

too talky. You can see Marcel Marceau, or [Brazilian soccer star] Ronaldinho scoring this soccer goal in an incredible display of virtuosity. Forget Diana; on YouTube you can watch the coronation of the meek little Queen Elizabeth in 1953.”

Heffernan’s own tastes run to “very arcane and esoteric stuff,” she says. “And I like offbeat things like Christian and religious programming, and sci-fi.” But regarding YouTube, she is quick to empha-

“This value system is not intrinsically worse than the one that determines prime-time television’s crisp, white-collar aesthetic...”

size that it “isn’t just something for hipsters and teens, or people with exotic interests—pursue your *existing* interests. Like jazz? Try John Coltrane playing with the Miles Davis Quintet in Düsseldorf in 1960. Check out Yoko Ono’s performance art. Scary tricks with knives and archery, or babies laughing. There’s film of Ernest Hemingway catching a man-size marlin. Interviews, in English, with Sigmund Freud. The second-most-viewed video on YouTube not too long ago was *geriatric1927*, a British World War II radar technician telling his life story in pieces. Such good oral history.”

Four days out of five, Heffernan works from home, where she says she watches the “national average” of five hours of television per day: “I sit on my couch like everyone else, and I try *not* to meet television stars or producers.” Her video iPod can download TV shows or on-line content, and she also digitally records programs. Recordings, not real-time viewing, are essential for doing “close readings”—a habit carried over from grad school—which require Heffernan to pause the video repeatedly to make notes. One window on her MacBook computer runs the video, while another has Word open for note-taking. “It’s like doing literary analysis,” she explains, “with the added challenge that I get to use my eyes and ears.”

Born in Hanover, New Hampshire (her father is an emeritus professor of English at Dartmouth), Heffernan recalls that when her parents limited their children’s television viewing to one hour per day, “My brother and I wailed like *The Passion of the Christ*.” She took her undergraduate degree in English and philosophy at the University

of Virginia in 1991 and then enrolled at Harvard. But a succession of media jobs in New York City interrupted her graduate education: fact-checking at the *New Yorker*, writing patter for hosts on MTV and VH-1, editing at *Talk* magazine and *Harper’s*, discussing television for *Slate* and the *New Yorker*. “Logistically, it was agonizing,” she says. “I was trying to build a career [in New York] and finish a Ph.D. at Harvard. There was a lot of Amtrak involved.” Yet she also

found time to write stage plays and to collaborate with her friend Mike Albo on a 2005 comic novel, *The Underminer*. Heffernan had never worked for a daily paper when the *Times* hired her in 2003, “but the assumption was that having worked for *Slate*, with very quick turnaround, I could handle daily deadlines.”

Handle them she has. In one Screens column, after commenting on YouTube’s

“slacker aesthetic,” its “mush politics (the Free Hugs Campaign),” and its “chronic oscillation between absurdism (‘Ask a Ninja’) and emo (‘Say It’s Possible’),” she wrote, “This value system is not intrinsically worse than the one that determines prime-time television’s crisp, white-collar aesthetic; its mainstream politics; and its chronic oscillation between punchy and sappy”—probably as cogent a summary of network TV’s worldview as you’re likely to find in one place.

Part of that worldview, of course, is the truism that only one television critic really matters: the A.C. Nielsen Company, which generates the national ratings. Heffernan writes a different brand of critique. Her columns instruct readers not so much on what to watch or avoid, but on new ways of perceiving what they have already chosen to bring up on their screens. And Heffernan contributes something that many critics lack: a willingness to give the subjects of her reviews the benefit of the doubt. “If I can’t rise to understand why something is interesting,” she says, “it’s my failing.”

~CRAIG LAMBERT

## An Imperial American

*The complex, contradictory Lincoln Kirstein*

by EUGENE R. GADDIS

LINCOLN KIRSTEIN ’30 combined a ferocious intelligence with manic energy, a belief that there was nothing he could not do, and a passionate conviction that if the arts and letters flourished, beauty might save the world.

