

TO: Park University Students Taking the Writing Competency Test

FROM: Steve Atkinson, WCT Coordinator

SUBJECT: Writing Competency Test

THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN PASSING THE WCT IS READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE MATERIAL ON THESE PAGES: THE COVER SHEETS, EVALUATION GUIDELINES, AND NOTE ON SOURCES.

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES SPECIFIED BELOW MAY RESULT IN AUTOMATIC DISQUALIFICATION.

This is the reading material you need for your upcoming Writing Competency Test. You should bring pens, an I.D., and a paid WCT fee receipt. You may use erasable ink but not pencil. **Passing the Writing Competency Test is a university-wide graduation requirement and a prerequisite for EN306 and equivalent courses.**

To prepare for the test, you should study the attached materials. They include

- the assessment scale that will be used by test evaluators. You should read it carefully so that you will have a clear idea of the criteria by which your test will be scored. Two evaluators will score each test.
- a selection of materials to read and consider for planning your essay.

For the test, you will be asked to write a critical essay on some point or idea discussed in the packet or suggested by it. Your essay should be clearly and significantly related to the packet material. There are many possibilities; you will need to develop your own topic.

Your essay must make at least some use of all the articles in the packet, but it should not be a summary of the articles. Don't plod through them paragraph by paragraph; instead, use them to develop your claim. You decide how to use them: some might be discussed in detail and others only mentioned briefly.

You should, therefore, read the articles carefully and critically; think about and maybe discuss with others the ideas they contain. Here are some suggestions to help you focus your thinking:

- What topics are common to all the readings?
- Which issue or idea discussed in these articles do you find most interesting?
- What evidence or support from *your own experience* could you use to develop your essay?
- What evidence or support do the *readings* provide?

In defining a FOCUS and DEVELOPING your ideas (see the attached Evaluation Standards for the meaning of these terms), you may want to consider these questions as well:

- What social, political, or economic questions do you see raised by the articles? How do you respond to them?
- What value questions do you see raised? How do you respond to them? Can you articulate an arguable claim about these questions?
- Are there aesthetic or scientific dimensions to the issue that would be interesting to raise?

You may do any planning and prewriting you want, but you may not bring any prewriting or drafts with you to the test. You should bring *only* the packet of articles to the test, and you may make any notes you want on the pages of the packet, including an outline of your essay and your documentation of sources. You may *not* have substantial portions of the essay written in the packet. You must turn in the complete packet, with your name on it, when you complete the test. A dictionary will be provided for your use at the test site.

Note that everything you write during the test, including notes, outlines, and drafts, *must be written in the bluebook*. Only material *written in the bluebook* will be considered by the scorers. Do not insert or staple material into the bluebook. Please leave the bluebook intact—don't tear out pages.

NOTE. *Be prepared to document sources you quote, paraphrase, or cite. Your essay must refer in some way to all of the articles, and it must contain a Works Cited list and parenthetical references or some comparable form of documentation. Use **ONLY** material from the packet as sources for your essay.*

Remember that your essay may be DISQUALIFIED if you

(1) write on a topic with no significant connection to the packet material, or

(2) use sources—other than your own experience, of course—from outside the packet.

Please be careful in planning your essay.

WCT EVALUATION STANDARDS

Your WCT essay will be evaluated on four criteria. Each one will be scored separately, so that a strong score in one area may make up for a weak score in another, but the four scores must total at least 8. You must, in addition, get acceptable scores (2 or above) in at least three categories. Each essay will be scored by two readers; in the event of a conflict, a third reader will decide.

These are the categories; each one will be scored from 1 (lowest) to 4.

FOCUS. A 4 is awarded to a critical essay whose controlling idea seems not only clear but particularly thoughtful or imaginative.

A 3 indicates a focus that is clear and sustained throughout but that may not be especially original in light of the readings.

A 2 in this category, as in the others, indicates minimum competence: the focus is clear but commonplace or conventional.

If the piece cannot be considered a critical essay, either because it simply summarizes one or more of the articles or because its focus does not offer an arguable claim, it receives a 1 in this category.

DEVELOPMENT. A 4 is awarded to an essay that, whatever its length, seems to the reader to be a full discussion. It makes use of both material from all the supplied readings and also ideas, experiences, or information personally supplied by the writer. All the material is smoothly integrated and persuasively supports the essay's focus. The writer seems to be a thoughtful, critical reader of the sources with a genuine personal "voice."

A 3 indicates that the writer has incorporated all the source material both appropriately in terms of content and smoothly in terms of style, and has also contributed personal ideas and experiences to the discussion. The essay's focus is clearly supported.

A 2 in this category indicates an essay that makes at least some use of each of the readings and some other material to support its focus, though the use may not always be relevant, and the sources not discussed critically.

A 1 is given to an essay that makes no use of the sources, does not at least mention every article, whose use fails to provide coherent support for the essay's focus, or whose use consists of unmarked quotation (copying from the sources word-for-word).

ORGANIZATION

The 4 essay is not only easy to follow, its structure seems effortless because of smooth transitions and a convincing rhetorical pattern.

A 3 is awarded to the essay that has clear paragraphing and a logical sequence of topics.

A 2 essay is generally easy to follow, with reasonable paragraphing, though the discussion may wander briefly.

The 1 essay is difficult to follow, either because the sequence of topics is not logical, because it is repetitive, or because the paragraphing is not helpful.

MECHANICS

The 4 essay reads exceptionally smoothly, and the reader notices no errors in grammar, usage, punctuation, or spelling. The Works Cited list is complete, and there is appropriate internal documentation.

The 3 essay may contain an occasional problem in sentence structure or diction, but the reader is never seriously distracted. Documentation is complete.

In a 2 essay, there may be enough mechanical problems to distract the reader temporarily, but it is always possible to understand what the writer means. Documentation is essentially complete.

A score of 1 indicates either severe problems with sentence structure or word choice--severe enough so that the meaning is difficult or impossible to understand--or serious deficiencies in documentation--no Works Cited list or inadequate documentation of material within the essay.

NOTE ON SOURCES

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Caution. *The information on this page is not presented in one of the accepted academic documentation styles (MLA, APA, CBE, Chicago, etc.). Students should use this information in creating appropriate documentation for their WCT essay, not copy it as it appears. Additional necessary information may appear on the photocopied pages.*

The title of the first selection does not appear on the pages; it is “Is Ai Wei China’s Most Dangerous Man?” It appeared in *Smithsonian*, the September 2012 issue. To see the images accompanying this article in color, go to <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/Is-Ai-Weiwei-Chinas-Most-Dangerous-Man-165592906.html>

Jon Stewart’s article/interview with Bruce Springsteen appeared in the March 29, 2012 issue of *Rolling Stone*.

The remaining two articles are from *The New Yorker*. “Books” and “A Critic at Large” are departments of the magazine, not parts of the titles.

L

ast year, the editors of *ArtReview* magazine named the Chinese dissident Ai Weiwei the most powerful artist in the world. It was an unusual choice. Ai's varied, scattershot work doesn't fetch the highest prices at auction, and critics, while they admire his achievement, don't treat him as a master who has transformed the art of his period. In China, Ai—a brave and unrelenting critic of the authoritarian regime—has spent time in jail, was not allowed by the government to leave

Beijing for a year and cannot travel without official permission. As a result, he has become a symbol of the struggle for human rights in China, but not preeminently so. He is too quixotic a figure to have developed the moral gravitas of the great men of conscience who challenged the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century.

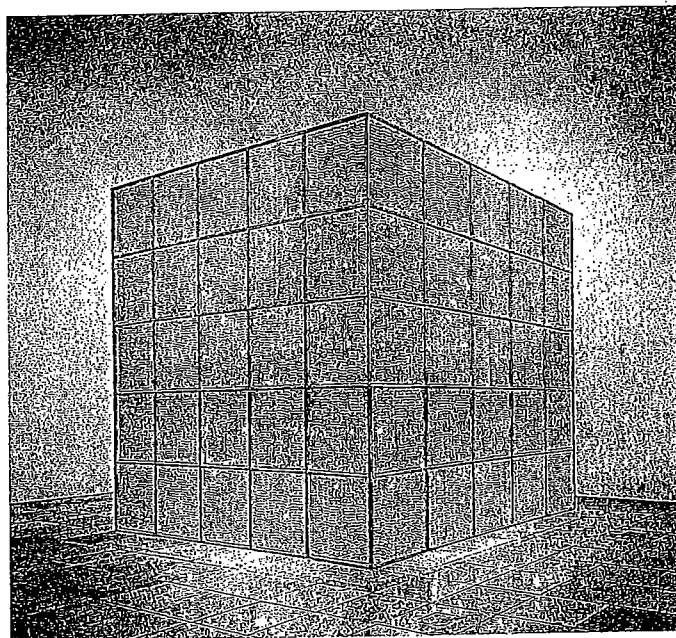
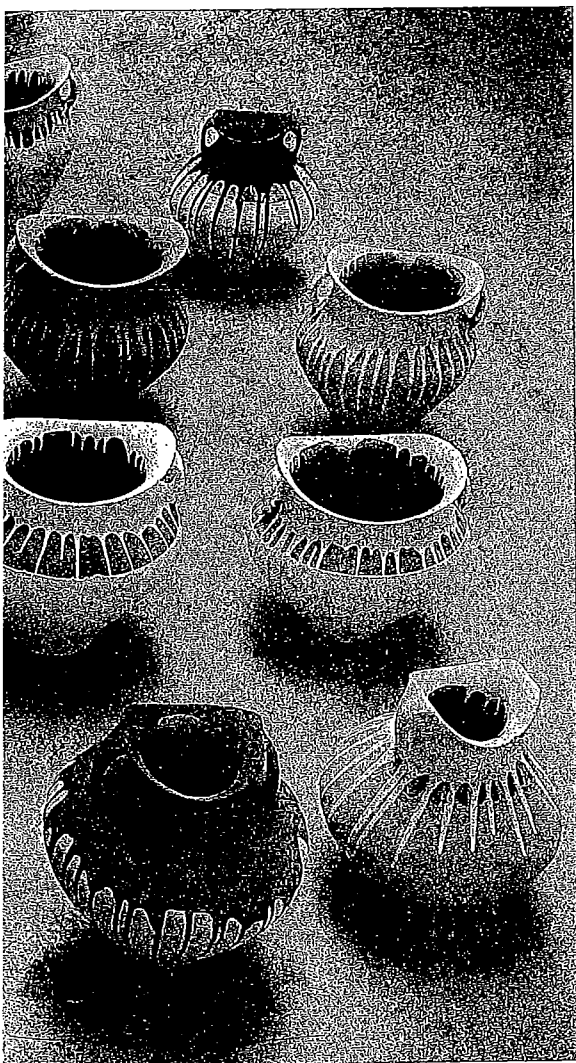
So what is it about Ai? What makes him, in Western eyes, the world's "most powerful artist"? The answer lies in the West itself. Now obsessed with China, the West would surely invent Ai if he didn't already exist. China

may after all become the most powerful nation in the world. It must therefore have an artist of comparable consequence to hold up a mirror both to China's failings and its potential. Ai (his name is pronounced *eye way-way*) is perfect for the part. Having spent his formative years as an artist in New York in the 1980s, when Warhol was a god and conceptual and performance art were dominant, he knows how to combine his life and art into a daring and politically charged performance that helps define how we see modern China. He'll use any

medium or genre—sculpture, ready-mades, photography, performance, architecture, tweets and blogs—to deliver his pungent message.

Ai's persona—which, as with Warhol's, is inseparable from his art—draws power from the contradictory roles that artists perform in modern culture. The loftiest are those of martyr, preacher and conscience. Not only has Ai been harassed and jailed, he has also continually called the Chinese regime to account; he has made a list, for example, that includes the name of each of the more than 5,000 schoolchildren who died during the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 because of shoddy schoolhouse construction. At the same time, he plays a decidedly unsaintly, Dada-inspired role—the bad boy provocateur who outrages stuffed shirts everywhere. (In one of his best-known photographs, he gives the White House the finger.) Not least, he is a kind of visionary showman. He cultivates the press, arouses comment





Subverting attitudes about the past, Ai painted vessels said to be 5,000 to 7,000 years old for *Colored Vases* (left). In a glittering irony, *Cube Light* (above) is as opulent as a palace chandelier.

and creates spectacles. His signature work, *Sunflower Seeds*—a work of hallucinatory intensity that was a sensation at the Tate Modern in London in 2010—consists of 100 million pieces of porcelain, each painted by one of 1,600 Chinese craftsmen to resemble a sunflower seed. As Andy would say, in high deadpan, “Wow.”

This year Ai is the subject of two shows in Washington, D.C., an appropriate backdrop for an A-list power artist. In the spring, “Perspectives: Ai Weiwei” opened at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery with a monumental

installation of *Fragments* (2005). Working with a team of skilled carpenters, Ai turned ironwood salvaged from dismantled Qing-era temples into a handsomely constructed structure that appears chaotic on the ground but, if seen from above, coalesces into a map of China. (*Fragments* embodies a dilemma characteristic of Ai: Can the timber of the past, foolishly discarded by the present, be recrafted into a China, perhaps a better China, that we cannot yet discern?) And the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden will

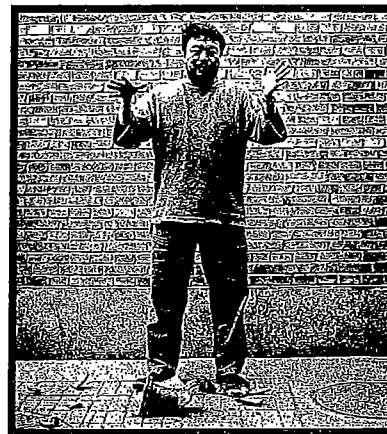
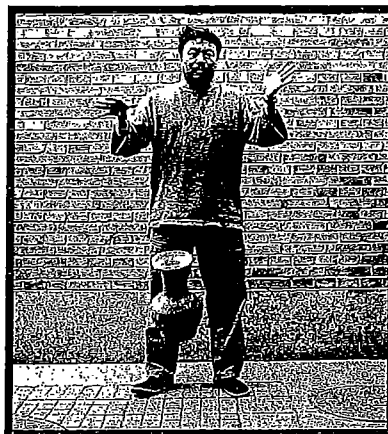
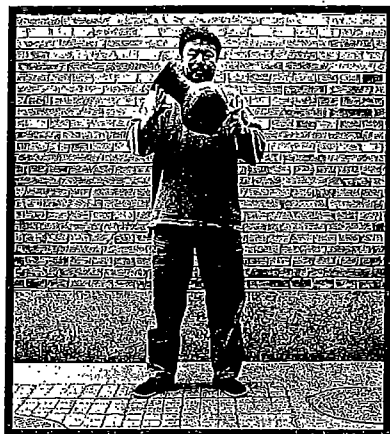
present a wide-ranging survey of Ai’s work, from October 7 to February 2013. The exhibition title—“According to What?”—was borrowed from a Jasper Johns painting.

The question that is not often asked is whether Ai, as an artist, is more than just a contemporary phenom. Is *Sunflower Seeds*, for example, more than a passing headline? Will Ai ultimately matter to China—and to the future—as much as he does to today’s Western art world?

