



CSPS Poetry Letter

Dear Poets and Friends of Poetry everywhere,

Today I have a special treat for you; yet in a way it is a republication, as Santa Monica poet Hélène Cardona has translated and published her father's poems bilingually. She has acted in "Chocolat" and many other movies, and has also been published in the *CQ*. The book is:

José Manuel Cardona, *Birnam Wood/El Bosque de Birnam: A Poetic Anthology*, published by Salmon Poetry, Ennistymon, County Clare, Ireland, 2018.

José Manuel Cardona was born in 1928 and was a voice from afar. "Birnam Wood" is poignant and sad, but is also celebratory of life, of love and of art. A friend of Luis Cernuda and a whole generation of Spanish poets and artists before him, Cardona left Spain during the early Franco dictatorship. His obtaining doctorates at universities in Nancy and Geneva, and later working for the United Nations in many of the world's capitals, did not mitigate what was ultimately to become a life of exile. Starting to write poetry and collaborating at poetry journals in the fifties, Cardona is a poet deeply imbued with world poetic traditions—with Pound, Rilke, Hölderlin, Vallejo. Yet despite exile, Cardona is and remains a deeply Mediterranean, Spanish poet: "Under this sea Phoenician amphorae / Sleep their languid female curves." [21] In 2007, the anthology "Birnam Wood" was first published in Spanish as "El Bosque de Birnam" by the government of Cardona's native island of Ibiza. It is thanks to José Manuel's daughter, the polyglot American poet Hélène Cardona, that it has now seen the light of day in English in her spirited, inspired translation.

Unlike Ulysses, who according to Homer shunned Circe as sorceress, Cardona dedicates some wonderful love poems to her, whose eyes he apostrophes as the "astral gaze of [a] blind sphinx." An entire poetic cycle of 1959 is entitled "Poemas a Circe":

This island where we love belongs to no one ...
I prefer it this way, because love
Is that language of fire or scattered
Universe, in vines everywhere. [19]

He not only compares the loved woman to the earth, but she becomes, she is, the earth herself: "Circe, you are flesh, fertile land, / Like the one I don't have on this island." [19] But ultimately, even in Circe's arms, the poet remains a stranger, both at home and abroad. And from Circe's arms, he is propelled toward travel, toward foreign lands, and into exile:

If they ask what is my name, I will
answer No one, My name is No one, No one,
and I own nothing, and it doesn't hurt me
because this way I walk with less weight. [33]

Like that other poet diplomat, writing "Residence on Earth" in Rangoon, several decades before him, Cardona is a deeply engaged poet embodying human suffering in Spain as elsewhere:

I embody each man, each remnant
of tormented man, each slag
of debased man, each cry
of executed man [39]

Overall, José Manuel Cardona’s vision of humanity remains bleak, which is not surprising given the times in which he lived. In the major poem of 1995, “El Embeleso,” [The Spell], he writes (evoking Plato, Hobbes, and their ilk) of humankind’s pessimists:

I don’t think we ever leave
the cave. Wolf, tiger and vulture,
words man invented
fleeing from himself. [67]

Yet with the very word of “fleeing”—of people being forced into times of exile by times of war and civil war—José Manuel Cardona suggests a parsimonious note of hope for future generations: Humans, take heed, and *reform!*

And this he means may largely be possible thanks to the gift of poetry.

Your *Poetry Letter* editor,

Margaret Saine
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Orange, May 2018



Here is a poem by *CQ* contributor Richard Luftig:

EARLY BIRD SPECIAL

I’ll have the open-faced,
turkey sandwich with gravy
and an extra plate. We’ll share.
And Budweiser. If you could bring us
an empty glass that would be nice.

Afterwards, they will return
to the home they’ve shared
for the last fifty years: she driving,
he giving directions and telling
her again about the first time they met.

Richard Luftig, Pomona, California
First appeared in *Straylight*, Fall 2016





The second poem I have for you is by David Anderson, a CSPS Patron, **CQ** contributor, frequent participant (and winner) in our monthly contests, and repeating winner in our annual contest:

THE LAST SONGS OF SAINT KILDA

When a boy, Trevor sat before a piano
by the knees of a musician who placed
 hands
on his young fingers to teach him
the tunes of a disappearing generation.

 In his 70s,
to hear those tunes, he could only approach
the piano in the care home's great room
with no one else present. And lightly
 touching
the keys of the upright, he excavated from
 his memory
the simple melodies, the almost familiar
 harmonies
of lullabies, working songs and elegies
 wrung
from days lived with throbbing ocean
 shores, sea
stacks, cliffs and the constant winds and
 mists
of an abandoned island
 at the westernmost end of the
 world.

David Anderson, Lincoln, California
2nd Place, CSPS 2018 March Monthly
Contest

Our next poem is by long-time **CQ** contributor Diane Lee Moomey:

BRIE

I'm opening a Brie for you. I'll set
it where its shoulders, creamy firm, will
 slump
into the warmth of afternoon, and where
what breeze there is today will carry news
of "Brie" out to the highway, where you
 may

be driving. Yo-Yo Ma is at full volume
now (in case you're walking by), and I've
opened the Neruda to the verse
that seemed to summon you a time or two
ago, and read its final stanza twice,
read aloud his final stanza twice.
And I have trimmed the ivy, cut the spent
camellia blossoms, swept the brown ones
 from
beneath the pots that cluster near the door
where surely you will knock and bring a
 poem,

like you did before.

Diane Lee Moomey, Half Moon Bay,
California
First appeared in *Peacock Journal*, April
2017

Our last poem is from Kathy Lundy Derengowski, a member of the CSPA and a frequent participant (and winner) in our monthly contests. Congratulations, Kathy! And good luck with the publication of this remarkable poem and its coda, memorable for poets worldwide:

SEAMSTRESS

I don't sew at all but I tailor my life carefully
I alter

I embroider
I shorten when I must
I know that life is
one thread after another
patches and seams
what must be stitched together
what must be ripped apart
I need something with a little stretch and some forgiveness
easy care and
with any luck
wrinkle resistant.

There is sometimes a pattern but always, for a poet,
it is all material.

Kathy Lundy Derengowski, San Marcos, California
1st Place, CSPA 2018 March Monthly Contest

By the way, you don't have to live in California to participate in our poetry contests. These winners just show that we have a lot of talented poets in California, so let's celebrate our good poets!

Enjoy the rest of spring and the coming summer, and please accept my wishes for your continued *good writing!*

Margaret Saine