Kirstein preferred a certain degree of personal ambiguity, if not mystery, which could be attributed to both an underlying shyness and a calculated slyness. In his College class’s senior album, he declined to list his field of study. (It was the fine arts.) During World II, he held the rank of

Martin Duberman, Ph.D. ’57, *The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein* (Knopf, \$37.50)

private first class in the United States Army, but it was said that he delayed sewing the stripes on his custom-tailored uniform for as

long as possible. Throughout his long tenure as president of the School of American Ballet and general director of the New York City Ballet, he was the formidable master-impresario, the creator and preserver of both institutions, but he seemed gleeful in pointing out that the uninitiated at Lincoln Center “have trouble figuring out who I am.” By the 1980s, however, public recognition of his contributions to literature, the fine arts, and dance had widened to the point that such anonymity was no longer possible. To John Russell, then chief art critic for the *New York Times*, he was “one of the most valuable of living Americans.” “A living national treasure,” declared Susan Sontag.

He appeared to dismiss such encomiums, yet Kirstein was intensely self-conscious in every sense of the word, and he had immortal longings. He documented

everything he did. He had his own image preserved in oil, tempera, gouache, ink, pencil, and bronze. Guests at 128 East 19th Street in the 1980s had the pulse-quicken- ing experience of conversing with their host against a backdrop of his portraits by Lucien Freud (powerful but unfinished after fisticuffs between subject and artist), Pavel Tchelitchev (a triptych, including the subject as a standing nude in boxing gloves), Jamie Wyeth (who moved in for months to hone his skill in portraiture, clocking 58 sessions to achieve a likeness in a style reminiscent of Sargent and Eakins), Michael Leonard (Kirstein in khaki with cats), David Langfitt (Kirstein as a retired German submarine commander). Fidelma Cadmus (Kirstein's wife of 50 years, who depicted him as suspicious and vulnerable), and Martin Mower (his Harvard faculty mentor), as well as an eerie self-portrait done in sanguine on paper when he was an undergraduate. He could be contemplated three-dimensionally in portrait heads by Isamu Noguchi (commissioned by Kirstein while at Harvard) and Gaston Lachaise, who also did a striding nude. These icons kept company with sculptures of Abraham Lincoln, William Shakespeare, and Napoleon Bonaparte. Kirstein was not inaccurate when he told John Russell: "I'm an imperial American."

Kirstein made sure that his homes and collections were elegantly photographed and his diaries and correspondence tucked safely into institutions that were likely to endure, particularly the Dance Collection, which he had founded in the 1940s (now part of the Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center). Plainly, he wanted future chroniclers of his life to have a comprehensive body of material to help them while they were "figuring out who I am."

Such a task is not for the faint-hearted. As early as the 1950s, when his achievements were far from over, Kirstein himself had hinted that he might withdraw from the world and produce a five-volume memoir. By the 1980s, his admirers were tantalized when they heard that the working title of "a monumental autobiography" was *Memoirs of a Sly Fellow*. Instead, in 1986,