Ai lives in Caochangdi, a village in suburban Beijing favored by artists, where, like an art-king in exile, he regularly greets visitors come to pay homage to his vision of a better China. A large, burly man with a fondness for the neighborhood’s feral cats, Ai, who is 55, is disarmingly modest for one who spends so much time in the public eye. He recently told Christina Larson, an American writer in Beijing who interviewed the artist for *SMITHSONIAN*, that he remains astonished by his prominence. “The secret police told me everybody can see it but you, that you’re so influential. But I think [their behavior] makes me more influential. They create me rather than solve the problems I raise.”

The authorities keep him in the

“It made every young person who may or may not have liked me before think I must be some kind of hero.”



news by, for example, hounding him for tax evasion. This past summer, during a hearing on his tax case—which he was not allowed to attend—his studio was surrounded by about 30 police cars. The story was widely covered. In 2010, he established a studio in a proposed arts district in Shanghai. The regime, fearing it would become a center of dissent—and claiming the structure violated a building code—destroyed it early in 2011. According to Ai, “It made every young person who may or may not have liked me before think I must be some kind of hero.”

Ai lives well enough, even under house arrest, but there’s little about him that’s extravagant or arty. His house, like many in the district, is gray and utilitarian. The neighborhood doesn’t have much street or café life; it’s the sort of place, one Beijing resident said, where people go to be left alone. His courtyard home consists of two buildings: a studio and a residence. The studio—a large space with a skylight—has a gray floor and white walls and seems much less cluttered than other artist studios. Both the studio and the residence have a neutral air, as if they have not yet been filled, but are instead environments where an artist waits for ideas, or acts on impulse, or greets cats and visitors. Like Andy Warhol, Ai always has a camera at hand—in his case, an iPhone—as if he

were waiting for something to happen.

His life seems steeped in “befores” and “afters.” Before the modern era, he says, China’s culture had a kind of “total condition, with philosophy, aesthetics, moral understanding and craftsmanship.” In ancient China, art could become very powerful. “It’s not just a decoration or one idea, but rather a total high model which art can carry out.” He finds a similar and transcendent unity of vision in the work of one of his favorite artists, van Gogh: “The art was a belief that expressed his views of the universe, how it should be.”

Ai Weiwei’s 1995 triptych (above) pictures him dropping a 2,000-year-old Han dynasty urn. Though Ai was the artistic consultant who helped conceive the “Bird’s Nest” stadium (right) for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, he boycotted the opening ceremony.

less personal kind of emptiness about the China of before. “There were almost no cars on the street,” he said. “No private cars, only embassy cars. You could walk in the middle of the street. It was very slow, very quiet and very gray. There were not so many expressions on human faces. After the Cultural Revolution,

Ai’s interest in design has less to do with being a conventional architect than with rebuilding—and redesigning—China itself.

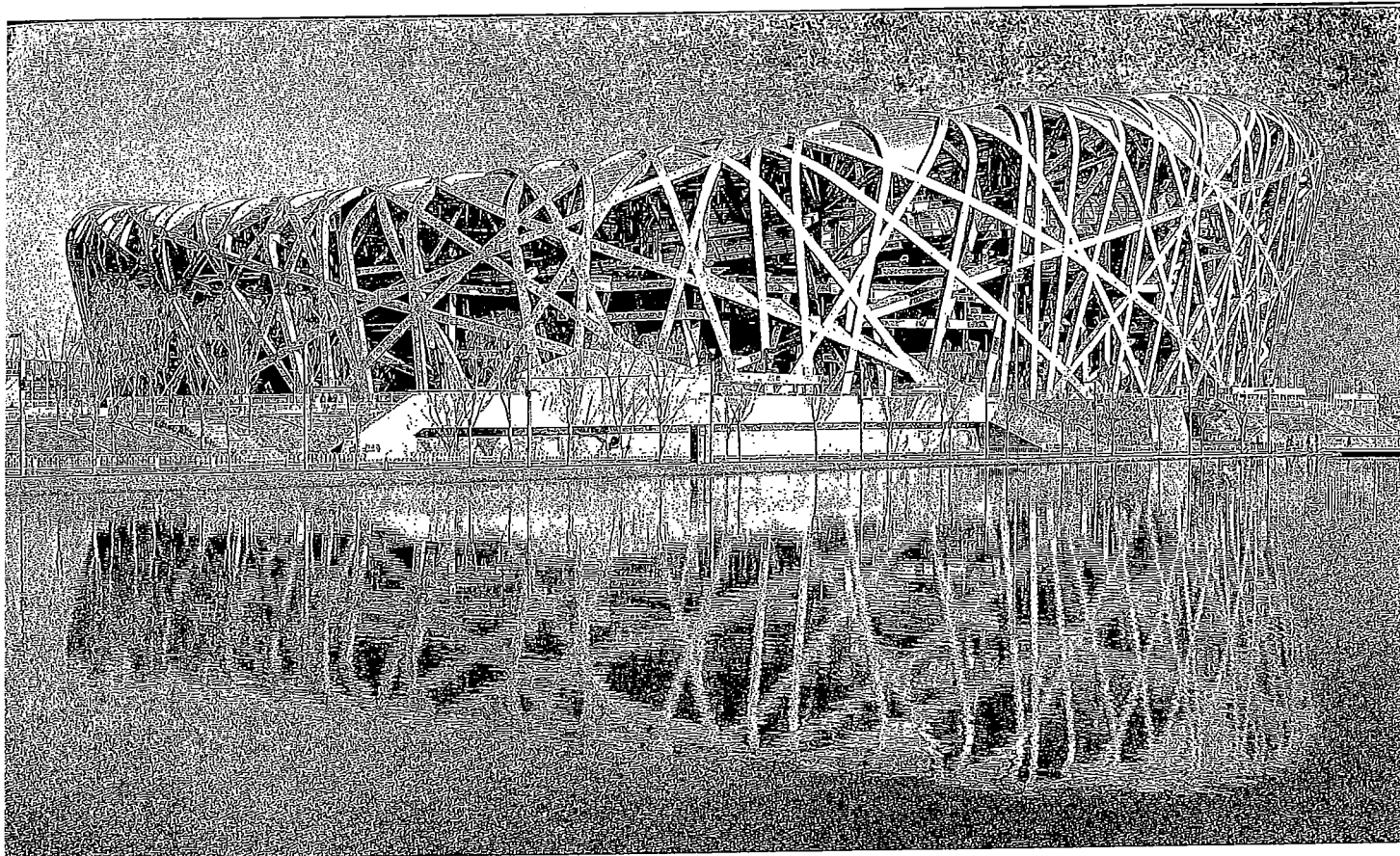
His more immediate before, however, is not ancient China but the totalitarian culture into which he was born. Ai’s father, the renowned poet Ai Qing, ran afoul of the regime in the late ’50s and he and his family were sent to a labor camp. He spent five years cleaning toilets. (Ai Qing was exonerated in 1978 and lived in Beijing until his death in 1996.) To Ai Weiwei, there was also another,

muscles were still not built up to laugh or show emotion. When you saw a little bit of color—like a yellow umbrella in the rain—it was quite shocking. The society was all gray, and a little bit blue.”

In 1981, when it became possible for Chinese citizens to travel abroad, Ai made his way to New York. His first glimpse of the city came on a plane in the early evening. “It looked



Take a closer look at Ai Weiwei’s “Circle of Animals” at the Hirshhorn Museum at Smithsonian.com/weiwei



like a bowl of diamonds," he said. It was not the city's material wealth that attracted him, however, but its dazzling freedom of action and speech. For a time Ai had an apartment near Tompkins Square Park in the East Village, where young Chinese artists and intellectuals often gathered. But he had no particular success as an artist. He worked odd jobs and spent his time going to exhibitions. The poet Allen Ginsberg, whom he befriended, told Ai that galleries would not take much notice of his work.

Although he has a special interest in Jasper Johns, Warhol and Dada, Ai is not easily categorized. He has a wandering mind that can embrace very different, sometimes contrary, elements. The same artist who loves the transcendental oneness of van Gogh, for example, also admires the abstruse and sometimes analytical sensibility of Johns. Much of Ai's best-known work is rooted in conceptual and Dadaist art. He has often created "ready-mades"—objects taken from the world that an artist then alters or modifies—that have a strong satirical element. In one well-known example, he placed a Chinese figurine inside a

bottle of Johnnie Walker Scotch. Yet in contrast to many conceptual artists, he also demonstrated, early on, a keen interest in a work's visual qualities and sent himself to study at the Parsons School of Design and the Art Students League in New York.

Ai's interest in design and architecture led him, in 2006, to collaborate with HHF Architects on a country house in upstate New York for two young art collectors. The house is four equal-sized boxes covered on the outside in corrugated metal; the small spaces between the boxes permit light to suffuse the interior, where the geometry is also softened by wood and surprising angles. The award-winning design is both remarkably simple and—in its use of light and the grouping of interior spaces—richly complex.

But Ai's interest in design and architecture has less to do with being a conventional architect than with rebuilding—and redesigning—China itself. Returning to China in 1993, when his father fell ill, he was discouraged by two new forms of oppression: fashion and cronyism. "Deng Xiaoping encouraged people to get rich," he said, adding that those who succeeded did so through their affiliation with

the Communist Party. "I could see so many luxury cars, but there was no justice or fairness in this society. Far from it." New consumer goods such as tape recorders brought fresh voices and music into a moribund culture. But rather than struggle to create independent identities, Ai said, young people instead settled into a new, easy and fashion-driven conformity. "People listened to sentimental Taiwanese pop music. Levi's blue jeans came in very early. People were seeking to be identified with a certain kind of style, which saves a lot of talking."

Ai responded to the new China with scabrous satire, challenging its puritanical and conformist character by regularly showcasing a rude and boisterous individuality. He published a photograph of himself in which he is shown naked, leaping ludicrously into the air, while holding something over his genitals. The photo caption—"Grass mud horse covering the middle"—sounds in spoken Chinese like a coarse jest about mothers and the Central Committee. He formed a corporation called "Beijing Fake Cultural Development Ltd." He mocked the Olympic Games, which, in China, are now a kind of state religion. The CCTV

tower in Beijing, designed by the celebrated Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas (see p. 72), is regarded with great national pride; the Chinese were horrified when a fire swept through an annex and a nearby hotel during construction. Ai's response? "I think if the CCTV building really burns down it would be the modern landmark of Beijing. It can represent a huge empire of ambition burning down."

Ai's resistance to all forms of control—capitalist and communist—manifests itself in one poignant way. He refuses to listen to music. He associates music with the propaganda of the old days and prefers the silent spaces of independent thought. "When I was growing up, we were forced to listen to only Communist music. I think that left a bad impression. I have many musician friends, but I never listen to music." He blames the Chinese educational system for failing to generate any grand or open-ended sense of possibility either for individuals or the society as a whole. "Education should teach you to think, but they just want to control everyone's mind." What the regime is most afraid of, he says, is "free discussion."

Ai will occasionally say something optimistic. Perhaps the Internet will open up the discussion that schools now restrain, for example, even if the blog he ran has been shut down. For the most part, though, Ai's commentary remains bleak and denunciatory. Few people in China believe in what they are doing, he says, not even the secret police. "I've been interrogated by over eight people, and they all told me, 'This is our job.' . . . They do not believe anything. But they tell me, 'You can never win this war.'"

Not soon anyway. In the West, the artist as provocateur—Marcel Duchamp, Warhol and Damien Hirst are well-known examples—is a familiar figure. In a China just emerging as a world power, where the political authorities prize conformity, discipline and the accumulation of riches, an artist working in the provocative Western tradition is still regarded as a threat. Chinese intellectuals may support him, but the Chinese generally

have no more understanding of Ai than a typical American has of Duchamp or Warhol. "There are no heroes in modern China," Ai said.

The West would like to turn Ai into a hero, but he seems reluctant to oblige. He lived in postmodern New York. He knows the celebrity racket and the hero racket. "I don't believe that much in my own answer," he said. "My resistance is a symbolic gesture." But Ai, if not a hero, has found ways to symbolize certain qualities that China may one day celebrate him for protecting and asserting. Free discussion is one. An out-there, dark and Rabelaisian playfulness is another. But the most interesting quality of them all is found in his best works of art: a prophetic dream of China.

Much of Ai's art is of only passing interest. Like so much conceptual art, it seems little more than a diagram of some preconceived moral. Art with a moral too often ends with the moral, which can stopper the imagination. Consider Ai's amusing and well-known Johnnie Walker piece. Is it suggesting that China is enveloped within—and intoxicated by—Western consumer culture? Of course it is. Once you've seen it, you don't have to think about it anymore. Jokes, even serious jokes, are like that. They're not as good the second time around.

But several Ai works are fundamentally different in character. They're made of more than morals and commentary. They're open-ended, mysterious, sometimes utopian in spirit. Each calls to mind—as architecture and design can—the birth of the new. The oddest instance is the "Bird's Nest" stadium of the 2008 Olympics. While an impassioned critic of the propaganda around the Olympics, Ai nonetheless collaborated with the architects Herzog & de Meuron in the design of the stadium. What kind of China is being nurtured, one wonders, in that spiky nest?

According to Ai, governments cannot hide forever from what he calls "principles" and "the true argument." He decries the loss of religion, aesthetic feeling and moral judgment,

arguing that "this is a large space that needs to be occupied." To occupy that space, Ai continues to dream of social transformation, and he devises actions and works that evoke worlds of possibility. For the 2007 Documenta—a famous exhibition of contemporary art held every five years in Kassel, Germany—Ai contributed two pieces. One was a monumental sculpture called *Template*, a chaotic Babel of doors and windows from ruined Ming and Qing dynasty houses. These doors and windows from the past seemed to lead nowhere until, oddly enough, a storm knocked down the sculpture. His second contribution was a work of "social sculpture" called *Fairytale*, for which he brought 1,001 people from China—chosen through an open blog invitation—to Documenta. He designed their clothes, luggage and a place for them to stay. But he did not point them in any particular direction. On this unlikely trip through the woods, the Chinese pilgrims might find for themselves a new and magical world. They too might discover, as Ai did when he went to New York, "a bowl of diamonds."

