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FEATURES

On the cover: Bronze helmet from the ancient city of Axos, in northern Crete. Photograph: Vanni/Art Resource, NY

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BOSTON COLLEGE
MAGAZINE VOLUME 68 NUMBER 1 WINTER 2008

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LETTERS

POLLOCK'S EYES

Re "Eyes on Pollock" (Letters, Fall 2007): What makes an artist? As an artist, I think about this all the time, and here's what I've come up with: Paintings that are done to promote an agenda, gloss somebody's image, or otherwise engage in propaganda, are ultimately not art; being beautifully done, easy on the eyes, and easy to understand does not make them art. Art communicates truth. The best art does that in a way that encourages a viewer to keep looking and to keep finding truth within it. The truths may be profound or simple.

Rockwell's illustrations tend to deliver comforting images that rarely exist. Pollock's images are troubling and hard to digest, but seem to address the very real concerns in the 1940s and 1950s of world war, cold war, and nuclear annihilation.

Joan Savitt, MBA'84
Wellesley, Massachusetts

OVER THERE

In "Body and Soul" (Fall 2007), Thomas C. Kohler disclosed the significant influence of Catholic teachings on the development of this country's labor movement. Because every business needs profits (without which there would be no jobs for unions or management), management sometimes needs foreign low-income workers in order to compete in a world economy. The Catholic social thought tradition continues in less developed countries where it is most needed and where a better life can best be achieved through work groups organized to bargain collectively.

Bill MacGillivray '65
Hingham, Massachusetts

Many people today have little experience with unions or understand their role in building the American middle class. Jesuits at my alma mater, Le Moyne College, in Syracuse, New York, established an influential Industrial Relations Institute a year or two before the college opened for classes in 1947. In the new college, industrial relations became a popular major among the World War II veterans who enrolled. Indeed, whatever our major, everyone read the social encyclicals—*Rerum novarum* and *Quadragesimo anno*.

The Church's labor movement recognized the importance of work to the experience of human dignity. That movement can serve again as a healthy ally in the promotion of other ingredients of social justice.

Peg Dwyer M.Ed.'56, Hon.'98
Wellesley, Massachusetts

RESERVATIONS

Re "Roman Mythology," by William Bole (Fall 2007): Cullen Murphy's assertion that "the United States is a democracy" is wholly without merit. Article IV, Section 4, of the U.S. Constitution guarantees "to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government." John Adams wisely wrote, "Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself." Murphy avers that privatization of government services is "one of the insidious parallels . . . between America and Rome, and one that . . . will ultimately do the most damage." The group in a position to do the most damage to a country is the one that controls the country's finances and wields power via its influence over the economic and political systems. In America that is the Federal Reserve System.

