vite me to stay and write poems, as Rilke had once been invited. I was gratified, but didn't hold my breath. The place in those days had thirty-two gardeners, and the chief gardener resembled Anatole France.

With warmest good wishes,
Tony

*J. D. ("Sandy") McClatchy (1945– ), poet, critic, and librettist, is the editor of* The Yale Review *and many other works, including* Anthony Hecht: Selected Poems *(Knopf, 2011). He teaches at Yale University. In preparation for his essay on Hecht for Sydney Lea's volume, McClatchy invited Hecht to write a few paragraphs relating to his being hospitalized for depression in the early 1960s.*

December 26, 1984 Rochester NY

Dear Sandy,

I must try to answer your question, though I do so with a certain reluctance, since it's a topic I normally avoid in conversation, and touch upon only by indirection in the poems. I may say in an editorial way that I was never very comfortable about the way Anne Sexton exploited her hospitalizations and periods of dementia. I knew her quite well, but this "trait" of hers always made me feel ill at ease. It was clear she enjoyed both the attention she received from therapists and the more general notoriety of being "twelve-fingered," one of her kind. Cal Lowell was quite different, and though perhaps a little proud of his craziness at times (it became a license for recklessness in his manic moods, and seemed to him sometimes the sign of his genius as well as the frailty of his character) he only indulged it to the extent of not taking his lithium when the first manic signs of an attack came on him, chiefly because he felt so good, and, knowing that all the terrible consequences might, perhaps even must, ensue, he could not bring himself to descend from his exaltation.

Briefly, then, at the termination of five-and-a-half years of a painfully unhappy and unsuccessful marriage, a separation settlement was made, followed by a divorce, which required of my ex-wife that she live within 150 miles of New York City, so that I should be able to see the children on a regular basis. I must add that, while the marriage had been an unhappy one virtually from the start, its failure was a terrible blow to my self-esteem, and it was not I who sought to terminate it. When it was over I invested all my frustrated familial feelings on the two boys whom I saw, like most divorced fathers, on weekends, making those days unhealthily emotional, and completely without any ease or natural-

ness. In a way, I resented this arrangement: I had a job to perform during the week (teaching at Bard in those years) and such spare time as I had was devoted entirely to the children, who were pretty young in those days, the younger one still in diapers when all this began. So I had no private life of my own, and consequently invested too much emotional capital in the children. I was the more inclined to do so because I knew their mother to be completely irresponsible with regard to them. Then one day she told me, as I was delivering the children to her at the end of a weekend, that she had fallen in love with a Belgian, and that while I could legally prevent her from moving to Europe, as this man wished her to do, if she were forced to stay in this country she would be very unhappy, and if she were very unhappy, the children would be very unhappy. There was, of course, no argument to counter this. I had asked my lawyer, before the separation papers were drawn up, whether it would be possible for me to obtain custody of the children. He told me that it was virtually impossible, and in those days he was right. So she took the children off to Belgium, and I sank into a very deep depression. I felt no incentive even to get out of bed in the morning. I don't believe I thought in terms of suicide, but neither did life seem to hold out any attractions whatever. My doctor was worried about me, and suggested that I commit myself to a hospital, chiefly, he said, for the administration of medication. It was thorazine, which Anne took, and some other drug the name of which I no longer recall. I was there for three months, toward the end of which time I was allowed to go out during the days. Lowell was particularly kind to me during this period. The hospital was called Gracie Square Hospital, and there were some public pay phones on my floor, on which incoming calls to patients would be carried. Anyone could pick up a phone when it rang, and then page in a loud shout whomever the call was for. It was the custom of the patients to announce, in a loud and cheerful voice, on picking up the phone: "Crazy Square." Many of the patients were on electric shock; it had been agreed before I went in that I would be treated solely with medication, and this was observed. And the medication did indeed control the depression. What would have been a grim three months was, while by no means cheerful, yet remarkably endurable. The only thing I remember complaining about—it was pointless, of course, to complain about the food or routine—was the pictures. The plain bare walls were occasionally "enlivened" by framed pieces of cloth with arbitrary patterns on them, things that might have been drapes or upholstery. The chief point about them was that they were non-representational, and would not remind any patient of anything that carried an emotional burden.

Now, after all that, let me say that I really enjoyed dinner with you, and profited by your tip of the Gold & Fizdale book, which I promptly bought Helen for Christmas. She is grateful to us both. [. . .]

Tony

## 1985

*Hecht published an appreciation of Ben Jonson's poetry in* The Wilson Quarterly *19 (Spring 1995).*

[Early March 1985] Rochester NY

[To Joseph Summers]

Dear Joe,

So delighted am I with this curious correspondence about serious matters between colleagues in the same department that I felt impelled to reply to your latest quotations and observations on suitably elegant letter paper. We seem to continue in perfect agreement. You were right in supposing that I knew the passage from Jonson's Timber (I had found it quoted by Hebel and Hudson in the back of their ample anthology of Renaissance poetry) but in fact I had not read or thought about it much for years. Yes, I agree, one "winces" a bit at Jonson's tone; I very likely more than you, because he is speaking as a practicing poet, and I find myself often enough obliged to suppress sentiments analogous to his. So I find myself thinking, "Thank God he said it, so that I don't have to." There are few things that I find more unseemly than the resentful and usually envious remarks of an elder poet who feels he has been cheated out of the fame and applause he deserves. Though what Jonson says is all too often true, it is not something poets are in a position to say without appearing to have a private ax to grind. There are far too many examples of this sort of arch self-consciousness. Robert Hillyer was full of such contempt for his contemporaries, and poor John Crowe Ransom wrote a mocking commentary on Eliot's "Waste Land" (which he had the wit or grace not to republish in book form) that could not fail to remind a reader that the two poets happened to be born in the same year. Graves may have been the most reckless offender in this way, and his Oxford lectures, collected in The Crowning Privilege, contain one called "Be These Thy Gods, O Israel," which undertakes to demolish Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Dylan Thomas, and Auden. It comes dangerously close to simple vindictiveness. And yet one cannot help sympathize with any poet, even Frost, who sees his labor as lonely and largely unnoticed, and sees a lot of trumpery admired instead.