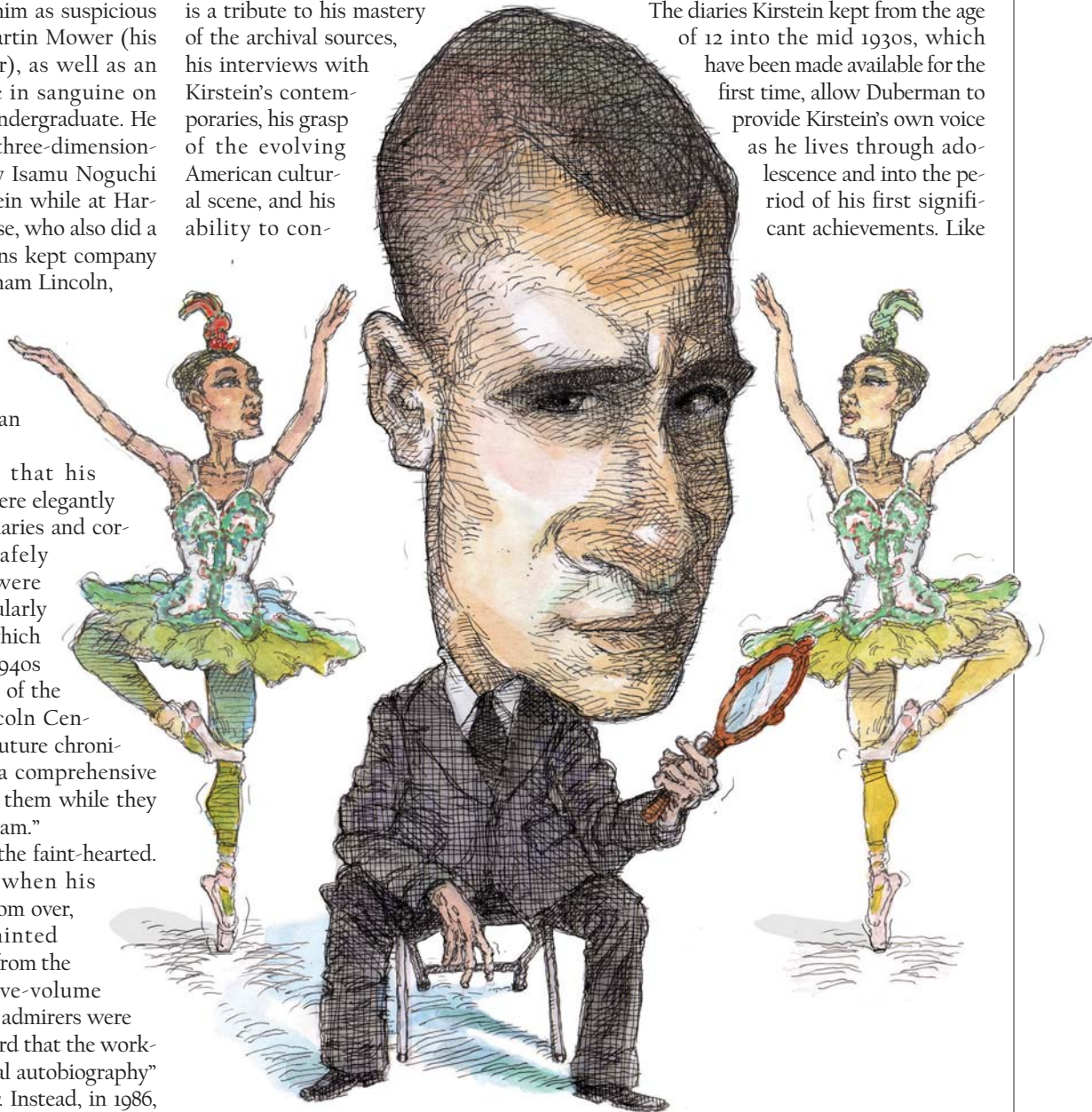
he published *Quarry: A Collection in Lieu of Memoirs*, a record of his New York house and idiosyncratic acquisitions, photographed by Jerry Thompson and accompanied by an autobiographical narrative. In 1994, less than two years before his death, Kirstein produced *Mosaic*, a slim, revealing, but not entirely accurate volume that brought his life only to 1933, on the brink of his fateful encounter with Russian choreographer George Balanchine.

Now, in time for the centennial of Kirstein's birth, Martin Duberman has written a revelatory biography, *The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein*. Those worlds were remarkably disparate, yet Duberman has fully encompassed them in 631 pages, plus an additional 65 pages of notes. This is a tribute to his mastery of the archival sources, his interviews with Kirstein's contemporaries, his grasp of the evolving American cultural scene, and his ability to con-

struct a convincing psychological profile of a complex and contradictory arbiter of twentieth-century American culture.

