

teaching, and have been very happy in my association both with my students and my colleagues. Former students still write and visit me, and I correspond with former colleagues at many institutions. It has taken Georgetown University to give to the notion of retirement the added glamor of serenity and gladness.

Your note about mucking around in the garden with bone-meal and night-crawlers filled my nostrils, but not with longing. Both Helen and I have black thumbs, and Nature has cursed us for this estrangement by knocking down two huge trees on our property within the space of a month. [. . .]

This comes with love from both of us to both of you.

Tony

*John Whitehead (1924–1999), a self-described “Auden addict,” was the author of A Commentary on the Poetry of W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice, and Stephen Spender (1992).*

[May 27, 1993] Washington DC

Dear Mr. Whitehead,

Your letter and copious notes have been forwarded to me by Harvard University Press, and I write to express to you my deep gratitude for the receipt of them. Your scrutiny of my book was more detailed and careful than I had any right to hope for, and if there is to be a future printing I will certainly try to incorporate as many of your suggested emendations as possible. I add that, of course, I had no illusion that my text was faultless, and had myself discovered—to my great chagrin—at least a few of the errors that you also located. I only wish I could expunge or alter them all.

At the same time, you and I differ in our views of many matters—not only from one another, but from others as well. For example, I have been chidden by critics in this country for failure to take into account what they deem as incontestably Auden’s “greatest work,” which turns out, depending on which critic is consulted, to be About the House, The Sea and the Mirror or Homage to Clio. In your case, it is The Age of Anxiety. There is certainly nothing wrong with this diversity of opinion, and my book made no pretenses as regards covering the whole ground. Indeed, while the publishers at Harvard were nervous about the length of what I wrote, I myself wished then—and still wish—that I had gone into greater detail about the materials I selected for inspection.

There are, finally, some further topics upon which we differ. Americans are not quite so ignorant of the horrors of WWII as you seem to suppose. I myself served (in France, Germany and Czechoslovakia) in the front lines of an Infantry

Division that suffered such heavy losses (more than half the men in my company were killed or severely mutilated) that the commanding general was relieved of his command as incompetent. Furthermore, an English friend of mine [Bernard Knox] whose military career was far more daring than mine, and who was awarded the Bronze Star and the Croix de Guerre (he fought against the Franco forces in Spain, with the Maquis in France, and the anti-Fascist forces in Italy) read the book and found no fault with my views about the English attitude towards Auden's move to the United States.

With all good wishes.

Sincerely,  
Anthony Hecht

*B. H. [Pete] Fairchild (1942–) studied under Hecht at Sewanee and is now the author of a number of books of poems. Hecht wrote the introduction for The Art of the Lathe (1998).*

June 7, 1993 Washington DC

Dear Pete,

I'm grateful to you for your latest letter, though saddened by the news of your various rejections. And yet, knowing your work as I do, I feel the sort of confidence in your abilities that perhaps at the moment you cannot share. The confidence of which I speak is based on a condition of objectivity, which is probably the last thing you could bring to a view of your work. And all poets, Shakespeare not excepted, are given to moments (when they are not instead extended periods of time) of grave self-doubt—

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,  
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least, . . .

I think you are quite right to proceed along your patient course, poem by poem, adding to your work both in bulk and in development. I remember the curious anguish that went into the assembly of my own first book [*A Summoning of Stones*]. I would write a couple of new poems, and deem them better than anything written previously. So when I began to think in terms of a book I would cut out the earliest work to make room for the later, not so much out of eagerness to avoid having a book too long, but to avoid invidious comparisons