Sunflower Seeds, his most celebrated work, yields similar questions. The painting of so many individual seeds is a slightly mad tour de force. But the scale of the work, which is at once tiny and vast—raindrop and ocean—seems no crazier than a "Made in China" consumer society and its bottomless desires. Does the number of seeds reflect the dizzying amount of money—millions, billions, trillions—that corporations and nations generate? Do the seeds simultaneously suggest the famines that mark Chinese history? Do they evoke China's brief moment of cultural freedom in 1956 known as the "Hundred Flowers Campaign?" Do they represent both the citizen and the nation, the individual and the mass, endowing both with an air of germinating possibility? Will China ever bloom, one wonders, with the joyful intensity of van Gogh's sunflowers? ○

CHRISTINA LARSON in Beijing contributed reporting to this story.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S STATE OF THE UNION

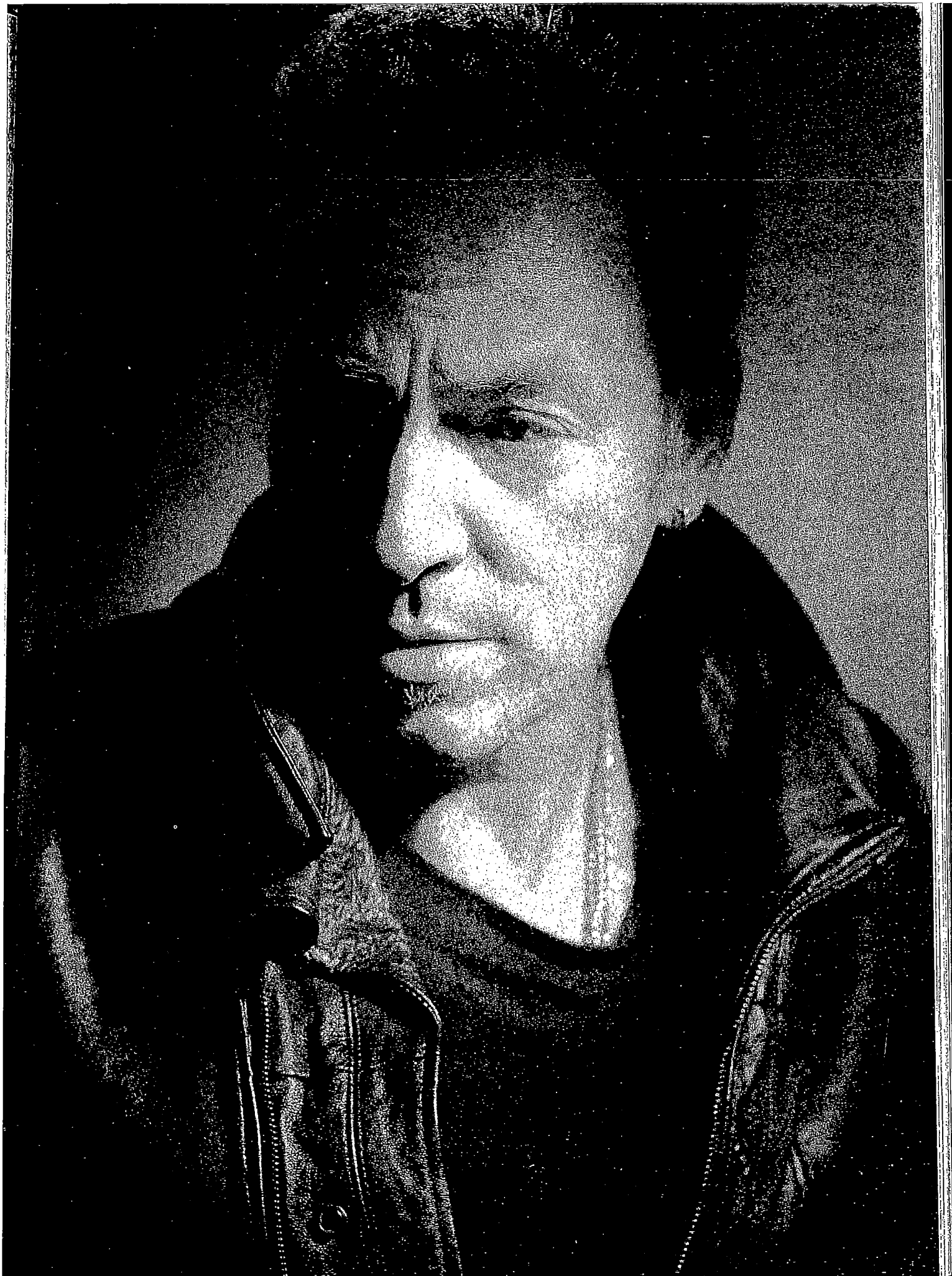
JON STEWART sits down with his home-state hero for a conversation about 'Wrecking Ball,' the death of Clarence Clemons, and the gap between 'American reality and the American dream'

THEY HAVE A LOT TO TALK ABOUT THIS EVENING, these two guys from New Jersey, these serious men with silly jobs. "When he's talking to his audience," says Jon Stewart, "he's put time and effort into that conversation. He wants his music to be *about* something." The host of *The Daily Show* is talking about Bruce Springsteen, and about himself, too: Stewart and Springsteen have each found ways to instill a steeliness of purpose into the acts of singing songs and telling jokes. But there's another way to look at it, Stewart suggests with a laugh: "You're in businesses where you should be having a good time, you dour pricks! What is wrong with you?" ♪ Springsteen

arrives at *The Daily Show*'s Manhattan studios on foot one icy day in late January, fresh from Jersey – he fought the wind for the dozen blocks from the Lincoln Tunnel along 11th Avenue, wearing only a thin leather jacket. "There was traffic," says Springsteen, "so Patti dropped me off." ("The Freehold is strong in that one," Stewart says, picturing this journey.) Back from taping that night's *Daily Show*, Stewart joins Springsteen in his cluttered office – where there's already a photo of the two men together pinned to the wall – after exchanging his suit and tie for khakis and a long-sleeved T-shirt.

In recent years, Stewart has seen his decades-long Springsteen fandom

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK SELIGER





JERSEY BOYS
Springsteen and
Stewart in his
Daily Show office
on January 30th

turn into a friendship. "It's in no way surreal," Stewart says with heavy sarcasm. "It's the most natural thing in the world. It's very hard to reconcile sitting and fishing in a little pond in New Jersey with a guy you spent many years hitchhiking the I-95 corridor to see in Philadelphia back in the day. The only band I think I've seen more than Bruce Springsteen is the Springsteen tribute band Backstreets. I try not to let him know how pathetic I truly am."

Stewart grew up in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, 30 miles northwest of Springsteen's Monmouth County hometown. "Every car he sang about you were like, 'I've seen that up on blocks in the backyard right near where I live.'" He saw his first Springsteen show on 1978's *Darkness on the Edge of Town* tour, when he was about 15. "The first time you hear *Darkness*, you begin to plan how to move out of New Jersey," says Stewart. (Like Springsteen, Stewart eventually returned, and has a home in the Garden State: "You realize, hey, New Jersey's all right, actually!")

On Springsteen's new album, *Wrecking Ball*, his characters aren't looking for escape — they just want a job. With fiercely populist tunes like "Death to My Hometown" and "Jack of All Trades," Springsteen paints a picture of an America where "the banker man grows fat/Working man grows thin." Springsteen wanted the new songs to address "what happened to the social fabric of the world that we're living in."

The two men spoke for nearly two hours, with Springsteen sharing details of his creative process, his grief over the loss of Clarence Clemons last year and the angry patriotism that fuels *Wrecking Ball*. When it was over, Stewart handed the recorder to a ROLLING STONE staffer: "Here you go — we got most of it."

"There's a lot of drunken singing," adds Springsteen.

"A lot of it's in Hebrew," says Stewart.

How have you been, man?

Good! We've been starting rehearsals with the whole band — on the abandoned military base at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

I know that place. Every time I drive by there, I think about "The Andromeda Strain." I always think that it's one of those horror movies where all the structures still stand, still somewhat manicured, but the shit is just empty.

That's what it's like. There's a rehearsal studio, and we are the sole citizens. We're the only game in town on that thing. And the funny thing was, I played there at the teen club and the officers' club when I was 16 — it was a regular gig. It's funny to be back there now when it's completely empty.

This was more of a solo album than an E Street Band album — what was the process behind it?

It basically all started out as folk music — it was me and my guitar singing these songs. But while I was doing that, I was hearing maybe 50 percent of the arrangement in my head. So the minute I stopped playing, I would run around on all the instruments, and in about an hour or more, I would rough out the sound I was hearing in my head while I was singing. A lot of it was cut with acoustic guitar, singing and a sample, like maybe a hip-hop loop or country-blues-stomp loop. And the actual drums came later — there was no preconceived set of instruments that needed to be used. I could go anywhere, do anything, use anything. It was very wide-open.

There are songs on here that feel like you and the Chieftains went out for a beer, and you decided to go kick it.

I called on a lot of roots and Celtic elements because I use the music to give the story a historical context. "Death to My Hometown" sounds like an Irish rebel song, but it's all about what happened four years ago. I want to give people a sense that this is something that's happened over and over and over again; what happened in 2008 happened before the turn of the century, and just after the turn of the century — it's a repetitive, historical cycle that has basically landed on the heads of the same people.

They could have been singing in 1840, 1860....

Or yesterday. "Shackled and Drawn" is the same thing, it's like a slave song, a field chant.

Near the end of the record, hearing Clarence's sax on "Land of Hope and Dreams" hits you in the gut. It's powerful.

He played beautifully. That's a loss we haven't gauged, or will be able to gauge.

Did it make you reticent to tour?

No, I knew we were going to play, and I knew the band was going to continue. I knew that, I guess, it's two things: One, people need to know that the band is going to continue and be OK and carry on its service and its entertainment. And the other part of the show will be that people need to miss Clarence – and they will, and so will I.

But all it says is that the currents of life hold their sway even over the dream world of pop music, and that's the way it goes. We're like everybody else. We're just trying to figure it out. I don't know what's going to happen the first night we walk out onstage or the 10th night or...you don't really know. It's an experience we're going to have with our audience on this tour.

How did his death affect this album?

The record was pretty much done, except that I wanted to get Clarence on it. The week before he died I called him to come in and record on his way back from Los Angeles, where he'd worked with Lady Gaga. He was having problems with the feeling in his hand. He was worried and asked if he could go home to Florida first and have it checked out. It was the only time Clarence passed on a recording session, so I said sure, we'd catch it later down the road.

A week later, he was in the hospital from the stroke. I flew to Florida and spent the week with his family at his bedside. He never really regained consciousness, but in the first few days he'd squeeze my hand when he heard my voice. Then things got worse. After the funeral, I returned home to my studio to finish the record. [*Wrecking Ball* producer] Ron Aniello greeted me, and as we sat at the control board he said, "I'm so sorry about Clarence. I didn't know what to do when I heard, so I went home to Los Angeles and put this together from one of the live takes of the song." He played me "Land of Hope and Dreams," and when the solo section hit, Clarence's sax filled the room. I cried. So he's there, through a little technical magic...but he's there.

"Hope and Dreams" and other songs on the album's second half seem to move from the personal and political to a sense of the spiritual.

Well, on the first half of the record, you're just pissed off. The first cut, "We Take Care of Our Own," is where I set out the questions that I'm going to try to answer. The song's chorus is posed as a challenge and a question. Do we take care of our own? What happened to that social contract? Where did that go over the past 30 years? How has it been eroded so terribly? And how is it that the outrage about that erosion is just beginning to be voiced right now? I've written about this stuff for those 30 years, from *Darkness on the Edge of Town* to *The Ghost of Tom Joad* through to today. It all came out of the Carter recession of the late Seventies, and when I was writing about that, my brother-in-law lost his construction job and went to work as a janitor in the local high school. It changed his life.

So these are issues and things that occur over and over again in history and land on the backs of the same people. In my music – if it has a purpose beyond dancing and fun and vacuuming your floor to it – I always try to gauge the distance between Ameri-

can reality and the American dream. The mantra that I go into in the last verse of "We Take Care of Our Own" – "Where are the eyes, where are the hearts?" – it's really: "Where are those things now, what happened to those things over the past 30 years? What happened to the social fabric of the world that we're living in? What's the price that people pay for it on a daily basis?" Which is something that I lived with intensely as a child, and is probably the prime motivation for the subjects I've written about since I was very, very young.

Someone wrote in "The New York Times" that "We Take Care of Our Own" was "jingoistic."

Whoever said that, they need a smarter pop writer.

[Laughs] It takes you back to the days of "Born in the U.S.A.," which was so widely misunderstood.

Yeah. I didn't feel that so much from this particular instance, but you write the best piece of music you can, and you put it out there, and then you see what comes back at you. Lately, it seems as if the polarization of the country has gotten so extreme that people want to force you into being either a phony "patriot" or an "apologist." Nuanced political dialogue or creative expression seems like it's been hamstrung by the decay of political speech and it's infantilized our national discourse. I can't go for that and I won't write that way.

What's the thinking behind "Easy Money"?

That's the street criminalization of the big-money Wall Street hustle. That's the guy that's saying, "Everybody else is getting theirs, and not paying for it, I'm going out to get mine." That hustle has been legitimized over the past four years, when you have the level of risk and greed at the top of the financial industry, and people basically walking away, relatively scot-free, completely unaccountable. That lack of accountability is the poison shot straight into the heart of the country. It goes back to Watergate. Watergate legitimized the hustle at the top of the game – it legitimized every street-corner thug. You almost had the country brought down by it, basically. All the radical hippies, longhairs – no one ever came as close to sinking the USA as the guys in the pinstriped suits.

You cannot have a social contract with the enormous income disparity – you're going to slice the country down the middle. Without jobs, without helping folks with foreclosures, without regulating the banks, without some sort of tax reform...Mitt Romney paid 15 percent tax? Without addressing those issues in some way, I don't think the country is going to hold together. I understand the effects of globalization, I understand all that, but at the end of the day, you can't have a society and you can't have a civilization without a reasonable amount of economic fairness, full employment, purpose and civic responsibility.

You've been writing about poor men wanting to be rich, rich men wanting to be king since the Seventies. That's what I like about what you were saying earlier – there's a certain universality to it that's ageless. The motivations don't seem to change.

For the majority of my lifetime, you saw an increase in inequality. It has only been in the news since Occupy Wall Street, but it was something that was a long, long time coming, and I think that, for better or for worse, I experienced the dynamic as a child, and it was something that I never forgot. I experienced what happens when, say, the male figure in your house struggles

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to work, can't find work, and the woman in the house becomes the primary breadwinner. That was my house.

That's happening in homes all across America right now: guys that worked outside, guys that worked construction, guys that worked manufacturing, particularly those kinds of guys, suddenly those jobs disappeared. Their attitude, their education may not be suited immediately for the service economy – the economy now. It's been devastating on middle-class and blue-collar men, particularly. That was my story, that was the story I've written about. I've written about that story for 30 years, because I lived that story as a child, and I witnessed it day after day after day, and I saw its effects. I saw the crisis that it creates. I saw the loss of your sense of masculinity. It was a wrenching thing to watch for a child, a young child, on a daily basis, and it never, ever let up.

I think people would look at it and go, "Jeez, you have all the creature comforts, how do you understand that?" But it's clearly something that was imprinted on you genetically in your soul. It just doesn't matter.

We talk, we write, we think, and even as late in the day as I am, we experience so much through the veil of the formative years of our life. That never goes away.

I have a metaphor. I say, "Look, you're in a car, your new selves can get in, but your old selves can't get out." You can bring new vision and guidance into your life, but you can't lose or forget who you've been or what you've seen. New people can get in, but nobody ever gets out: The child from 1950, he doesn't get

me, has been lifelong. Occasionally, you come upon a moment in time when you're really able to push up against it, where there's something out there for you to really push up against. And this last decade, there's been a lot of that. That was the case with *The Rising* and with *Magic*, which was a record about the Bush presidency. And this record, in a funny way, is an opportunity – an opportunity to bring the questions that have obsessed me for a large part of my life to the forefront. The problem we're having right now is that those questions aren't being pushed to the forefront on a national level – they're just beginning to really be voiced. I think Occupy Wall Street has given the president some elbow room where he can talk about income equality, talk about programs that would help the folks that have been hit the hardest, but it's just the very, very beginning. I think that is a moment that's here, and you have to give credit to the folks at Occupy Wall Street for changing the national discussion, which I really believe that they did.