Duberman, who is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of history at the City University of New York, brings to his elucidation of Kirstein's life a long experience as a prizewinning biographer of other multi-layered American figures: Charles Francis Adams, James Russell Lowell, and Paul Robeson. A novelist and playwright as well, he is skilled at investing his story with drama, and his extensive research on homosexuality in America (he is the author of *Left Out: The Politics of Exclusion*), allows him to put in context Kirstein's ever-present sexual adventures, which occasionally involved concurrent affairs with men and women.

The diaries Kirstein kept from the age of 12 into the mid 1930s, which have been made available for the first time, allow Duberman to provide Kirstein's own voice as he lives through adolescence and into the period of his first significant achievements. Like



**By some measures, 30% of American health spending is wasted.**

— THE ECONOMIST

**Change has never been a core competency in health care.**

— HEALTHCARE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT ASSN.

**There is no prescription more valuable than knowledge.**

— C. EVERETT KOOP, M.D.



 **YALE MBA FOR EXECUTIVES  
LEADERSHIP IN HEALTHCARE**

Sophisticated Education  
Scheduled for Working Professionals

[mba.yale.edu/mba-e](http://mba.yale.edu/mba-e)

## MONTAGE

many of his letters, the diaries are explicit; some readers may tire of Kirstein's preoccupation with his own sexuality. Yet Duberman uses these sources effectively to shed light on the widespread homosexual activity—thoroughly liberated, though of necessity hidden—of the intellectual elite of Kirstein's generation.

More enlightening, however, is what these sources reveal about his relentless artistic and literary pursuits. From the opening sentence about Rose Stein's determination to marry Louis Kirstein against the wishes of her wealthy merchant family, Duberman keeps the narrative flowing. The prose—and even the notes—are dense with quotations, and the casual reader may not choose to linger over them all. But the book is a treasure trove for those who seek an intimate knowledge of how the brilliant, hyper-

anchine created in the United States a renaissance in classical dancing. During Kirstein's 88 years, he supported individual artists and museum exhibitions, served as an invaluable member of the Monuments Commission that retrieved much of the art looted by the Nazis, assisted in the creation of Lincoln Center and the American Shakespeare Festival, arranged the first American tour of the Japanese Grand Kabuki, marched with Martin Luther King Jr. from Selma to Birmingham, and published more than 15 books and 500 pamphlets, articles, and program notes.

Duberman's book moves chronologically, but he wisely focuses each chapter on a distinct subject for clarity ("Nijinsky," "The Museum of Modern Art," "Japan"). As is often inevitable in a work of this magnitude, there are occasional in-

**“Words will not flow into the ink fast enough. We have a real chance to have an American ballet within 3 yrs. time.”**

sensitive, occasionally enraged, and more often generous son of a self-made department-store magnate became an irresistible force—first among Harvard's *jeunesse dorée* and then on a more conspicuous stage.

As Duberman demonstrates in hitherto unpublished detail, Kirstein was congenitally independent and compulsively productive. In 1928, as a sophomore, he launched *Hound & Horn*, one of the most thought-provoking literary magazines of its era. As a junior, along with classmates Edward M. M. Warburg and John Walker III, he brought forth the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art, introducing many of the most significant twentieth-century artists to Boston for the first time. In significant ways, the Museum of Modern Art was its successor. At Harvard, Kirstein also concluded that the one perfect medium that would bring all the arts together was the dance. Three years after graduation, with the help of the Wadsworth Atheneum's director, A. Everett "Chick" Austin Jr., and other modernists he had met at Harvard, he arranged for the immigration of George Balanchine to America. Through the School of American Ballet and its company, which evolved into the New York City Ballet, he and Bal-

accuracies: in my own field, I know that the Bushnell Auditorium in Hartford was not part of the Wadsworth Atheneum, nor was Hartford's first significant collector of modern art, James Thrall Soby, connected with the Museum of Modern Art during the period in which he is first mentioned. But these are minor blemishes in what will surely be regarded as a definitive work.

