

December 15, 1999 Washington DC

[To David Mason]

Dear David,

[...] Tomorrow I am to be whisked to a BBC studio here in Washington, there to be interviewed by radio from New York by a young lady who is assembling a collection of such interviews, all of them about Joseph Brodsky. [...] The invitation gave me a chance to reread some of the poetry, and to think about it. And in the course of thinking I seemed suddenly to remember a critical essay by Empson called, I think, "Donne: The Space Man," or something like that. I've looked high and low for it, but can't come up with it. [Empson's essay appeared in *The Kenyon Review* 19 (1957)]. As I recall, it focused, reasonably enough, on the effect of the Copernican revolution on Donne's thought and imagery. And it seems to me that Brodsky is more given to imagery drawn from the Space-Time continuum than any other poet I can think of; and among his earliest poems is an "Elegy for John Donne." I would like to say something about this tomorrow, if I have a chance.

This comes with love from Helen as from me,
Tony

2000

Shirley Hazzard (1931–) is the author of many works of fiction and nonfiction, including Greene on Capri, a Memoir (2000), to which Hecht is responding.

February 25, 2000 Washington DC

My dear Shirley:

I've read through your Greene Thoughts with all deliberate loitering, delighting in so many things along the way, the lovely deployment of your language, the elegance, the ricercare, of composition, musical in its every aspect, the open and welcome candor about everything of importance, and not least about the prickly and even forbidding qualities in Greene himself. It is far more than a memoir; it is full of suggestive depths and seemingly casual riches that conduce to long mulling. Perhaps because I was in neighboring Ischia in the late 40s and early 50s, much of the landscape shows again with all its damp or warm authenticity, its steep inclines, vineyards, rural simplicities. Ischians used to boast, in those days, that they grew and pressed the grapes that were bottled and sold as Capresi wine, chiefly because Capri didn't have enough room for sufficient vineyards, given over as it largely was to tourist trade.

I was also prompted to think, not for the first time, of the importance of silence to some writers, though not to others. As doubtless you know, Hart Crane used to play jazz music loudly on radio and records while he was writing poems. Of all sounds that would absolutely prohibit any work of mine, music of any sort, either classical or pop, would be first. It calls attention to itself, with its own syntax, its own line of development, blotting out, for me, my own slowly developing lines of thought. Random street noise I can generally disregard, unless it is extremely loud. Conversation, of course, is impossible. I used to envy the artist, Leonard Baskin, who used to work late into the evenings, doing the most delicate wood engravings or etchings, and entertaining company, me among them, while concentratedly at work, but able to converse with guests nevertheless. Nothing of that sort has ever been possible for me.

Chiefly, of course, I was led to ponder, as all your readers will be, on Greene's extraordinary, willful, and often selfish character. I am not referring to moments of pettiness or explosive rage, though these are unpleasant enough. I'm led to mull upon his apparent need to have as his mistress a woman who is married to someone else. This cannot be set down to mere mischief. I suppose there are no end of reasons that draw people into adulterous affairs, that there's no formula, even psychoanalytic, to describe the need that compels this triangular situation. But I have seen enough of it in the course of time—have, I confess, once involved myself in such a situation—but much more often have considered the motives of others; and rarely if ever have I thought it anything but self-indulgent as well as cruel. The role of the ego in matters of love is probably the most difficult thing to account for, and perhaps except for other-worldly love, can never be kept in decent order. But in Greene's case it almost seems as though the compliant husband was nearly as essential to him as the indulgent wife. From the point of view which concerns itself with egotism, this is particularly striking. [. . .]

This comes to you with love from us both.

Tony

Deborah Garrison succeeded Harry Ford as the poetry editor at Knopf. Hecht is discussing the order and format for The Darkness and the Light.

March 17, 2000 Washington DC

Dear Deborah Garrison,

[. . .] Regarding the introduction of "Mirror" and "The Ceremony of Innocence" into the sequence, I have given the problem a good deal of thought,