

the gods decide, I hope you like these poems yourself, and I send my thanks in advance for your efforts in my behalf.

All best wishes,
Tony

1961

This is the first of Hecht's letters to the poet Anne Sexton (1928–1974). The Wannings were close friends of Hecht's. "The Dover Bitch" was dedicated to Andrews Wanning, and Hecht composed an Epithalamion in honor of their daughter Margaret's marriage. (See letter of March 19, 1971.)

April 14, 1961 New York NY

Dear Anne,

I just got your letter—both your letters, the one on the cocktail napkin too. They got here a little earlier than is usual for the mail, and I found them on my way out to the post office to send the government its pound of flesh. (When they get enough of this flesh together, they'll stitch it up and shoot it into orbit.) If your letters had come at the regular time, I would have missed them, because I'm going away for the weekend—up No'th, to Saugerties, across the river from Bard College, to visit some old friends, Pat & Andrews Wanning. Do you know them? It seems possible that you might because they have a house in Maine, at East Blue Hill, I think; and then perhaps you might have given a reading at Bard and met them there, where Andy teaches. Philip Booth [the poet] and his wife will also be guests there this weekend, though Booth has a practical purpose in mind—he's coming to be interviewed for a job at the college. I remember your mentioning his name, so I guess you know him, and I'll take the liberty of giving him your regards.

Except for little weekend skirmishes like this, I don't plan to be away from New York much at all until August, when I will take my children to Fire Island for a month. After that, God knows. I have so set my heart on this next year of work (my own work, writing) that I'm not going to give it up without a good fight. Right now I'm not even thinking about it, because I can't really make any plans till I talk to my ex-wife. She is by no means the soul of candor, so I don't know how much good the talk will do, but we'll see.

Those are the details of life. And now, what do I say? I love you? Yes, I guess I do. But I feel sort of foolish writing a love letter to a happily married woman. Still, it was a wonderful time we spent together, and in ways that I can scarcely

put my finger on, you made me very happy. I hope that by the time this reaches you, the wine glasses will have arrived, and I should like you and Kayo [Sexton's husband] to drink a toast to each other first, and then one to me. I take it there'll be something around the house to put in the glasses; there's no reason why they can't be used for good dry martinis, for that matter.

From here, a moment before I run for the bus, I wish you every happiness. You are an astonishingly gifted and accomplished poet, and an unbelievably lovely human being. Every one who knows you is lucky.

Love

Tony

[Early May 1961] New York NY

[To Anne Sexton]

Anne, dear Anne:

This will be a curious letter. Not at all like me. I am sad. Because I am in love. But not with you, or, not entirely with you. Anyway, you have a man of your own. The trouble is, so does she. And she feels a kind of mute, Thomas Hardy loyalty to him. But she loves me. I know it. I have written her a poem ["A Letter"]. I think it is good, but I don't know; I just finished it an hour ago. I'd send it to you, but the stanzas are too complicated for me to manage just now. I'm a little bit drunk. Which reminds me, I think you drink too much. Though perhaps no more than I do; which is too much.

To answer all the questions in your letters: Yes. I don't mind your spelling mistakes. I put them down to haste and bad spelling, which covers my errors in this line. I envy your kelly greenery. Here, in the late afternoon, the bricks of the building across from my back window are lit for half an hour with rusty evening light. Still, I was up in the country last week (I gave a reading at Bard College) and it was almost like being born. Which reminds me: I would love to read on a program with you. The trouble is, I am really not terribly well known, I am not on any lists and my name doesn't ring enough bells. So the only readings I give are generally arranged by friends: Betty Kray at the [Poetry Center, 92nd Street] Y, Bill Meredith at Connecticut, and some old colleagues at Bard. O yes, and I shall be reading next week at Columbia, again through an old acquaintance, Robert Pack. (You see what happens to me when I get tight? Even my letters turn out to be blank verse.) So what I suggest, if this seems all right to you, is that you mention me as a possible co-reader when you are asked somewhere to read. I think you must have many more such engagements than I do, and if you would not mind, I would be terribly pleased. [. . .]