Throughout the book, Duberman perceptively addresses Kirstein's prodigious literary output on dance, painting, sculpture, photography, movies, biography, history, and poetry, acknowledging that his writing style ranged from lyrical clarity to language so compressed and arcane that it amounted to intellectual arrogance. As Duberman shows, the real Kirstein came through in his diaries and correspondence, never more authentically than in the two letters he wrote in the summer of 1933 when suddenly, with pulsating clarity, he saw Balanchine, the future of dance in America, and his own destiny coalesce and begged Chick Austin to help him: "This is the most important letter I will ever write you as you will see. My pen burns my hand as I write. Words will not flow into the ink fast enough. We have a real chance to

have an American ballet within 3 yrs. time.... Do you know George Balanchine...the most ingenious technician in ballet I have ever seen.... Please, please Chick if you have any love for anything we both do adore, rack your brains and try to make this all come true.... We have the future in our hands..." [and later] "This will be no collection, but living art—and the chance for perfect creation."

Duberman's monumental story ends on a somber note when the failing, bedridden Kirstein loses all interest in looking at the books on art that he had loved. Yet readers will have no doubt that on certain nights—from his seat at the New York State Theater, as he watched the dancers materialize on stage and bring to life one of George Balanchine's miraculous gifts to the world—Kirstein knew that he was in

the presence of the "perfect creation" that would not have happened without him.

*Eugene R. Gaddis, the DeLana archivist and curator of the Austin House at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, is the author of *Magician of the Modern: Chick Austin and the Transformation of the Arts in America* and editor of the forthcoming *Magic Façade: The Austin House*.*

## Rhythms of Race

African-American poet Kevin Young talks shop.

by SHAUN SUTNER

**A**T AGE 36, Kevin Young '92 ranks among the most accomplished poets of his generation. The recipient of Guggenheim, Stegner, and NEA fellowships, he recently left Indiana University to become Haywood professor of English and creative writing at Emory University in Atlanta, where he is also curator of the 75,000-volume Raymond Danowski Poetry Library, believed to be one of the world's largest private collections of English-language poetry.

Young was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, to Louisiana natives. As a child, he lived in Chicago, Syracuse, Boston, and Natick, Massachusetts. His late father was a physician; his mother, who has a doctorate in chemistry, is president and CEO of the Mattapan Health Center in Boston.

At Harvard, Young was one of the youngest members of the Dark Room Collective, an influential group of black Boston-area writers. Having spent his high-school years in Kansas, he writes

poems that reflect his midwestern roots as well as his ancestral Southern heritage.

In January, Alfred A. Knopf published his most recent book of poems, *For the Confederate Dead*. His earlier *Jelly Roll* was a finalist for the National Book Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and won the Paterson Poetry Prize. He is the author of three other poetry collections—including *Black Maria*, recently adapted for the stage and performed by the Providence Black Repertory Company—and *To Repel Ghosts: The Remix*, a retelling of the life and work of the late New York graffiti artist and painter Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Young has also edited the Library of America's *John Berryman: Selected Poems* and two other poetry and prose collections. He divides his time between Atlanta and Belmont, Massachusetts, where he and his wife, Catherine Tuttle, live with their two children.

Poet Kevin Young  
at Emory University



*Q. What made you want to become a poet?*

*A. I took a creative-writing summer course when I was 12 or 13. I wrote short stories and was into comic books. Suddenly I wrote a poem because we were supposed to, and the teacher liked it and passed it around. In retrospect, I don't see why, because [my] poems were terrible. I still remember them, but they're best left undiscussed.*

*Q. When he heard the title of your new book, an African-American colleague of mine responded: "[Bleep] the Confederate dead!" Are you expressing sympathy for the Confederate dead?*

*A. I thought long and hard about the title. It's trying to deal with the ironies of Ameri-*

Photograph by Kay Hinton