

people than in the outside world, and he began to change his mind about leaving. But he had to know a few more details before he could make up his mind definitely.

Later that evening, he was walking with the women on either side to the Barracks. "Just one thing," he said. "How do you make love here?" The woman with long yellow hair on his right said that she'd have to know him better before she could tell him, but the woman on his left said that you just have to do it with more subtlety and originality to take advantage of certain situations. "There are plenty of good women here who know more than you'd imagine," she said. He remembered the world beyond the gates. His steps became slower and slower as he approached the Barracks. He reached into the air and drew out a gold coin. "Do you believe in magic?" he asked. Their answer made up his mind.

## A Green Pass / Michael Hogan

You are standing in line with a pass  
wet and wrinkled in your hand.  
The temperature is a hundred and fifteen  
and the sun burns the whole sky steel-white  
above the quadrangle.  
The four walls shimmer with heat  
like a reflector oven.  
And you are waiting with a green pass which means  
you are here to see the warden.  
He spoke to you once when your father died,  
he questioned you shortly after the strike  
in prison industries.  
Bad news or interrogations,  
you see the warden.  
You could return to your cell.  
If it's important  
you'll be called again.  
Yet you wait like an auto victim in traction  
anxious for the six o'clock news  
to see if his accident is covered.  
In the cell there are swamp coolers  
straining like sludge pumps after a flood.

It is damp there, the cement floors are cool.  
But you keep your place in line.  
It is a penance you impose upon yourself  
like kneeling on unpadded prie-dieux.  
You owe her that much.  
Whether you loved her or not  
you owe her that much.

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FIELDS OF ACTION / CRITICISM  
AND POETRY

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“To Be Quiet in the Hands of the Marvelous”:  
The Poetry of A. R. Ammons / Frederick Buell

Those who first became acquainted with the work of A. R. Ammons by reading his more recent poetry have probably been surprised by looking back to the early poems reprinted in his *Collected Poems: 1951-71*. A large number of the poems dated between the years 1951 and 1955 (the date when his first volume of poetry, *Ommateum*, was published) do not seem to be characteristic of his mature work. Ammons has set these poems in a grim, at times overtly Gothic, world of death, shame, grief, and unexplained loss, and he has centered them around gestures of mysterious impotence or failure. Even where the poems' speakers move toward self-extinction, the result is neither peace nor catharsis, but a state of sensibility that is hauntingly difficult to describe. For want of a better phrase, I would call it a state of incomplete suffocation.<sup>1</sup> An example is the conclusion of the volume's best-known poem, “So I Said I Am Ezra”:

I moved my feet and turning from the wind  
that ripped sheets of sand  
from the beach and threw them  
like seamists across the dunes  
swayed as if the wind were taking me away  
and said  
I am Ezra