Depression years. His family included two sisters and one brother who died in his infancy. This loss was mourned in Ammon's poem "Easter Morning" (ibid .(

Ammons was educated at New Hope Elementary School and Whiteville High School. He began writing poetry while serving in the US army in the Second World War. He spent a few months in the navy until he got out in 1946. Then he entered Wake Forest University to study many majors: biology, chemistry and general science. When he was

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about forty, Ammons joined the academic life and worked as an eliminate school headmaster and an editor. The same year, he got married to Phyllis Plumbo. In 1952 he entered the University of California to study English for three semesters. Twelve years later, he moved to live in South Jersey where he runs his father's glass company (Bur 3-4.)

In 1955, Ammons published his first collection of poetry entitled *Ommateum: With Doxology*. He spent the next nine years writing poems for his second collection. In 1964 Ammons began teaching at Cornell University. The same prolific year witnessed the publication of his second volume of poems *Expressions of Sea Level*. Ammons shone his stardom with the publication of the *Collected Poems 1951-1971* which won the National Book Award in 1973. Also, he was granted the Bollingen Prize for publishing his long poem *Sphere* (1974). Among his other collections are *A Coast of Trees* (1981), *Garbage* (1993) and *Glare* (1997) (Lehman, 1996, 3.)

III. Ecological Consciousness in the Poetry of A. R. Ammons

Ecological themes strongly abide in Ammons's poetry. His scientific knowledge in biology, chemistry and ecology shapes his views concerning the relationship between man and the environment including other forms of life (Sitter, 2013:183). Ammons effectively utilizes his ecological knowledge through his poems in many ways.

In his poem "prospecting", Ammons employs the notion of the interdependence of man and nature. This poem exhibits that all life forms need one another for survival. The poem includes a short trip from night to dawn in which the speaker is camping in cottonwoods. He appears in loneliness and nobody else with him but the natural world. He depicts many scenes in which the human and non-human seem connected and in need of each other. The poet seeks refuge in nature. He opens dialogues and builds up bridges with non-human beings. He writes :

Drowsed over the coals
and my loneliness
like an inner image went
out and shook
hands with the willows (Collected Poems, 43.)

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In this stanza, the poet shakes hands with willows emphasizing man's need to nature. The idea of identification with the inanimate is made crystal clear here. The poet develops this idea throughout the poem when he starts calling with the coyotes and telling ghost stories to a circle of lizards in a Shahrazad-like manner :

and on a hill-thorn of sage
called with the coyotes
and told ghost stories to
a night circle of lizards.
Tipping on its handle
the Dipper unobtrusively
poured out the night (Collected Poems, 43.)

Another manifestation of Ammons's ecological consciousness can be traced in his interest in what is called The one: many problem. The world is full of infinite objects which are permanently changing, even though this world of objects and change, there appears to be an underlying stability and unity. The observation of this phenomena drives philosophers to believe that the infinity of things and their changes can substantially be linked to a single object, material, or idea. The problem of discovering the one thing that stands beyond all things in the universe is called the problem of the one and the many (Hooker, 1999, 2 .)

The one: many problem is initiated from the hypothesis that the universe is one thing. Hence, there should be one, unifying aspect that lies beyond everything. This can be a material, such as water, air, or atoms. Otherwise, it may be an abstract being, such as a number, or a mind. Religions recognize it to be a divine source, such as the Christian and Muslim concept of God or the Chinese concept of Shang-ti, meaning the Lord on High. Then the problem is to find what that one unifying idea is (ibid .)

In his book Complexities of Motion: New Essays on A. R. Ammons's Long Poems, Steven Schneider states that Ammons's obsession in the one and many springs from the strong influence inflicted upon him by the Chinese and Indian philosophy. He further explains that Ammons's belief

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in the one: many problem appears most powerfully in his long poem sphere-- the form of a motion (Schneider, 1999: 160). In an interview with William Walsh, Ammons states :

"Sphere, finally was the place where I was able to deal with the problem of the One and the Many to my own satisfaction. It was a time when we were first beginning to see an image of the earth from outer space on the television screen, at a time when it was inevitable to think about that as the central image of our lives- that sphere" (qtd. In Schneider: 160.)

