Super Pudding, Sprouted Dick
on “Suet Pudding, Spotted Dick”

A light year or two from “I am Ezra,” but who else but Archie could have written this poem? It has all the trappings of later Ammons: concepts carved so they stand physical, or set into motion, riding or being ridden. It has flights of syntactical shrapnel—here colons pressed into action to make us read on. There is a word, never Latinate, that makes me turn to a dictionary. There is that gentle, discursive tone of the natural philosopher turned philosopher of nature. And a double-entendre title; it was always hard to keep the man down.

Archie is never far from carefully observed nature. The switch to the hornet’s nest in a winter tree is abrupt, but necessary, for something must take us out of the philosophical riff that has played itself out in spreading vaguenesses of alternative (“many, or as many as possible, or some?”). Ammons’s second switch, his mind wandering from hornets to bees, is no accident. A coda, for sure. But it is also his mirror move, propelling us gently back to the beginning of the poem. Through the pervasive “I” in the latter part of the poem, the distancing “oneself” of the beginning comes alive. It does not suffice to make autonomy stand tall; only if we worry about hornets, bees, and mites, can we earn being alone.

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