As dark as this record gets, there's a sense of hope by the end.

All of these issues aren't going to be solved immediately, obviously. I have faith that through pressing on and through paying attention and listening and being vigilant and voicing your concerns and insisting that the right thing be done, you can move your world inches closer to where you want it to be for your children. You have to have faith in that. You have to have a clear eye, but you still have to have an open heart and mind. Because you have to have spirit, you have to have the soul.

If you look at the character in "Jack of All Trades" or when

"ALL THE ARTISTS THAT I LOVE – THERE WAS SOMETHING EATING AT THEM THAT THEY COULD NOT SHAKE OFF."

out. The teenager, the adolescent boy, no one can get out. They are with you until the end of the ride, and you're going to pass a certain amount of them on.

And they exert an amazing amount of influence.

The key is, of course, who's driving. On any given day, you're hoping that one of your better angels is at the wheel. That's not necessarily always the case, but that's what you work toward. Why do you always hear of the tycoon hoarding Kleenex, like they are the last he's ever going to see? Why is my mother-in-law switching out all the lights in her house? She came up through the Depression, when those fucking lights had to go out, and you used the one that you needed. These enormous economic shifts imprint people at an incredibly deep level. People who are going through the pain of this one, it's a life-changer – it will change the way you grow up and the way you think for the rest of your life for the people who are suffering through this one.

You lose trust.

And that stays with you even if the economy gets better, even if you get a better break. The cumulative effect of these kinds of recessions and this kind of punishment of people is so deep, and so those things are always there.

So how does that shape your work?

For me, it's the thing that pisses you off the most, the thing you want to fix the most, right? They're the things you want to heal the most, they're the things you want to repair the most. They're what obsess you, and what makes your art interesting to other people: "What's that thing eating at that guy?" Hank Williams, all the people I love the most, had something eating at them that they just couldn't shake off. That makes for interesting work and an interesting life, if you shape it correctly. That, for

you move to "Rocky Ground" and those voices, they're resilient voices, and voices that go on through the next generation. When you get to the end of the record, the voices are really coming from the other world, they're coming from beyond the grave. In "We Are Alive," those are voices of people who have died, and even "Land of Hope and Dreams" – something that I wrote 10 years ago – gives voice to those spirits.

I love that song. How did you come to include it?

This was funny, because I wrote everything else on the album, and I did not have an end. I stopped somewhere around "Rocky Ground" and I said, "Where do you take this? How do you turn this into something that provides both clarity and inspiration?" Because that, along with fun and entertainment, is what I think my job is. So I sat around and I had "Land of Hope and Dreams," and that was a song I wrote when the E Street Band got back together again in 1998. I wrote it before the tour as the band's current manifesto. In other words, we have stood for these things in the past. This is our current statement of how we will try to stand for these things in the future. That's what our band is about.

But it was a funny song because the voices in it sort of do come from beyond the current moment, they're talking about that other world: "People, get ready, there's a train coming" – everybody knows what that refers to. It refers to both something that's present, whether it's a train of equality, justice, fairness, whatever, good times, joy, struggle – that train is coming into your life every single day of your life. And then there's the train that you hop on maybe when that train has passed. It's the train that you're riding, your children are going to ride long after you're gone, and there was a deep sense of that in the gospel church, and in the black community, that forged an enormous charac-



LEAP OF FAITH
 "There will be no
 E Street farewell
 tour," says
 Springsteen.
 "It goes until
 it stops."

ter and toughness. So for me, you're talking about that, too. It's the train that keeps going when I'm gone, and when your music and these times are just a memory... These ideas are something that I wanted at the end of this record. We had a difficult time recording it, because we had a very good live version of it, so I had to find a way to reinvent it, rhythmically, and once again, I have to give credit to the fella that produced it with me, Ron Aniello, and Jon Landau, who also contributed an enormous amount to this record.

After that, the record ends with "We Are Alive." How did that one come together?

When I got there, I needed one more song – I needed a strange kind of party. And "We Are Alive" provides that. It's a party filled with ghosts. It's a party filled with the dead, but whose voices and spirit and ideas remain with us and go on and on. That's why I talk about the girls in Birmingham, the workers in Maryland and the new immigrants crossing the southern border. It's just the recurrence and how the blood and spirit of all those people regenerate the country and what America is, generation after generation, so I end the record with a party of ghosts. Ghosts who are speaking to the living.

Throughout this album, you get a taste of many different Springsteen flavors. You have so many different constituencies that want so many different things from you. How do you deal with that?

Generally I do what I like at any given moment and let the people find out where they fit in. The only thing I do keep in mind is that I'm in the midst of a lifetime conversation with my audience, and I'm trying to keep track of that conversation. Martin Scorsese once said that "your job is to make your audience

care about your obsessions." So if the artist loses track of the conversation he's having with his audience, he may lose us forever. So I try to keep track of that conversation, while giving myself the musical freedom I need.

You don't want to shut people out.

No. I see the cops, the firefighters, the construction workers, the conservative guys, the Republicans, the Democrats. My family is filled with Republicans and Democrats, every Sunday night at the table, and so it's not hung there on anybody's political hat. I want people to just experience it as their own, and see where their ideas and their feelings fit inside of it. Its independence means a lot, because I respect the audience that comes to see me. I want them to be able to hear it as clearly as they can. I don't want the horse to follow the cart.

Has that gotten harder as the times have gotten more divided? As you find that the partisan voices are getting more shrill, is it harder to put something out and feel like it lives beyond that conversation, and it can be the conversation you want to have?

The conversation I want to have with the audience is just the one that I want to have. There's also the one they're having with themselves, the one they're having with their buddy, the one they're having with their wife. It's a wide-open playing field. We've been onstage and we've been booed by our own crowd.

I've been there.

I mentioned Bush being impeached at the Meadowlands in 2000-something, and some people booed, and that's fine.

A conversation can be an argument. That's the thing I don't understand. That's what Thanksgiving is for – you sit and you and your family argue out all different points of view, but you still love each other.

Yeah. I'm proud of our band in that we've maintained an audience who want to listen to us, in the sense that they're interested in not just what you were saying in '85 or '80, but interested in what we're saying right now – what's the next step we're going to take together, what are we going to argue about, what are we going to debate the meaning of?

How consciously did you translate some of your political ideas into songs?

It's not something you can do when you push a button. You sit down, and if you're lucky, the planets have aligned to the point where that anger and the craft you've learned combines with whatever that mysterious X factor is that allows you to scoop some of it up – and it turns into a piece of music. Before this record, I recorded almost 40 songs for another record I was working on that had nothing to do with any of this, and at one point, I threw it out. I said, "This is the wrong voice for me right now."

[Deliberately meek] Can I hear that one too, sometime?

[Laughs] I hope so. I hope I wasn't wasting my time. I spent a good amount of time doing it. I spent almost a year writing and recording it. But the songs had nothing to do with what was going on out there at all. They were more like, for lack of a better word, solo, a little quieter, and at the end of the day I sat back and looked at it and couldn't get an album out of it. So I put that aside and cut this record, basically 10 songs in 10 days. You hit something, it's like a visitation, you are up at night, the guitar sits at the foot of the bed, you're up at 4 a.m., you have the book nearby, you have the tape recorder, and this goes on for maybe a week and a half or two weeks, and then it stops, it's done. Once in a great while, that happens. So this record, I went in every day and recorded a different one of these songs,

10 days in a row. It was because I felt I really had something, once I asked the right questions, the questions of "We Take Care of Our Own." Once I asked those questions, it helped me lock into the rest of the record. You know it when you catch a wave.

I used to love that feeling, nothing better than waking up to a joke. You wake up and go, "Shit, it's right there." It's great.

And then if you take that joke and you've been able to integrate it with your deepest set of beliefs, it doesn't get any better than that.

I always wondered, it's funny, as much as other people get out of it, it's still such an oddly selfish pursuit. It's scratching that itch deep inside you.

That's why we're narcissistic, self-serving bastards – our wives will guarantee. But sometimes it works.

When you're revisited by that muse, is it a welcome friend? Do you ever worry, "That was my last visitation – Scrooge, you had three ghosts come see you, and that's it"?

Here's the thing, I finally talked myself out of that. I remember when I wrote *The River*, I was 30 years old, and I said, "I'm never going to write another good song again – that was it, I've peaked, I'm not going to write a good song ever again." Then my kids came along, and at some point, Patti was assisting me in the fact that I was not as attentive a father as I should be, and my argument was, "Don't you understand, I'm thinking of a song!"

about things and to remain interested in the world around you is really essential as you go on.

Personally, how are you dealing with the loss of Clarence?

Losing Clarence was like losing the rain. You're losing something that has been so elemental in your life for such a long time. It was like losing some huge part of your own psychic construction – suddenly it's just gone, everything feels less. Our relationship was just this immediate chemical connection that happened that first night in Asbury, as he was walking toward the stage: "Here comes my guy."

Love at first sight.

Yeah, for me, anyway. Actually, the first time I asked him to join the band, he said he already had a job.

"Sounds great, but, no, man, I don't think I can swing that."

Yeah, he was playing with Norman Seldin and the Joyful Noyze, and I didn't have a record deal or any immediate prospects. My recollection – and Clarence's might have been different over the years – was he said, "I don't know, I have a steady gig, I'm enjoying that," then he disappeared.

I turned the record in to Columbia Records, and Clive Davis gave it back to me and said that there was nothing that could get played on the radio. My recollection is I went to the beach and I wrote "Spirit in the Night" and "Blinded by the Light," and then we found Clarence somehow. Garry Tallent had played with

“LOSING CLARENCE WAS LIKE LOSING THE RAIN. HE WAS SO ELEMENTAL IN MY LIFE FOR SUCH A LONG TIME. IT WAS LIKE LOSING SOME HUGE PART OF YOUR PSYCHIC CONSTRUCTION.”

You're an artist, you can't be bothered with raising children!

"I'm writing a song right now, I have to lay another golden egg or we're all going down, and this whole place, this is all sinking!" One day I realized, "Wait, I've got it, I've got more music in my head than I'm going to live to put out." But your son or your daughter, they're going to be gone tomorrow, or the day after. I realized, "This is what's going to be gone, and this is what's going to always be here, not the other way around." Music and art are always flowing through the ether – they'll always be there – but life, life moves on and is gone. Life is locked in an eternal dance with time, and unlike art and time, the two can't be separated.

After I realized that, I relaxed. Now if I'm humming something and I don't have a recorder, maybe I'll hum it again a little differently later. If I have an idea, it will come back. What's happened is it's percolated up in you and become concrete. Once it's grown, it's there. But it took me a long time to realize that, just because the fear of not telling another funny joke or writing another song is based in simple self-loathing. Which can come in handy.

Everybody's first song, first joke, is "This is who I am, this is where I was raised, this is who my parents are." Then you exhaust that, and are faced with "What do I write about now?" And you begin to look out. But that transition is a very tough one to make.

It really depends on where it takes you. It depends on how hard you're paying attention. When I see performers who feel like they've lost their mojo, sometimes it's that they're just not paying hard enough attention. Your willingness to think hard

him in a band called Little Melvin and the Invaders, which was an all-black band that played in the black clubs around Asbury Park – Clarence was the saxophonist and Garry was the only white member and bassist.

We were always trying to track Clarence down – he was this mysterious figure that you couldn't quite get your hands on. We found him for the last two songs on *Greetings From Asbury Park*. He came in and laid down the magic, and I said, "Yeah, that's my sound." I said, "I'm going to go on tour," and he said, "I'm ready," and that was when we connected.

So even though we got up and played together that first night and it felt like magic, he was a little hesitant at first, because he had a steady job, and that was not to be undervalued at the time, because no one else did. Also, he had a very different life already – he had two children. He might have been divorced, so he had payments. He was in the adult world in the sense that he was a social worker at the Jamesburg youth reformatory. He worked as a counselor with the boys there.

I played at the boys' facility there around that time! I was in a band, and I played for the fellas at the academy. We played big-band music – I was nine or 10. I played trumpet. I can't believe I haven't laid down tracks for you yet. We played all those songs like "In the Mood" and "Take the A Train" and "Golden Earrings."

Can you still play that thing?

The embouchure is slightly out of shape thanks to the years of smoking, but I imagine I could do a few lip-ups and have myself back in shape in no time.

We have a horn section. We're ready for you.

It must be a strange thing - to lose something that can't be replaced, and to find yourself in this position of other people saying, "So how are you going to replace that?"

Yeah. We're not the first band that's had to deal with that issue. That's just the way that it is. In Clarence and my case, we were not just in a band together - we were a real duo, a team that existed not only within the structure of the E Street Band, but also apart from it as something powerful in and of itself. That's something and someone you don't replace, not 40 years of it. You just have to give thanks that it was a part of your life, that he was a part of my life, and honor what we did together.

You make that part of the conversation you're having with your audience.

You have no other choice. And that's what we're going to do when we go out this time. It's just a question of how you address it. We wanted people who were close to home, people who understood the band, not necessarily somebody who could play rings around the moon - all our guys are great players, but it's not what we're about. It was about how well you understand who we are and what we do and what we're trying to do. We were very, very lucky, and we had Eddie Manion, who worked with Southside Johnny over the years. He's worked with me in the Seeger Sessions Band, he played with the E Street Band back in 1988, and we had Jake Clemons, Clarence's nephew. Jake traveled with us on the last tour for quite a while with "C" - he'd picked up the saxophone as a youngster after he came to a show in 1988 and saw his uncle.

That's how he got into it?

Yeah. He's been a musician most of his life and has worked really hard. Between those two guys - and we have an excellent horn section we're going to bring out this time - I feel really comfortable with how it's going.

I imagine musicians having that mentality of "Go on without me - I'm down, I can't keep going, but go on without me!"

I've seen some funny moments onstage. I've seen Max [Weinberg] stretchered into his dressing room, neck bolted down, and two hours later, in the middle of "Badlands," playing like a banshee. I know what it took for him. I've seen the guys do some strange and funny things. At the end of the day, a show is just a show. It's an act of theater; it's pretend, it's as deeply rooted in reality and real feelings as you can make it, but it's a performance, and life and the things we've experienced the past couple of years, they're bigger and broader than that. They're real friendships you have with all these folks that were not part of what people saw - that were part of some mystical, strange chemical alchemy that you had with this person. I was my son Evan's age when I met Clarence, 22. And I'm 62, right? So there was a huge relationship that occurred beyond our audience's imaginations and dreams.

So I'm looking forward to the shows being a happy thing, a sad and happy thing. Like I said, people need to miss Clarence. I need to miss him, too. That's what's going to happen.

Do you have an idea for yourself of where this conversation is going? Are there conversations you've wanted to wrap up with the audience that you haven't had a chance to?

It's never going to be wrapped up. You're never going to hear anything called an E Street Band farewell tour - that's never going to exist. It just goes until it stops, and then it keeps going.

It doesn't even stop then.

No.

You can still get stimulated by things artistically. Do those things have to be greater and greater to break through to you, or is the muse still tuned as finely as it was?