Michael Danforth '97
Orlando, Florida

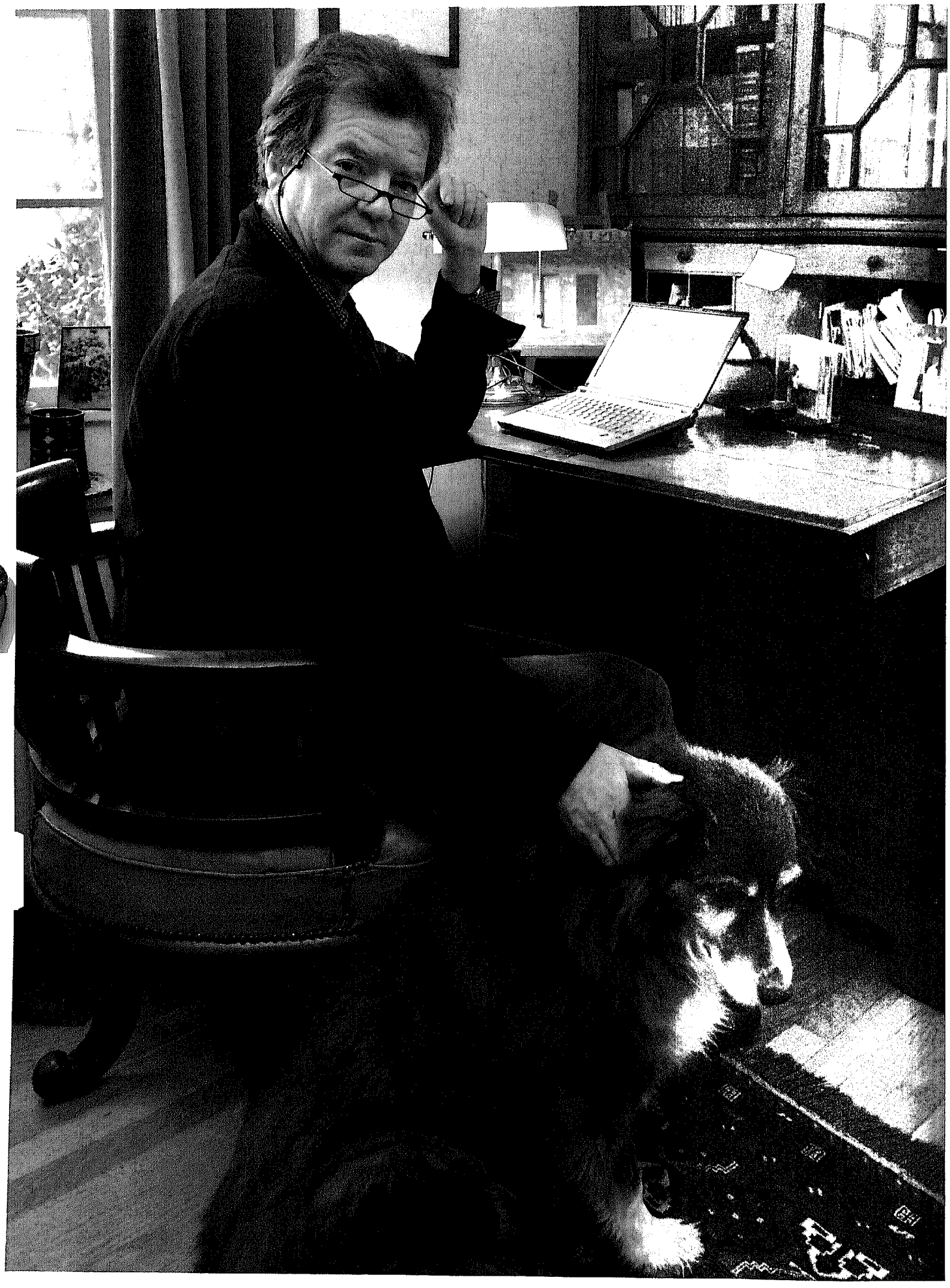
JOB DESCRIPTION

"Heart of Stone" (text by Cara Feinberg, photos by Gary Wayne Gilbert), in Fall 2007, is a wonderful piece on the restoration of Gasson Hall. However, it is sad tha the contract for reproducing the stone blocks was or had to be given to a company outside of the United States.

Denise C. Moore JD'76
Belmont, Massachusetts

MOTHER AND SON

I read Clare Dunsford's article "Reading J. P." (Fall 2007) with fascination and profound admiration for the author and her



Most contemporary philosophy stands above the fray.

KEARNEY'S CHOICE

But not all of it

BY WILLIAM BOLE

On a gray October morning, an Irish film crew descends on a modest home in West Newton, Massachusetts, hauling microphones, booms, lights, cameras, mixers, and backdrops, having already brought with them the dark skies from where they came. The crew's leader, Alan Gilsenan, one of the most prolific documentary filmmakers in Ireland, chats with a reporter about the philosopher Richard Kearney, whose living room, a haven for potted plants and coffee tables with oversized books, is morphing into a television studio. "Richard opened up different ways of being Irish," says Gilsenan, referring to Kearney's place in debates about Irish identity going back to the late 1970s, before his decision to come to America nine years ago to teach full time at Boston College. Down the stairs comes Your Man, as they say in Ireland, dressed in brown corduroy slacks and a checkered Oxford shirt, looking unforgivably young, with his wavy reddish hair, for someone who was helping to alter Ireland's political fortunes three decades ago.

