

can bring to bear which are musical in character, and the examples I use are Shakespeare's song, "When that I was and a little tiny boy," and Hardy's "During Wind and Rain." Similarly, the first lecture, on poetry and painting does not deal with poems based on paintings or vice versa (though your own splendid poems based on painterly sources are mentioned) but rather with poems that employ painterly characteristics, and examples are offered from Elizabeth Bishop and Stevens. [. . .]

Affectionately,
Tony

Sandra McPherson is a poet and professor emeritus of English at UC Davis. Hecht's letter was in response to her query about a course she was planning on "Love and Desire in Contemporary American Poetry."

October 4, 1992 Washington DC

Dear Sandy,

Though it's hard to remember the genesis of some poems written a long time ago, I think that "The Ghost in the Martini" had, as it were, two illegitimate parents. One was Max Beerbohm, who wrote a Foreword to a reissue of his early novel, Zuleika Dobson, in which he announced that he had not ventured to make any changes in the book because he was keenly aware of how its young author would have resented the supervision of some elderly foggy breathing down his neck. The other parent was Mark Strand, whose poem, "The Man in the Tree," though it seems at first to have two characters, has actually, the more one studies it, only one. I once read "The Ghost in the Martini" to an audience in England which included W. H. Auden, who, after the reading was over, said that he was surprised I could get that drunk on one martini.

"The End of the Weekend" is based on an anecdote told to me by Ted Hughes at the time he and Sylvia Plath lived in Northampton, MA, when Sylvia and I both taught at Smith College, and where, it may be added, Ted was treated with chilling contempt. He applied for a teaching job there, and was told he was unqualified because he had no teaching experience.

"The Dover Bitch" started with its first sentence. I have always admired the Arnold poem on which it is based, and yet I also felt a marked impatience with Arnold's way of making love into a form of redemption and substitution for any other form of transcendent experience. Putting that much weight on human fidelity in a love relationship is to burden it beyond the limits of any lightness or carefree spontaneity. It was to make love into something grimly solemn, like

Victorian organ music, for which the word “lugubrious” could have been coined. The title of my poem was suggested to me by my friend, who at the time was also my colleague, Daniel Aaron. On the basis both of the poem and its title I have been accused of sexism, though when I wrote the poem I intended only to bring a spirit of levity and informality to the relations between men and women in the persons of Arnold’s poem.

With very best wishes,
Tony