You just have to be living and listening. I don't have a wide knowledge of hip-hop - I listen to some, I have a glancing knowledge of it - but it found its way into this record. You have to let it impact you. You have to be open and see the value, hear what magic it holds, and somewhere down the line, maybe years later, suddenly there's a little spot in your song where you go, "I know what this needs," and it's there for you. Listening, paying attention, being open - that's supposed to be the natural development of adulthood.

That's the development of adulthood? I knew it was something.

It's supposed to be how we broaden and move into adulthood. We're supposed to be picking up as we go - a larger experience of our world. It's something I've tried to facilitate through what I've done - broaden people's perspective; broaden people's vision and assist people in seeing through to, for lack of a better word, the inner reality of things. Your show is basically an interpretive media class.

That may be the nicest thing anyone's ever said about our show.

That's one of the things it is. That did not exist, in that form, until you did it. You have to go back to some of the early stand-up, Mort Sahl...

It's funny - what you were saying about how that song could have been sung in the 1800s, I feel that way about "The Daily Show." There have always been people who do this, we're just using the form and technology that exist now to express it.

This is what the guys at Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers forgot. They forgot that they are a part of a continuum of history, and it's not about the fucking buck that you make today at whoever's fucking expense. If

there's not a sense of continuity, a sense of some sort of communal obligation and responsibility, a sense of a future involved in what you're doing, and a sense of being beholden to the past, you end up being one shallow, greedy motherfucker, just trying to get all you can get.

Now that's a name for a song, "Shallow Greedy Motherfuckers."

I had that one, but I left it off.

I love that you've never let the tail wag the dog, which is pretty surprising for a guy in rock & roll. I never saw you in a Ziggy Stardust suit - you were never that guy.

I would have looked completely ridiculous in it. Any time I tried to put anything on other than the boring things that I still wear, I just, for some reason, looked ridiculous. I wish I could have carried a little more flash.

Whatever you were wearing during those times, I can remember me and my friends hearing you and thinking, "Oh, we're not alone. It feels like this guy knows us." Maybe that's the magic of the conversation.

At the end of the day, that's what it's all about. When I did your show, that's the experience I'm having. It's like, "Oh, my God, an island of sanity."

[Pause]

I think this is when we should kiss and hug [laughs].



SCOOTER AND THE BIG MAN

Clemons and Springsteen in 1978. "We were not just in a band together," says Springsteen. "We were a real duo."

BOOKS

THE PALE KING

Michael Jackson's ambiguous legacy.

BY BILL WYMAN



"White folks, some young white folks, they run *away* from America," Joe Brown, the father of James Brown, once said. "Black folks, they run all over, up North, everywhere, tryin' to get *into* America." These days, waist-deep in the defiant hip-hop era, it's easy to forget the nineteen-fifties, when black artists, held back, in various ways, from the new pop America, looked on as white performers appropriated their music and took it to the masses. In 1956, Pat Boone's anodyne version of "Tutti Frutti" was in stores and on the radio at the same time as Little Richard's lubricious original, and ended up outcharting it. Artists in niche markets always dream of "crossing over" and making

it big in the mainstream. During the next few decades, numerous artists left the grittiness and, in many ways, the truth of their culture behind, as crossover ambition intoxicated and, some have argued, overwhelmed black music. (The critic Nelson George has described the process as a "cultural suicide.") For better or for worse, Michael Jackson, whose 1982 album "Thriller" remains the best-selling record in history, fulfilled this ambition more spectacularly than any black performer before or since.

American in the best sense, "Thriller" contains multitudes, from rock ("Beat It") and pop ("P.Y.T.") to soulful schmaltz ("The Girl Is Mine") and easy

listening ("Human Nature"). At the album's center is Jackson's greatest song, "Billie Jean." Its protagonist has been accused of fathering a son with a young woman; his denials ("The kid is not my son!") are undercut both by the facts ("His eyes were like mine") and by that relentless bass line tiptoeing around the morally compromised speaker. (The song is loaded with portents. What then seemed to be paranoia would, in time, take on a different cast, when Jackson was accused of another kind of sexual indiscretion. And, later, Jackson would maintain that he had fathered two kids who didn't look like him at all.) But Jackson is also engaging in an early bit of mythmaking. "I am the one," he sings, "who will dance on the floor in the round." Gasping out the words of the second line in triplets—"who will dance on the floor in the round"—he was reminding his audience of who he was: a young star whose whole life had been lived on a stage, in the round.

Jackson started on the outside. He was born into a working-class family in Gary, Indiana, in 1958. His mother, Katherine, a Jehovah's Witness, was the emotional center of the household, but her passivity in the face of her husband's violence toward their children seems to have marked Jackson as decisively as the violence itself. Joseph Jackson, whose rhythm-and-blues band, the Falcons, disbanded in the early years of his marriage, is not the first father to have channelled his thwarted creative aspirations into his children, but he had more success than most. We tend to think of success stories like the Jacksons' as a kind of movie montage—giddy scenes of rehearsals, driving to shows, playing before bigger and bigger crowds. But Joseph, who had grown up in Arkansas, was also trying to get into America, and for him the trip was grim and determined; the reality was an angry father driving five boys into unknown and potentially dangerous territory. (The Jackson 5 played everywhere, from supermarkets to strip clubs.) Order was maintained with a regimen of beatings and whippings, and, later, at their motels, Michael saw his father disappearing with new female acquaintances, and pretended to sleep when his older brothers brought groupies back to the rooms they shared. Family members, specifically his father, would tease him

Jackson became the world's biggest black star by shedding conventional images of blackness.

about his acne and call him Big Nose.

By the time the Jackson 5 landed an audition for Motown Records, in 1968, the label had perfected the art of crossover. Berry Gordy, a onetime boxer and auto worker, who founded the label in 1959, understood what black performers needed to leave behind in order to get ahead in mid-century America. His label's charm school molded and dressed the artists, and kept their images clean. In the classic Motown simulacrum, the women were super-club elegant—the exemplar being Diana Ross. The men were emotional—sometimes titanically so, like Levi Stubbs, of the Four Tops—but they were slickly outfitted in suits, and never threatening. Gordy tended to shy away from politics as well; no Motown act played at Woodstock or Monterey, and it's hard to think of a song about Rosa Parks or lynchings. Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye shrugged off these rules later in their careers, but the label's social timidity set the tone for black pop for years after.

Gordy knew what he was doing: Motown sold probably more than a billion records. The Jackson 5 was his last great signing of the classic era. The group's first four singles—"I Want You Back," "ABC," "The Love You Save," and "Til Be There"—went to No. 1. Jackson's ineffable presence—this tiny man was able to lecture a female on the vicissitudes of love one minute and tell her "Show us what you can do!" the next—fascinated audiences. The Jackson Brothers learned the business, occasionally the hard way. The contract their father signed with Gordy gave them a fraction over one per cent of what their records earned. Michael also learned how to stick to the company script. A writer for the magazine *Soul* marvelled at the way "an eight-year-old boy... became a man when a microphone was in his hand." In fact, the singer was ten at the time. Motown had deemed little Michael not little enough, and promptly shaved two years off his age. Jackson, a quick study, showed no qualms about repeating his new age to journalists.

He was less receptive to another industry lesson: that pop stardom has a short half-life. The Jackson 5's novelty wore off, and Motown's interest waned. In 1975, the act moved to CBS (later Sony), leaving behind both brother Jermaine—who'd married Gordy's daughter—and their name, another casualty of

the contract that Joseph had signed. The royalty rate was better than Motown's, but the Jacksons, as the new ensemble was called, managed little more than a few disco-lite hits. In any case, Michael had bigger plans, and, despite his family's resistance, he put together a solo deal with the label. It was the key transitional moment in his life.

That any aspect of his career has been neglected seems hard to believe, and yet Jackson may be the most underappreciated pop songwriter of his era. "Off the Wall," his debut as an adult solo artist, was recorded with Quincy Jones, a man of exquisite taste and impeccable hepcat pedigree as a producer, arranger, and composer. Jackson needed a hit single to establish himself as a mature star. As Jones was collecting material from other songsmiths, Jackson wrote the hit for himself. "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," a seamless piece of dance pop, is neither imitative nor straightforward. It sports a distinctive plucked guitar riff and a restless bass line, to which Jackson added a new, androgynous falsetto. Jones didn't create the hit for him. The home demo that Jackson prepared shows that his conception of the song was close to the finished product; he even invited his younger siblings Randy and Janet to bang on bottles to accent the driving percussion track. "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough" was a No. 1 hit, and "Off the Wall" went multiplatinum. This was 1979, the year of Jackson's first nose job.

The success of "Off the Wall" left Jackson unsatisfied. His next album, he determined, would have to be bigger. For the "Thriller" sessions, Jackson sketched out a moody R. & B. number, with crisp, emphatic drums and an irresistible chorus. As with "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," the home demo of "Billie Jean" is a strikingly accurate template of the final version. The song dazzled just about everyone who heard it, in the winter of 1983; it went to No. 1, and stayed there for seven weeks. This was another example of Jackson's prowess as a high-stakes clutch hit writer. (Jackson, by my count, has solo writing credit on nine No. 1 songs.) Shortly after, during his seismic performance of "Billie Jean" at the "Motown 25" TV special, he introduced his moonwalk dance step to the world. The song's video became one of the first by a

black artist to be played regularly on the newly launched MTV. "Thriller" spawned seven Top Ten hit singles and remained No. 1 on the *Billboard* album chart for thirty-seven weeks.

Jackson wasn't content with popularity alone, though. As the royalties rolled in, he and his attorney, John Branca, won a hard-fought campaign to buy the music-publishing catalogue that included the Lennon-McCartney songs recorded by the Beatles; Jackson paid forty-seven and a half million dollars. In the nineteen-nineties, he merged his company with Sony, and the new operation, rechristened Sony/ATV, grew steadily in value over the years and was recently estimated to be worth more than a billion dollars. Fabled blues and soul artists, former Motown colleagues, his glowering father: all must have looked on in awe. Jackson had achieved a popular success, and a measure of economic autonomy, that previous black artists could never have dreamed of. The crossover was complete. He had made it into America.

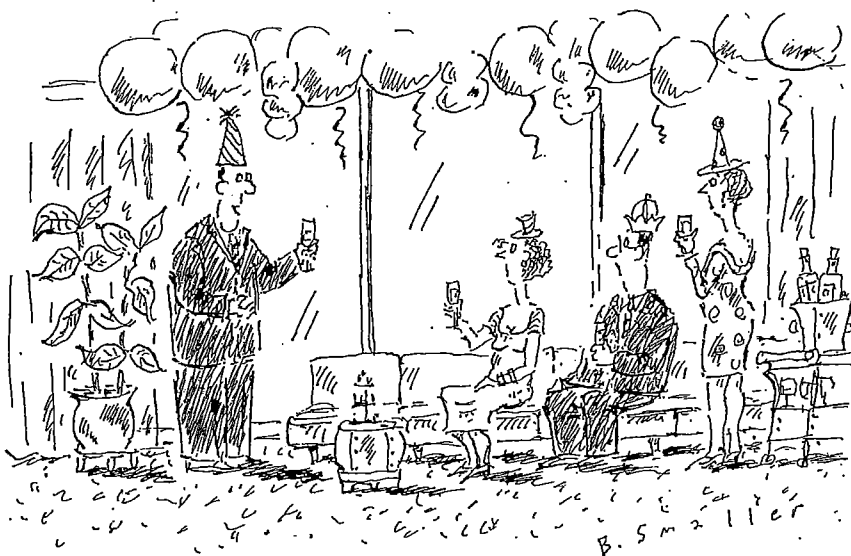
One of the cruelties of stardom is that you never know when you've reached your apogee. For Jackson, decline set in almost as soon as "Thriller" fell out of the No. 1 spot, in April, 1984. It lasted a quarter of a century, which is to say, the rest of his life. Randall Sullivan, a former *Rolling Stone* contributing editor best known for "Labyrinth," an investigation into the police corruption surrounding the murders of the rap stars Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur, does his best to capture the complexities of a sad tale. His new, nearly eight-hundred-page biography, "Untouchable: The Strange Life and Tragic Death of Michael Jackson" (Grove), is chaotically organized and overlong. But it details thoroughly both the bad decisions that led Jackson to ruin and the increasingly foggy world from which he made them.

By the mid-eighties, Jackson had become the biggest black star ever, in part by shedding conventional images of blackness. It is true that he continued to work with black musicians and never explicitly repudiated his musical heritage. The racial overtones in the long-form video for the single "Thriller," for example, are unavoidable; made up as a ghoul, Jackson seems to be tacitly ridiculing stereotypes of menacing black behavior, in what proves, in the

end, to be an entirely wholesome entertainment. In 1986, however, when Jackson learned that he had vitiligo, a skin condition that produces blotches on the body, his response was to bleach his skin and pancake his face with white makeup. His infantile voice, androgynous manner, ever-whitening skin, and de-Africanized features and hair became a grotesque literalization of the crossover aesthetic.

But little about Jackson is that simple. He may also have been erasing from his body the face of the father who beat him. That some childhood trauma was driving a destructive urge to alter his appearance through plastic surgery seems likely. By the first decade of this century, Jackson's cheeks had a skeletal hollowness and his jawline was suddenly square; his mouth had been outlined with a permanent lipstick-like tattoo and he had lemurine black liner around his eyes; the broad African nose on the cover of "Off the Wall" had become a dainty protrusion. Sullivan unearths a pathetic cultural tie-in: the minuscule ski jump of a nose that Jackson so determinedly sought was that of a child actor, Bobby Driscoll, best known for dying young, but only after lending his voice and his face to Disney for Peter Pan in the classic animated movie. He wore a prosthetic during the last years of his life. At that point, according to Sullivan, all he had was "a pair of nostrils surrounded by a rim of shrivelled, shrunken, discolored cartilage."

Still, Jackson had accomplished what he'd set out to do—not just conquer the world but, in a sense, merge with it. In the late eighties and early nineties, however, with the rise of hip-hop, the crossover era was fading. The most high-profile of the new rap artists—N.W.A., Public Enemy, Snoop Dogg—refused to play to the perceived tastes of a mainstream audience. Instead, they were proudly black, highly sexualized, violent (in some cases sociopathically so), and, all in all, decidedly uningratiating to whites—who nonetheless bought their records by the bushel. Public Enemy's Chuck D. went so far as to attack the most sacred of all white rock stars (and, not incidentally, the paragon of white appropriation of black music): "Elvis was a hero to most / but he never meant shit to me." Jackson brought in rappers for cameos on his later records, but the results were decidedly non-



"Here's to even lower expectations in the New Year."

street. He tried it on the lead single from "Dangerous" (1991). "It don't matter if you're black or white," he insists in the chorus. That wasn't how the hip-hop world saw things; Jackson was suddenly off-message.

His experiments in sexual liminality were more troubling. In the summer of 1993, Sullivan recounts, Jackson was on tour in Asia, promoting "Dangerous," when the news broke that the parents of a thirteen-year-old boy, Jordan Chandler, had accused the singer of sexually molesting their son. In retrospect, the allegations seem inevitable. Jackson had been busing underprivileged and sick children out to his Neverland ranch, in Santa Barbara County, California, which doubled as an amusement park, to play and, in some cases, spend the night. Jackson always maintained that these sleepovers, during which he openly shared his bed with young boys, were entirely innocent. "If I am guilty of anything," he said, in the persecuted, messianic tone that began creeping into his public utterances at the time, "it is of giving all that I have to give to help children all over the world; it is of loving children of all ages and races; it is of gaining sheer joy from seeing children with their innocent and smiling faces; it is of enjoying through them the childhood that I missed myself." Jackson ended up settling out of court with the Chandler family for more than twenty million dollars.