In fact, the major ecological concern of Ammons's poem is to reconcile unity with diversity. This theme is employed by Ammons in various ways, for example, in his search for self-transience, his obsession in the concept of illusion, and the use of scientific facts to investigate natural systems including the ways via which they balance centers and peripheries .

In his quest for reconciliation between unity and diversity, Ammons explores a wide range of structures and events in Sphere. He figures out commonalities that underly discrete boundaries. The poet is fully aware of the multi-layered nature of reality. This awareness comes from his scientific background in biology and geology. He continuously explores the natural world's surfaces, though finds out a common core at the depth (Schneider, 1999: 161). For instance, in sections seventy-four and seventy-five, ecological consciousness is at the highest :

You and I cannot walk the street
Or rise to the occasion except via the sum total of effect
And possibility of the universe: we are not half-in and
Half-out of the universe but unamendable integral: when we
Move, something yields to us and accepts our steps: our
Tensions play against, find rightness in, other tensions not
Our own. (Sphere, 43-44: 1974 .)

The principle of reciprocity between man and nature is at the heart of Ammons's above-quoted stanza. The poet evidently speaks out that humans can never be ultimately separated from the natural world. He emphasizes that man is integrated with nature. Therefore, human's

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actions have implications on the universe (Schneider, 1999: 162). On another occasion, Ammons writes: " touch the universe anywhere/ you touch it everywhere" (ibid .(

In his lengthy poem *Garbage*, for which he won the National Book Award in 1993, Ammons skillfully depicts the circle of life. He evokes an Emersonian perspective of nature. David Baker states in the *Kenyon Review* that Ammons finds out that "nature everywhere is composed of the decadent and entropic, the aged, the tired" and that matter transforms and renews itself "turning of garbage into utility, decay into new life, an idea into further ideas" (Baker, 2000: 93). Ammons utilizes the metaphor of garbage in order to articulate the interweaved relationship between the individual and the world.

According to critic Daniel Hoffman, Ammons's poems are hugely indebted to the American poet Ralph Emerson. Hoffman confirms that Ammons's poetry "is founded on an implied Emersonian division of experience into nature and the soul" (qtd. In Walsh, 1990:19). Furthermore, Harold Bloom points out that both Ammons and Emerson share that reverent view toward the natural world and its complicated eco-system that ties everything living in this universe (1971: 34). In the tradition of Emerson, Ammons endeavours to unify the differences of the world, even unpoetic elements. Ammons believes that idealism overcomes decay; matter may perish, but the spirit remains .

In his poem, *Interval*, Ammons has another journey with the natural world. He seems surrounded by nature and its manifestations (streams, hills, squirrels, snakes, and birds). The poet lays down to sleep, but meanwhile, he starts contemplating God's intricate design of the human mind and the sublimity of nature :

The world is bright after 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 (Collected Poems, 52.(

The theme of the circle of life is at the heart of this poem. In fact, Ammons wants to convey a message that aims to raise the world's awareness about the importance of the natural environment. His

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message's essence is ecological which concentrates on the fact that humans' future in a safe world lies in a safe non-human world and that all insects, animals, plants, and bacteria play a vital role in a principle called the circle of life. If only one of these elements is extinct, then life on this planet becomes deranged. Ammons writes:

And nothing is separable
Look at this noble pine from which you are
Almost indistinguishable it is also sensible
And cries out when it is felled (Collected Poems, 52 .(

Conclusion

This paper has explored the theme of ecological consciousness in Ammons's poetry. Ammons employs science and art (ecology and poetry) in particular, and takes the charge of raising people's awareness about the importance of the natural world. The scientific and the perceptual world seem blended in his poems. In their essence, his poetic works shed light on the reciprocal relationship of all living forms, emphasizing the fact that keeping nature uncorrupted is the duty of man. For him, the future of man's survival lies in clear and clean nature. Influenced by Emerson, Ammons venerate the environment and calls for respecting its otherness.

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