elation that can somehow absorb into its bliss the oakum and fried smelts, the yelping of dogs, the creosote, the oil . . .

This comes with warmest greetings.
Tony

Hecht's letter below was written in response to the following topic for inclusion in The Yale Literary Magazine *(Winter 2000).*

> *"In his essay, 'Making, Knowing, Judging,' W. H. Auden offers a model for the developing writer's relationship with his early influences":*
>
> > A would-be writer serves his apprenticeship in a library. Though the Master is deaf and dumb and gives neither instruction nor criticism, the apprentice can choose any Master he likes, living or dead, the Master is available at any hour of the day or night, lessons are all for free, and his passionate admiration of his Master will ensure that he work hard to please him.
>
> *"Who were your masters and why? What did you take from their projects, and how did you learn to leave those voices behind to create something distinctly yours? When you write today, are you able to read your Masters without their styles creeping back into your own?"*

November 3, 1999 Washington DC

Dear Messrs. [Gregory] Tigani and [Callie] Wright,

Here are some rough answers to your three questions.

My early literary heroes were Eliot, John Crowe Ransom, Hardy, Auden, early Robert Lowell, along with John Donne, Marvell, and Yeats. Of these I personally knew only Ransom; the rest I studied and emulated at a distance, receiving, as Auden says in your quotation from him, "neither instruction nor criticism." The apprenticeship of a young poet is often a matter of servile imitation; and this is not a bad thing, if it can be controlled and overcome. Keats started out writing imitations of Spenser; Robert Lowell was imitating Milton and Marvell; Eliot imitated Laforgue; Shakespeare, in I Henry IV, in the great scene (2.4.) in which Falstaff "plays" the King, imitates these lines of Lyly's Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit, "Too much study doth intoxicate the brains, for (they say) although iron the more it is used the brighter it is, yet silver with much wearing doth waste to nothing; though the cammock [a crooked staff] the more it is bowed the better it serveth, yet the bow the more it is bent and occupied the weaker it waxeth; though the camomile the more it is todden and pressed down the more

it spreadeth, yet the violet the oftener it is handled and touched the sooner it withereth and decayeth." There can not be many poets of any merit who have not seriously apprenticed themselves to masters of their own choice, and often those among the illustrious dead. There was a time when I wrote too much like Lowell imitating Milton. One gets over these early crushes. And I can now read almost any poet without danger of infection from their style. It may be added that sometimes one wishes deliberately to sound like a certain poet other than oneself, especially when translating. I have, for example, (and not in a translation) tried to write a poem that resembles the verse of the Old Testament.

Yours,
Anthony Hecht

Mary Jo Salter (1954–), poet and editor, taught many years at Mt. Holyoke College. She is now on the faculty of the Writing Seminars at the Johns Hopkins University.

November 8, 1999 Washington DC

Dear Mary Jo,

You were right in suspecting that I returned to a very Mont Blanc of mail: three postal bins full of the stuff, much of it, of course, to be discarded, but it took a day to sort things out before even beginning the task of answering what called for answers. I haven't yet caught up entirely. The worst of it is the bad news you come back to; two friends hospitalized one of them over ninety with pneumonia, another with kidney failure. Consequently, this will be a poor reply to your very long letter, and its congeries of many topics. There's no way I could hope to address all the questions that you raise, but I would at least venture the comment that as regards the "delayed resolution" or "delayed satisfaction" of rhyme in Herbert's "Denial" and Hardy's "A Light Snowfall After Frost," Herbert seeks purposeful dissonance in the final lines of each stanza until the last one; whereas Hardy simply withholds the gratification of consonance for a fairly long time, keeping our attention suspended, our appetite unappeased until he is quite ready to satisfy us. Take a comparable technique of "delayed" or "suspended" rhyme in Arnold's "Dover Beach." "Roar," which ends line 9, only is granted its mate in line 22, and again in line 25. That's a long interval to hold a sound in the ear's memory, waiting, either patiently or impatiently, for resolution. And, as you know, there are plenty of poems in which only some of the lines rhyme, and not always the corresponding lines of different stanzas. [. . .]

Love to you both,
Tony