The question of Jackson's sexuality remains fraught. Clearly, his abusive upbringing didn't help. As a child star, he sang about worldly things, but without carnality. Despite glimmers of maturity during his solo career—few can look at the cover of "Off the Wall" and not see genuine erotic appeal—he seemed to regress to a pre-sexual moment. His moves and his mien became first feline, then feminine. (This transformation didn't go unnoticed in the black community; Louis Farrakhan called Jackson "sissified.") In the eighties and early nineties, Jackson tried to play the P.R. game and make his personal life seem conventional, embarking on high-profile "dates" with Madonna and Brooke Shields, but at a certain point, whether he was tired of the act or felt that his celebrity allowed him to do as he wished, he seemed to recuse himself from grown-up romantic life and become a soi-disant savior of children.

In 1994, when the child-molestation furor was at its height, Jackson married Elvis Presley's daughter, Lisa Marie. Sullivan's book does little to challenge the general impression that this was anything other than a ploy on Jackson's part to distract the public from his P.R. implosion. Presley apparently came to feel the same way, but not before she got to sit by as Jackson told Diane Sawyer in a television interview that he believed that there was nothing wrong with shar-

ing a bed with children. Several months later, Presley filed for divorce.

In 1996, Jackson got married again, to a woman named Debbie Rowe, a nurse who worked for one of his plastic surgeons. The pair met cute—Rowe had tenderly cared for the star after Jackson spilled a harsh skin-bleaching agent on his scrotum—and soon began having children, though not in the conventional sense. Prince was born in 1997, Paris a year later; both are white, and neither bears much resemblance to either parent. A third child, Blanket, arrived in 2002. Jackson claimed to be his father through artificial insemination, but he never revealed who the mother is. It's an open question whether Jackson ever had sex with anyone—man, woman, or child. Sullivan believes the singer died a virgin. When he and Rowe divorced, in 1999, Jackson was given full custody of the children.

By this time, Jackson was falling deep into debt. Ever since he bought the Beatles' catalogue, in the mid-eighties, the singer had acquired a reputation as a savvy businessman. The evidence here lays this idea to rest. Sullivan's book is, among other things, a record of staggering financial profligacy and wrongheadedness. We read, for example, of a trip Jackson made to Paris, in 1996, to meet a Saudi prince with whom he unveiled

plans for "a 'family values' global entertainment empire whose projects included plans to create a theme park home for all British bovines afflicted with mad cow disease." Before long, Jackson is touching down in Warsaw, "where he announced the \$500 million World of Childhood amusement park he planned to build with the cooperation of the Polish government." In the nineties, he worked with business advisers to market a new sports cola called, simply, Mystery Drink.

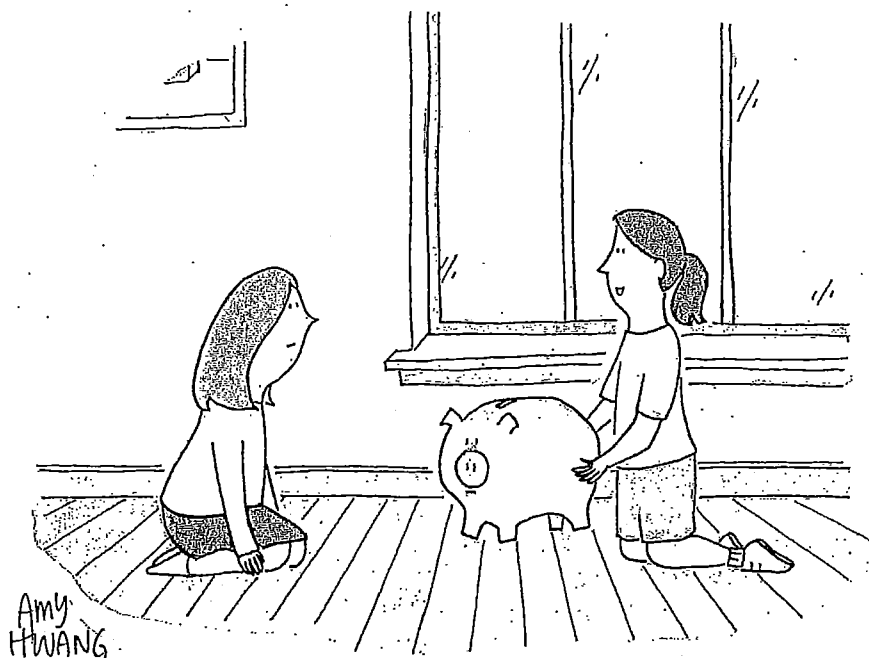
Meanwhile, Jackson lived, and spent, like a deranged royal. At Neverland, general upkeep—"from carpenters to snake handlers," as Sullivan puts it—cost four million dollars a year. Jackson spent twice that on travel and antiques. One of his many financial advisers was shocked to discover that, in December, 2000, Jackson had continued to rent an entire floor of the Four Seasons in New York, where he'd been staying with his entourage, during a monthlong trip back to Neverland for the holidays. Asked why he didn't vacate the rooms and save himself several hundred thousand dollars, Jackson replied, "What were we supposed to do with our stuff?" He went through advisers, collaborators, and managers cavalierly, from a producer of gay porn to a fat Bahraini sheik, from a Florida billionaire to one of Marion Barry's former press secretaries, with an assort-

ment of record-industry weasels and various other frauds floating in and out of his life as well. Finally, the Nation of Islam shows up. "This was a huge mistake," one of Jackson's associates said. "It was worse than Sony," said another.

None of this financial distress was necessary; all Jackson had to do was go to work. Whether paralyzed by the grandiosity of his visions or simply incapacitated by the prescription drugs to which he'd become addicted, the singer played only two tours, about a hundred and fifty shows, in the last two decades of his life. The money he left on the table during this period—the Age of the Supertour—was immense. The Rolling Stones grossed nearly a billion dollars from just two tours in the two-thousands.

He did find time to open his home to the British journalist Martin Bashir. The result, an odd, transfixing TV documentary, "Living with Michael Jackson," which aired in 2003, ranks with the Sex Pistols' decision to make the focus of its first U.S. tour a swing through the Deep South as the most unhelpful marketing decision in the history of popular music. Besides evading the question of his children's race and insisting that he'd had only a couple of plastic surgeries, Jackson again said that there was nothing wrong with his habit of sharing his bed with children. He even paraded some of them before the camera. The Santa Barbara County district attorney, who had not forgotten the settlement in the 1993 molestation case, got behind a new family with allegations who would commit to testifying against the singer. Jackson was put on trial for various charges relating to sexual activities with minors and, after a fourteen-week circus, acquitted on all counts.

Jackson deserves to have that exoneration noted. Still, his behavior with children went far beyond the bounds of propriety, if "propriety" is the word for what was violated when the thirtysomething singer routinely shared a bedroom with the twelve-year-old Chandler boy. Jackson obviously drew in the families with his seductive and glamorous world, and pushed the limits once he did. Sullivan's snapshot of the Chandler family close to twenty years after the settlement—Jackson fans have been hounding the son for years, and the father



"I'm saving for when I get a low-paying job doing what I love."

committed suicide in 2009—is the book's bleakest point, which is saying something.

After the trial, Jackson left Neverland for good. Chased by demons, he travelled the world with his children and a dwindling entourage, spending money compulsively. Once in a while, he managed to damage his image further, as when he was discovered, in a head scarf, using a women's rest room in Dubai. He wound up in Las Vegas, with one final whimsy in mind—the purchase of a sprawling estate whose price was far outside his ability to pay. One of his last managers—a Lebanese-American fixer named Dr. Tohme Tohme—finally convinced the star of the obvious: that his financial problems would at least be stabilized if he would just partake of the vast riches to be had from performing live. It was this advice that set in motion preparations for the comeback-and-farewell extravaganza tour, “This Is It.” Jackson was to play fifty concerts at the new O2 Arena in London, beginning in the summer of 2009. The shows sold out immediately.

Perhaps the greatest, most persistent source of torment in Jackson's life was his family. From the start of his child solo career, there was resentment at home; once the Jacksons realized that they had a golden goose in their midst, they resorted to all manner of emotional blackmail to leverage Michael's disproportionate commercial appeal for their own benefit. Exacting pressure on Michael was made easier by the fact that, even after “Thriller” topped the charts, the biggest pop star on the planet continued to live at home, in the family's Encino mansion. Sullivan makes it clear that Jackson couldn't say no to his mother, and the rest of the family systematically exploited this weakness. After “Off the Wall,” Jackson was persuaded to forgo a solo tour in favor of one with his brothers; similar arm-twisting came to bear following the release of “Thriller.” His family, over Jackson's objections, brought in the boxing promoter Don King to run the affair. The result, the so-called Victory Tour, was a mismanaged mess and a P.R. disaster. After that, Jackson largely cut himself off from everyone in his family save his mother. This made for ugly public scenes in which relatives would arrive wherever Jackson

was staying, demanding of the security that they be let through the gates, while the star refused to see them.

Predictably, the family dysfunction continued after Jackson's death. In 2003, the singer had dispensed with John Branca's services, seemingly for good, and told all who would listen how much he distrusted the attorney. Shortly before his death, on the eve of the London shows, however, Jackson supposedly met with Branca again, and after Jackson's death Branca produced a will in which he was designated a co-executor of the estate. The will was petulant. Jackson left forty per cent of his estate to his mother, and forty per cent to his kids in a separate trust, with the rest going to unnamed charities. Everyone else got stiffed. His mother was given guardianship of the three children.

According to Sullivan, Branca seems to have kept the will from Jackson's subsequent lawyers; that and other irregularities have driven Katherine and various family members to distraction, and they have challenged Branca on several fronts. But the Jacksons have always run their affairs poorly—most of Michael's brothers eventually declared bankruptcy, as did his parents—and often act at cross-purposes. The chances of the remaining Jacksons interfering with Branca's stewardship of the estate are slim. (Branca refused to answer questions about his handling of the will on the record, but it seems fairly obvious that he, or someone in his office, is one of Sullivan's chief confidential sources.) Tellingly, Jackson gave his executors “absolute discretion” in distributing Katherine Jackson's portion to her—mostly, it seems, to prevent his mother from channelling the money to the rest of the family. Sullivan's portrait of Jackson's octogenarian mother being forced to beg a music-industry attorney for funds from her dead son's estate is poignant—but it's also payback for her challenges to a will that is quite clear about Jackson's intentions. Only from the grave was he finally able to say no to his mother.

“No man achieves immortality through public acclaim,” said Bob Dylan, who had the opportunity to consider such things up close. From the point of view of celebrity and popular-

ity—the point of view that truly mattered to him—Jackson may well have been the most successful entertainer ever. His life and career remain sensational to all of us who marvelled as the black music that has run as a counterpoint to the past century—through gospel, jazz, the blues, soul, and hip-hop—resolved itself to play, for a time, perfectly in tune with a nation. Still, there's little doubt that Jackson lost something self-defining along the way. He ended up a shade, and, besides the music, all that he really left behind—an ambiguous legacy, and a tarnished name, to some rich white kids—was just the final, meaningless step in the ultimate crossover.

After a rehearsal for the “This Is It” shows in downtown L.A. on the night of June 24, 2009, the singer came home to a rented mansion. Soon the entire operation would pack up and head for London; there, Jackson knew, he would have to stand on a stage again and decisively show his children—and the world—that he could still live up to his legend. Drained from the rehearsal, Jackson probably took a shower; when he got out, he looked in the mirror at a face that had no nose, at a pinched mouth permanently outlined in pink, at the thin remnants of what was once a thick Afro. He went to bed but couldn't sleep. The night was not easy; he was awake until the morning, badgering his personal hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar-a-month physician to direct ever-increasing I.V. flows of hypnotic drugs into his system. The one that killed him—a hospital-grade potion called propofol—was used to put to sleep a man who apparently couldn't find sleep otherwise, and it's easy to see why he would need help, his mind full of songs, ideas, melodies, dance moves; of his fantasies and his lies; of the memories of his silly, grasping, toxic family; of the kids who were, or were not, his kids; of the other families whose lives he had touched and made better and the ones he'd beguiled and corrupted; of the giant global scream of an audience that he could no longer face. Sometime before noon the next morning, he drifted off to sleep and then out of existence, remembering a time when he and we were happy, when his only demon was an imaginary girl named Billie Jean, and he danced on the floor in the round. ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE HUMBUG

Edgar Allan Poe and the economy of horror.

BY JILL LEPORE



Edgar Allan Poe once wrote an essay called "The Philosophy of Composition," to explain why he wrote "The Raven" backward. The poem tells the story of a man who, "once upon a midnight dreary," while mourning his dead love, Lenore, answers a tapping at his chamber door, to find "darkness there and nothing more." He peers into the darkness, "dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before," and meets a silence broken only by his whispered

word, "Lenore?" He closes the door. The tapping starts again. He flings open his shutter and, "with many a flirt and flutter," in flies a raven, "grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore." The bird speaks just one word: "Nevermore." That word is the poem's last, but it's where Poe began. He started, he said, "at the end, where all works of art should begin," and he "first put pen to paper" at what became the third-to-last stanza:

"Prophet," said I, "thing of evil! prophet still if bird or devil!
By that heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore,
Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"The Philosophy of Composition" is a lovely little essay, but, as Poe himself admitted, it's a bit of jiggery-pokery, too. Poe didn't actually write "The Raven" backward. The essay is as much a contrivance as the poem itself. Here is a beautiful poem; it does everything a poem should do, is everything a poem should be. And here is a clever essay about the writing of a beautiful poem. Top that. Nearly everything Poe wrote, including the spooky stories for which he is best remembered, has this virtuosic, showy, lulling, and slightly wilting quality, like a peony just past bloom. Poe didn't write "The Raven" to answer the exacting demands of a philosophic Art, or not entirely, anyway. He wrote it for the same reason that he wrote tales like "The Gold-Bug": to stave off starvation. For a long while, Poe lived on bread and molasses; weeks before "The Gold-Bug" was published, he was begging near-strangers on the street for fifty cents to buy something to eat. "The Raven" has had a great run," he wrote to a friend, "but I wrote it for the express purpose of running—just as I did the 'Gold-Bug,' you know. The bird beat the bug, though, all hollow." The public that swallowed that bird and bug Poe strenuously resented. You love Poe or you don't, but, either way, Poe doesn't love you. A writer more condescending to more adoring readers would be hard to find. "The nose of a mob is its imagination," he wrote. "By this, at any time, it can be quietly led."

This year marks the two-hundredth anniversary of Poe's birth and the publication of two collections of gothic tales produced by the Mystery Writers of America. "On a Raven's Wing: New Tales in Honor of Edgar Allan Poe" (Harper; \$14.99) contains stories by twenty mystery writers, including Mary Higgins Clark. "In the Shadow of the Master: Classic Tales by Edgar Allan Poe" (William Morrow; \$25.99) pairs Poe's best-known stories with modern commentaries; Stephen King muses on

ANDRÉ CARILLHO

Always in debt, Poe both sought and sneered at the popular audience of his day.

