

Instagram: johnerichamel

American Journal of Poetry (July 2020): [The American Journal Of Poetry](#)

Arion (Winter 2021): [Volume 28 | Arion \(bu.edu\)](#)

The Poets' Touchstone (62.1, 62.2): [Publications – Poetry Society of New Hampshire \(psnh.org\)](#)

Comment on poem:

The poem “Botanical Gardens” is from a collection entitled *Province* or (I hope) *Where There Are Words* (bending a certain permission) and offered *in memoriam* to Danielle Passentin. The book refers to many places in Quebec, especially Montreal (as here) where Danielle lived and I often visited. The poem draws on the writings of François Cheng, whom Danielle was reading in the last years and months of her life. Cheng also wrote a book on Shitao, the 17th Century Chinese artist and Buddhist monk.

Additional Poems

Unpublished (from *Province*)

MONT-ROYAL CEMETERY

Yes, that's right, you are a discussion to me
As we walk the parchment hills,
Straggling down the mountain
From Lac des Castors.
Serried graves echo the city's grid.
Further passages in strength unroll,
Brief north day bevels the sun
And light skates down the corridor of death.

Frozen jaw, bracing wind, we,
In the province of our exchange,
We, walking among the trees and text;
Our words are birch trunks
Fading in a blizzard,
Marble statues in a drift.

More and further passages of strength

Unroll before us.
Brief north day bevels the sun.
Light skates down the corridor of death.

1996

Unpublished (from *Province*)

OUTREMONT

Some gods must be stacking blocks of ice,
Facet to facet, for makeshift towers
To house the oracle
Who speaks the capillating Borealis
Into the south.
For the sky never could say itself out
On such a day.
But for some there is only one God,
And the wailing wall,
An alabaster tree sprouting
Knotted prayers for fruit.

No vehicles ventured much this morning,
Trees rigged out in spongy snow,
Fresh drifts of sufficient size
To help us understand the departed storm.
All day we skated and played puck,
Until the crust of twilight burned.
We shouldered our sticks and met
The Orthodox fathers and children
Scrolling home their sleds.
The family still walks, therefore,
The stages of an ancient moment.
Though unable to voice a vow of stability,
Despite Hadrian and the Holocaust,
Still look, we hold
Our crumpled fruit upward,
Our daily upward waiting cries
Hammered out of
Isolation, neuroses, displacement,
That fragrant Jerusalem be this evening,
In handwritten notes
Of childhood's snowdrift, a candle,
For those unspoken songs collect and scatter

And bathe beyond the natural effect
Of the playful gift we were taking home,
A light that gives what we never had,
Stretches over us the *plenius* viaduct
By which we arrive equal to the day
For it had been a day and we had skated hard.

2017

unpublished

SHAPES OF THE WORD

Sun-shaped, dressed in a moo-moo
Yellow and ungainly bright,
She appeared at my door to ask a simple question,
To which I made a gruff reply, being choked
With papers to be graded.
Nudged by thought or heart, I looked up,
When she had gone,

And saw only the air of her departure,
The bountiful fault line in time
Remained as I ran where I sat, still hadn't fled
Some momentary after-image of her,
Frictionless, generative,
The air within air on the move, silent sparks
Along the jam.

Between worlds a pinole of light
Gave what's there and gone
In the doorway's frame, a flashing fish,
The lightning face on the shroud's vanish,
Asking no more
Than to break bread in kind words,
And still she left me this.

2021