"The Genius of 'The Tell-Tale Heart.'"

There's also a sensitive and haunting brief biography, Peter Ackroyd's "Poe: A Life Cut Short" (Doubleday, \$21.95), that offers a fitting tribute to Poe's begin-at-the-end philosophy by opening with his horrible and mysterious death, in October of 1849. Poe, drunk and delirious, seems to have been dragged around Baltimore to cast votes, precinct after precinct, in one of that city's infamously corrupt congressional elections, until he finally collapsed. From Ryan's tavern, a polling place in the Fourth Ward, Poe was carried, like a corpse, to a hospital. He died four days later. He was forty years old.

"My whole existence has been the merest Romance," Poe wrote, the year before his death, "in the sense of the most utter unworldliness." This is Byronic bunk. Poe's life was tragic, but he was about as unworldly as a bale of cotton. Poe's world was Andrew Jackson's America, a world of banking collapse, financial panic, and grinding depression that had a particularly devastating effect on the publishing industry, where Poe sought a perch. His biography really is a series of unfortunate events. But two of those events were transatlantic financial crises: the Panic of 1819 and the Panic of 1837, the pit and the pendulum of the antebellum economy. Poe died at the end of a decade known, in Europe, as "the Hungry Forties," and he wasn't the only American to fall face down in the gutter during a

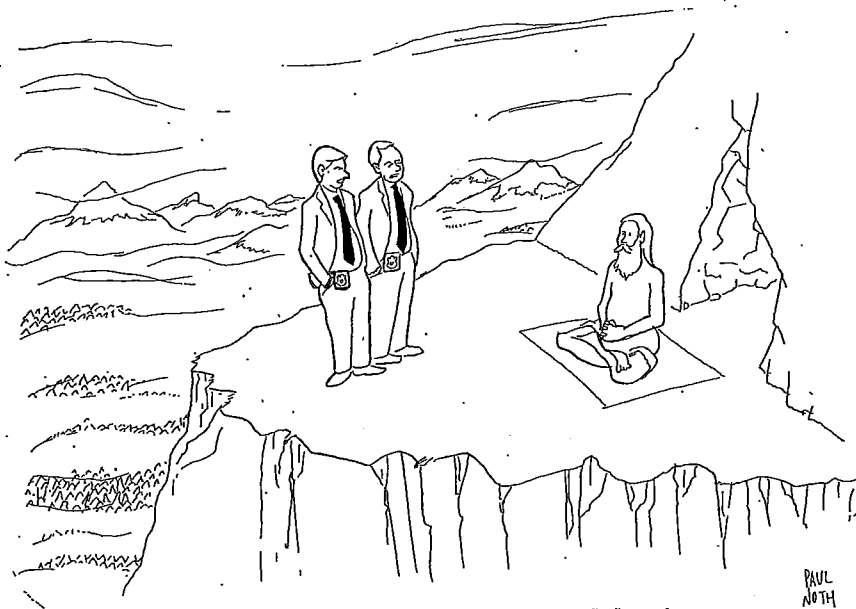
seven-year-long depression brought on by a credit collapse. He did not live out of time. He lived in hard times, dark times, up-and-down times. Indigence cast a shadow over everything he attempted. Poverty was his raven, tapping at the door, and it was Poe, not the bird, who uttered, helplessly, another rhyme for "Nevermore." "I send you an original tale," Poe once began a letter, and, at its end, added one line more: "P.S. I am poor."

Edgar Poe was born in Boston, on January 19, 1809, to a talented actress named Eliza Poe and her hapless husband, David, who deserted her. When Edgar was two, his mother died of consumption. Edgar and a brother and sister had little more to depend upon than the charity of strangers. The Poe orphans were separated, and Edgar landed in the home of a wealthy Richmond merchant named John Allan and his sickly, childless wife, Fanny. Allan, who ran a firm called the House of Ellis, never adopted the boy, and never loved him, either. Poe, for his part, took Allan's name but never wanted it. (He signed letters, and published, as "Edgar A. Poe.") In 1815, Allan moved his family to London, to take advantage of the booming British market for Virginia tobacco. Poe attended posh boarding schools. Then, during the Panic of 1819, the first bust in the industrializing nineteenth century, banks failed, factories closed, and Allan's business imploded. Allan, plagued with two hundred

thousand dollars of debt, returned to Virginia. Poe turned poet. The earliest verses in his hand that survive were written when he was fifteen: "Last night, with many cares and toils oppress'd, / Weary, I laid me on a couch to rest." Adolescent melancholy, and nothing more. But on the same sheet of paper, just below Poe's scrawl, Allan had calculated the compound interest on a debt.

In 1823, Poe fell in love with Jane Stannard, the unhinged mother of a school friend. A year later, Stannard died, insane. Poe spent much time at her graveside. "No more" became his favorite phrase. In 1825, Allan inherited a fortune from an uncle. He did not name Poe as his heir. Allan rose; Poe kept falling. At seventeen, Poe went to the University of Virginia, where he drank and gambled and, in a matter of months, racked up debts totalling more than two thousand dollars. Allan refused to honor them, even though Poe was at risk of debtors' prison. Poe ran off. There followed a series of huffy pronouncements and stormy departures; most ended in Poe creeping back, begging Allan for money. "I am in the greatest necessity, not having tasted food since Yesterday morning," Poe wrote. "I have no where to sleep at night, but roam about the Streets." Allan was unmoved. Poe enlisted in the Army and served for two years as Edgar A. Perry. In 1829, Fanny Allan died. Andrew Jackson was inaugurated. Poe, while awaiting a commission to West Point, submitted the manuscript for a book of poems to a publisher, who told him that he would publish it only if Poe guaranteed him against the loss. Allan wouldn't front the money. Poe moved to Baltimore, where he lived with his invalid grandmother; his aunt, Maria Clemm; his nine-year-old cousin, Virginia; and his brother, Henry, an alcoholic who was dying of consumption.

Jackson, meanwhile, refused to renew the charter of the Bank of the United States, run by Nicholas Biddle. Biddle insisted on the need for federal regulation of paper currency. Some of Jackson's supporters wanted no paper money at all. Between 1830 and 1837, while Biddle and Jackson battled, three hundred and forty-seven state-chartered banks opened across the country. They printed their own money—\$140 million in paper bills was in circulation by 1836. All this paper was backed by very little coin. At the end of



"You can tell us the sound of one hand clapping here or you can tell us downtown."

Jackson's two terms, American banks held six times as much paper money as gold.

Poe, who was broke, didn't need a bank. He could treasure up funds, he came to believe, in his own brain. He read as much as he could, borrowing books from Baltimore libraries. "There are minds which not only retain *all* receipts, but keep them at compound interest for ever," he wrote. Poe may have thought that his mind was a mint, but when his book of poems was finally published it earned him nothing (exactly what all his collections of poetry earned). He sold one of Maria Clemm's slaves. "I have tried to get the money for you from Mr. A a dozen times—but he always shuffles me off," Poe wrote to one of his creditors. And he added, lying, "Mr. A is not very often sober."

"I have an inveterate habit of speaking the truth," Poe once wrote. That, too, was a lie. (That Poe lied compulsively about his own life has proved the undoing of many a biographer.) In 1830, he finally made it to West Point, where he pulled pranks. "I cannot believe a word he writes," Allan wrote on the back of yet another letter from his wayward charge. Poe was court-martialed, and after that Allan, who had since married a woman twenty years his junior, cut him off entirely. Poe went to New York, but, unable to support himself by writing, he left the city within three months, returning to Baltimore to live with Mrs. Clemm and little Virginia. He published his first story, "Metzengerstein," about a doomed Hungarian baron, his gloomy castle, and his fiery steed. He won a prize of fifty dollars from the Baltimore *Saturday Visitor* for "MS Found in a Bottle." One of the editors, who met him, later wrote, "I found him in Baltimore in a state of starvation." In these straits, Poe wrote "Berenice," a story about a man who disinters his dead lover and yanks out all her teeth—"the white and glistening, and ghastly teeth of Berenice"—only to realize that she is still alive. It has been claimed, plausibly, that Poe wrote this story to make a very bad and long-winded joke about "bad taste." Also: he was hungry.

John Allan died in 1834, a rich man. He left his vast estate—three plantations and two hundred and thirty slaves—to his second wife and their three children. He left Edgar A. Poe

not a penny. The following year, Poe was hired as the editor of a new monthly magazine, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, in Richmond. He was paid sixty dollars a month, modest enough but, for him, a fortune. In 1836, Poe married Virginia Clemm. She was thirteen; he was twenty-seven; he said she was twenty-one. He called her his "darling little wifey." ("I was a child and *she* was a child, / In this kingdom by the sea; / But we loved with a love that was more than love—/ I and my Annabel Lee.") Poe held the job at the *Messenger* for only sixteen months. He boasted that, under his editorship, the magazine's circulation grew from seven hundred to fifty-five hundred, but, as the Poe scholar Terence Whalen has discovered, this was another lie. The magazine had thirteen hundred subscribers when Poe started, and eighteen hundred when he left.

Poe lied about the *Messenger's* circulation because he was attempting to forge a career in the world of magazine publishing during very troubled economic times. And, plainly, he was a very troubled man. Quarrelling with the publisher of the *Messenger*, Poe left the magazine and, in February of 1837, moved to New York. *The New-Yorker*, a weekly magazine edited by Rufus Griswold, welcomed him, praising his work at the *Messenger*. Harper & Brothers was just about to publish his novel, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," the account of a Nantucket seafarer. His voyages involve whaling; mutiny, shipwreck, sharks, cannibalism, letters written in blood, cryptic "Ethiopian characters," and an island of treacherous black people, with black teeth, whose chief is named Too-wit.

Unfortunately, Poe arrived in New York just in time for the Panic of 1837. With all that paper money, speculators had gone wild; in the West, there had been a land grab and in the East a housing bubble—in New York, real-estate values had risen a hundred and fifty per cent. When the crash came, in the last weeks of Jackson's Presidency, bankruptcies swept the nation. In New York, riots erupted as the swelling ranks of the city's poor broke into food shops. "Down with the panic makers," one newspaper warned, promising, "A bright sun will soon dispel the remain-

ing darkness." But the skies didn't brighten. In April, one New Yorker wrote in his diary, "Wall Street. The blackness of darkness still hangeth over it. Failure on failure." By the fall of 1837, nine out of ten Eastern factories had closed. Five hundred desperate New Yorkers turned up to answer an ad for twenty day laborers, to be paid at the truly measly wage of four dollars a month.

"Pym" failed, too. Poe's publisher had tried to pass the novel off as an authentic travel journal even as its author left a trail of clues to the hoax—"pym" being, for instance, an anagram of "imp." This didn't go over especially well. One reviewer called the book "an impudent attempt at humbugging the public." Poe did not write another novel. He moved to Philadelphia and wrote more short stories. During the seven-year depression that followed the Panic, Whalen has shown, Poe wrote a tenth as many poems and twice as many tales. He insisted that this was an aesthetic choice. Any piece of truly worthy writing must be able to be read at a sitting in order to achieve a single dramatic effect, the "Nevermore"-ish end with which, Poe said, every work of Art must begin. The tale, he believed, affords "the best prose opportunity for display of the highest talent." Maybe. But writing a book was exactly the kind of long-term investment Poe could not afford to make, especially with so little prospect of return. In the eighteenth-twenties, books cost, on average, two dollars; during the depression, that price fell to fifty cents.

Poe had started writing gothic stories before the economy collapsed. But, as a man without independent means, he was especially vulnerable to market forces, and he knew it. (That's probably why he worked so hard at appearing so otherworldly, so Romantic.) He tried to deduce, from careful study, what sold best, and concluded, "The history of all Magazines shows plainly that those which have attained celebrity were indebted for it to articles *similar in nature—to Berenice*." Gothic stories—supernatural tales set, often, in medieval ruins—had been popular for decades. They were fun to write on a rainy day, as Mary Shelley had discovered, and even more fun to parody, as Jane Aus-

ten found out (both "Frankenstein" and "Northanger Abbey" were published in 1818, when Poe was in England). The genre had since gone to seed, but it still sold well. A philosophy of composition? No, what Poe developed was a philosophy of the literary marketplace. He had little choice. "The general market for literary wares is in a state of stagnation," he reported, during one of the worst years of the depression.

The problem with Poe comes to this: He needed to turn his pen to profit, but he also wanted to signal, as with "Pym," that he was lowering himself. *Look! See? I'm brilliant! Even at writing dreck!* In the story "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (1838), he tells of an aspiring writer of gothic tales who visits the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, seeking instruction. "Your writer of intensities must have very black ink, and a very big pen, with a very blunt nib," the editor advises, then offers some examples of recent successes:

Let me see. There was "The Dead Alive," a capital thing!—the record of a gentleman's sensations when entombed before the breath was out of his body—full of taste, terror, sentiment, metaphysics, and erudition. You would have sworn that the writer had been born and brought up in a coffin. Then we had the "Confessions of an Opium-eater"—fine, very fine!—glorious imagination—deep philosophy—acute speculation—plenty of fire and fury, and a good spicing of the decidedly unintelligible. That was a nice bit of flummery, and went down the throats of the people delightfully. They would have it that Coleridge wrote the paper—but not so. It was composed by my pet baboon, Juniper.

Poe calibrated and recalibrated. Just how many ways can a writer insult his readers and get away with it? If you take Poe's best horror stories at face value, they are wonderfully, flawlessly terrifying; they are also dripping with contempt. "Half-banter, half-satire" is how he once described them. "The Tell-Tale Heart" reads more like three-quarters burlesque, especially when you think about the literary output of Juniper the baboon. A madman with super-acuity murders an old man and entombs the corpse beneath the floor. When the police arrive, the madman begins to hear the beating of his victim's heart:

I felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!—hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!—

"Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no

more! I admit the deed!—tear up the planks!—here, here!—it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

Most of Poe's stories have this campy, floozy "Boo!" business at the end. He knew that these were cheap tricks. He played them well—nobody better—but they weren't to everyone's taste. The first editor to read "The Tell-Tale Heart" rejected it. It was, he said, too loud.

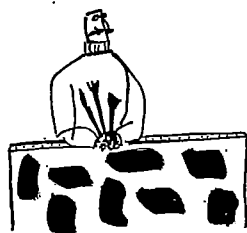
What Poe most wanted was never again to answer to an editor. "As soon as Fate allows, I will have a Magazine of my own—and will endeavor to kick up a dust," he wrote in 1839. Instead, he became, that same year, the assistant editor of the Philadelphia-based *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. He wrote, "That Magazines can live, and not only live but thrive, and not only thrive but afford to disburse money for original contributions, are facts which can only be solved, under the circumstances, by the really fanciful but still agreeable supposition, that there is somewhere still existing an ember not altogether quenched among the fires of good feeling for letters and literary men." But, as the depression deepened, magazines struggled, too. At *Burton's*, Poe had to send letters to his writers informing them, "The intense pressure has obliged Mr. B. with nearly every, if not with every, publisher in the country, to discontinue paying for contributions." Drinking and fighting with *Burton* are the usual reasons given for Poe's being sacked, in 1840. But, really, he was in an impossible position.

Poe then asked Nicholas Biddle to give him a thousand dollars to launch his own magazine, which he proposed calling *The Penn Magazine*. Biddle, broken by the Bank War, didn't oblige. Poe took a job as the book-review editor of *Graham's Magazine*. He wrote much of the copy himself. George Graham paid his writers on a scale that ranged from two dollars a page to twelve dollars. He paid Poe only four dollars, explaining, "The character of Poe's mind was of

such an order, as not to be very widely in demand."

At *Graham's* and elsewhere, Poe wrote a prodigious amount of rather extraordinary literary criticism. He was a keen critic: relentless, unsparing, and, at times, abusive. Thus, Poe on Margaret Fuller: "The manner of Carlyle is conventional—with himself. The style of Emerson is conventional—with himself and Carlyle. The style of Miss Fuller is conventional—with herself and Emerson and Carlyle:—that is to say, it is a triple-distilled conventionality:—and by the word 'conventionality,' as here used, I mean very nearly what, as regards personal conduct, we style 'affectation.'" He was picky about diction. "The history of the borders is filled with legends," James Fenimore Cooper had written. "Abounds with legends," would be better," Poe suggested, "for it is clear that if the history were filled with legends it would be all legend and no history." Cooper was a popular writer, and this, to Poe, was a good sign that he was a bad one: "The most 'popular,' the most 'successful' writers among us (for a brief period, at least) are, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, persons of mere address, perseverance, effrontery—in a word, busy-bodies, toadies, quacks." (Poe aspired to be that one out of a hundred who was not.) He also found grossly offensive the prevailing fashion for a national literature, and waged a one-man campaign against the Young Americans, charging them with adhering to "the gross paradox of liking a stupid book the better; because, sure enough, its stupidity is American." Poe also hated Transcendentalists and literary Bostonians, because, "self-bepuffed," they praised one another's work. He began his review of one much hyped novel, "For the sake of everything puffed, puffing and puffable, let us take a peep at its contents!" As Poe saw it, he was the nation's only real critic; everyone else was just a puffer. If Rufus Griswold's correspondence is any measure, Poe was right. A testy Griswold once wrote a publisher, "I puff your books, you know, without any regard to their quality."

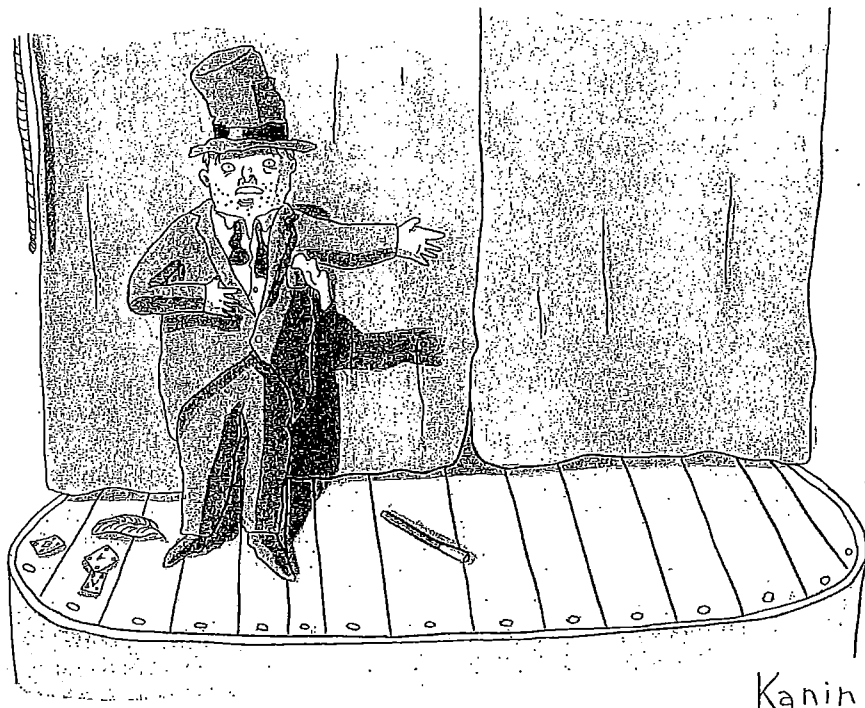
Poe was, unsurprisingly, much attacked, as in a column titled "POE-LEMICAL." And still he fought. Literature was to Poe a religion, Graham once



wrote, and Poe “its high-priest,” who “with a whip of scorpions scourged the money-changers from the temple.” Poe was looking, in other words, for a gold standard of literary value, against the nothingness of paper puffery. There was, in Andrew Jackson’s America, a literary bubble, and Edgar A. Poe was determined to burst it.

Around the time Poe left Philadelphia, he changed the name of his proposed magazine to *The Stylus*; on its cover he wanted a picture of a hand holding a pen and, beneath it, a Latin epigraph that translates as “Sometimes a pen of gold and sometimes a pen of iron.” *The Stylus* never got off the ground. Poe began to think of his life as a kind of forced labor in “the Magazine Prison-House.” But the market that confined him to that prison affected other writers, and readers, too. Something had happened in the world, in the midst of the Panic. When Poe wrote to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Washington Irving, soliciting contributions, he began his letter, “I need not call your attention to the signs of the times.” Magazines were cheaper than books and richer than newspapers. What Poe sensed was the commercial and stylistic ascendancy of magazine literature, despite the morbid financial times. The era of the magazine, with its clipped prose, relentless currency, and swift circulation, had arrived. No more “the verbose and ponderous.” The “energetic, busy spirit of the age,” Poe wrote, “tended wholly to the Magazine literature—to the curt, the terse, the well-timed, and the readily diffused.”

Poe was, nevertheless, desperate for something other than magazine writing to fall back on, and in July of 1841 he urged the Tyler Administration to hire him as a cryptographer. “Nothing intelligible can be written which, with time, I cannot decipher,” he boasted. That month, he published an essay on “secret writing,” celebrating the ancient art of writing “in such manner as to elude general comprehension.” Poe liked ciphers because he liked to send messages that readers lacking his particular genius could not decode. When he published a cryptogram that he had devised, he was astonished that even a single reader wrote in with the solution. “From



Kanin

“And, as you can see, my beautiful assistant has disappeared ... months ago ... with my brother.”

among at least 100,000 readers,” Poe replied to him, “you and I are the only persons who have succeeded.”

Poe had no real chance at a political appointment. But cryptography did save him, by leading him to an ingenious solution to his dilemma, that of a poet determined to both court and outwit the mob. In 1841, he published “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” the story of a crime solved by a code-cracking French detective named C. Auguste Dupin. (The murderer turns out to be an orangutan.) Two more Dupin tales, the world’s first detective stories, followed. With Dupin, Poe channelled his desire to write above his readers—to *dupe* them—into a character much like himself, a man who had once been wealthy but who, “by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it.” Dupin has a very Poe-ish intelligence; he is “fond of enigmas, of conundrums, hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of *acumen* which appears to the ordinary apprehension praeternatural.” And, like Poe, he gloats about his superior powers of perception, boasting,

“with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms.”

If Dupin sounds uncannily familiar, that’s because Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, like every other author of detective fiction, not to mention the creators of a thousand TV crime shows, is incalculably in Poe’s debt. “The children of Poe” is what Stephen King calls the members of his guild, and with good reason. But horror stories predate Poe, and have many other sources. Not so the literary sleuth. All detective stories and police procedurals begin with the intellectually imperious C. Auguste Dupin: methodical, eccentric, calculating—and insulting. We, mere readers, are so many Watsons, Hastingses, and Goodwins. Poe is the only Holmes.

Poe wrote his most popular story, “The Gold-Bug,” just before the nation at last emerged from depression. In January of 1842, his wife had begun to cough up blood; she was eventually consumed, as Poe’s mother had been, by tuberculosis. The squalid conditions in which the Poes lived didn’t help. Poe begged Graham for an advance of two

months' salary. In February, Poe wrote an unfavorable review of Dickens's "Barnaby Rudge," a novel about a village idiot and his talking raven that had been published, serially, in *The New Yorker*. The next month, Poe met Dickens, who was on his American tour (during which Dickens coined the phrase "the almighty dollar"). By April, Poe had resigned his editorship of *Graham's Magazine*, claiming that he found the magazine "namby-pamby," but he had also taken to drinking again. (After Poe's death, Graham, who was fond of him, commended his bookkeeping: "He kept his accounts, small as they were, with the accuracy of a banker.") When Griswold replaced Poe as the editor of *Graham's*, a friend of Poe's printed a squib: "We would give more for Edgar A. Poe's toe nail, than we would for Rueful Grizzle's soul, unless we wanted a milk-strainer." Shortly afterward, Poe reviewed Griswold's "Poets and Poetry of America," remarking that Griswold had included in his anthology many poets whom Poe deemed to be beneath contempt. The battle between Griswold and Poe shaped Poe's legacy for a century.

"My only hope of relief is the 'Bankrupt Act,'" Poe wrote in June. He peddled "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," a sequel to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," at a discount, telling an editor that Graham would have paid him a hundred dollars: "Of course I could not afford to make you an absolute present of it—but if you are willing to take it, I will say \$40." A friend who visited him that fall was mortified to find that Poe and his wife and Mrs. Clemm had a hard time coming up with anything to serve him. Then Poe offered to prostitute his magazine to the Tyler Administration. "It has been hinted to me that I will receive the most effectual patronage from Government, for a journal which will admit occasional papers in support of the Administration," he wrote. "Of the government patronage, upon the condition specified, *I am assured* and this alone will more than sustain the Magazine."

Early in 1843, Poe went to Washington, to lobby for that patronage, but he drank too much and abused his hosts. A journalist who met Poe on the streets of the capital found him seedy and woe-

begone. Just weeks later, Poe heard about a short-story contest, sponsored by the *Dollar Newspaper*. The prize was a hundred dollars: "*Very Liberal Offers and No Humbug*" read one version of the contest announcement. Poe had recently finished "The Gold-Bug," and had sold it to Graham for fifty-two dollars. Thinking to earn that extra forty-eight dollars, he returned Graham's money and submitted his story to the jury. He won first prize. The theme, another sign of the times, was clear enough: "The Banker's Daughter" took second prize; third went to a story called "Marrying for Money."

"The Gold-Bug" was printed in the *Dollar Newspaper* in June and July of 1843. Its Dupin-like protagonist, William Legrand, "had once been wealthy; but a series of misfortunes had reduced him to want." Legrand lives on Sullivan's Island, off South Carolina, with a Newfoundland and "an old negro, called Jupiter." Jupiter tells a spooky story: Legrand has discovered a strange beetle and, ever since, has been puzzling "a syphon wid de figgurs on de slate—de queerest figgurs I ebber did see. Ise git-ting to be skeered." (Poe's racism ran very deep.) Jupiter is the gothic tale-teller inside "The Gold-Bug," not unlike Juniper, the gothic-tale-writing baboon of "How to Write a Blackwood Article." In both stories, Poe divested himself of what he considered to be the darker side of his own authorship.

"The Gold-Bug" is a tangle of puns, many of them, as the literary scholar Marc Shell has pointed out, having to do with currency. Legrand has found a bug the color of gold. "De bug is a goole bug," Jupiter says. In other words, a ghoulish bug. It looks as if it were made of gold. It is not. "Dey aint no tin in him, Massa," Jupiter says. There's nothing in him—no tin, and no gold, either. Legrand has also found a parchment, made of goatskin, *kidskin*. It contains a map showing where a treasure was buried on the island by the pirate Captain Kidd. This pun Legrand himself has to figure out, in order to find the buried treasure. (Kidd's map, in this sense, is itself a guide to Poe's tales. Is Poe kidding or not? Are the tales a joke, and worthless, or brilliant, and priceless?) The parchment is covered with invisible ink, which, as Legrand discovers, conceals a cryptogram. After decoding the

cipher, Legrand takes Jupiter, the dog, and the befuddled narrator on a hunt for the treasure, which turns out to be a chest containing jewels and gold coins.

Poe's intent in writing "The Gold-Bug," one reviewer noted, "was evidently to write a popular tale: money, and the finding of money being chosen as the most popular thesis." When a critic called the prize "A Decided Humbug" and suggested that no editor could possibly have paid Poe a hundred dollars for such "unmitigated trash," Poe sued for libel and won a retraction. Still, the story is a kind of hoax. It aspires to popularity by assaulting the very idea of a popular audience. Poe's tales, like paper money, promise value even as they flaunt their worthlessness. Like the beetle of its title, "The Gold-Bug," the story, is "no tin," too.

After "The Gold-Bug," Poe's life went from bad to worse. In late 1843, when his friends heard that his wife and his mother-in-law were starving, they gave him fifteen dollars, only to come across him, an hour later, drunk and in the street. In 1844, Poe was down to his last four and a half dollars. The publication of "The Raven" the following year didn't rescue him from poverty, but it did propel him, almost overnight, to literary celebrity. This he simply sabotaged. He became the editor and then the owner of *The Broadway Journal*, a New York weekly. But the tone of his criticism grew more rancorous, especially with the ill-advised publication, in *Godey's Lady's Book*, of a series of sketches called "The Literati of New York City: Some Honest Opinions at Random Respecting Their Authorial Merits, with Occasional Words of Personality." Invited to Boston to recite a new poem, he read, instead, a poem that he later said he had written as a child (and subsequently, in *The Broadway Journal*, confessed, without apology, that he had been drunk). He tried to keep the magazine afloat, writing to a friend, "So help me Heaven, I have sent and gone personally in all the nooks & corners of Broker-Land & such a thing as the money you speak of—is *not to be obtained*." *The Broadway Journal* folded in 1846. Virginia Poe's prolonged illness left her husband in

tatters. "I drank, God only knows how often or how much," Poe admitted. He had a breakdown. His wife died in January of 1847. Toward the end of his own life, Poe may have descended again into lunacy. "I was never *really* insane, except on occasions where my heart was touched," he insisted, just months before his death, when he was, at best, disordered to the point of necromaniacal incoherence: "I have been taken to prison once since I came here for getting drunk; but then I was not. It was about Virginia." The cause of his death remains mysterious.

Poe was buried in Baltimore in October, 1849. "Nothing further then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered." Days after Poe's death, Rufus Griswold wrote a breathtakingly belligerent obituary: Poe's passing "will startle many, *but few will be grieved by it.*" Maria Clemm, in a singularly unfortunate act of ignorance or avarice, gave Griswold power of attorney and sold him Poe's papers. Griswold became his literary executor. A year later, he wrote a biography of Poe in which he distorted the historical record, publishing slanders and forgeries, to make Poe seem a fiend.

Between Poe's lies and Griswold's forgeries, it can be difficult to take the measure of Edgar A. Poe. Was the man an utter genius or a complete fraud? It's a question that has riddled Poe scholarship for a century and a half. James Russell Lowell wrote, the year before Poe died, "There comes Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge, / Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge." The question goes back to Poe himself, who was forever calculating. Half banter? Half satire? Two dollars a page, or four? Less Byron, more gore?

And the raven, never flitting, still is
sitting, *still* is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above
my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a
demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming
throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that
lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

Three-fifths Romantic; two-fifths
poor. ♦