During an hourlong interview, the camera-friendly philosopher speaks warmly of many things Irish, among them the enlightened monks of County Limerick who nurtured his questions about God, as well as matters having less to do with Hibernia than with hermeneutics, the branch of contemporary philosophy that is beginning to venerate Kearney, who has only just turned 54. Gilsenan, who is shooting a documentary called *The Irish Mind*, borrowing the title of a 1984 book edited by Kearney, keeps the conversation on a contemplative plane. That's to say, he does not steer into the mess of intrigue surrounding what Kearney refers to otherwise as his "retreat" from Ireland to the United States—the death threats, the (female) stalkers, the jealousies among fellow academics,

Left: Kearney at home, with Maisie

PHOTOGRAPH: Gary Wayne Gilbert

and other trials, about which Kearney these days speaks candidly, even good-humoredly.

As a scholar, essayist, activist, poet, novelist, and television talk-show host, Kearney (pronounced like Carney) seemed ubiquitous in Ireland in the 1980s and through much of the 1990s. Working with Northern Ireland's John Hume, who became the Nobel Peace laureate of 1998, and Mary Robinson, who would become president of the Republic of Ireland in 1990, he articulated a new and spacious sense of Irish identity, applicable in the North, in the Republic, and everywhere else ("the greatest Irish thinkers," Kearney wrote, "flouted the confines of geographical and mental maps"), a contemporary redefinition that might allow men and women living in Northern Ireland to choose fairly for themselves either British or Irish citizenship. Kearney, a native of the southern county of Cork, and his Protestant counterpart, Bernard Cullen, who teaches philosophy at Queens University in Belfast, spearheaded a proposal to that effect in 1983 (when Kearney was just 28 years old), at a groundbreaking conference of Protestant and Catholic leaders against political violence; the proposal did not seem prophetic at the time, as it was ripped apart by unswerving nationalists on all sides, including Britain's then–prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. Seven years later, though, when Robinson spoke up for a bendable notion of identity at her inauguration as the Republic of Ireland's first woman president, commentators called the speech "Kearneyesque."

With philosophy Paul Ricoeur, 2005

Mary Robinson spoke up for a bendable notion of identity at her inauguration as the Republic of Ireland's first woman president, and commentators called the speech "Kearneyesque."

The adjective has surfaced in other political reportage, including when voters in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland went to the polls on Good Friday 1998 and approved a peace accord that more or less quieted the violence of Belfast. The Good Friday Agreement, as it became known, declared that Catholics and Protestants in the North should be able to choose their citizenship—British or Irish or both. A year earlier, Kearney had fleshed out the notions underlying joint British-Irish sovereignty in his book *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Literature, Philosophy*, in which he'd challenged what he called the "rhetoric of purity and purification," declared Irish identity to be "not uniform but pluriform," and called for a new kind of political structure in the British Isles that would reflect the region's multiple social and regional identities. The book received much attention in Ireland, and Kearney remained a fixture on the news and talk shows.

Soon, though, Kearney's appearances on RTE, Ireland's public television and radio network, grew less frequent, and sightings of the philosopher in Dublin's cafés dwindled. He began a fairly quiet retreat from Ireland, taking visiting professorships in places like Nice, Paris, and Boston. Kearney didn't vanish altogether from Ireland. Starting in 1999, he spent semesters at Boston College but summered in Cork, as he continues to do, with his Paris-born wife, Anne Bernard Kearney, who teaches French literature at Boston College and speaks English with a French-Irish accent, and two daughters. At the Kearney home on Rabbit Island, a rugged outpost of West Cork, his summer days begin with yoga and meditation at 5:00 A.M., before he slips out the back door to pull up crab and lobster pots. He spends the bulk of his mornings writing—he has written 22 books, edited or co-edited 15 others, and at various points in our interviews he alluded to at least a half dozen volumes in the works—and he reads in the afternoon. In other words, he is by celebrity standards incorporeal in a country where one of the leading newspapers, the *Sunday Independent*, had once named him the sexiest man in Ireland ("every thinking woman's crumpet"). That remove is a consequence of a choice that Kearney says he freely made nine years ago, a choice in favor of his identity as a scholar, a choice for philosophy.

OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, MORE THAN A DOZEN international academic associations, ranging from the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy to the American Academy of Religion, have devoted conferences and seminars to aspects of Kearney's philosophy of religion. In addition, there are now two books not by, but about Kearney, who holds the Charles B. Seelig Chair of Philosophy

PHOTOGRAPH: Courtesy of Richard Kearney

at Boston College, which he accepted in 2001, making permanent his "retreat" to the United States. These are collections whose contributors have included prominent figures of 20th-century philosophy, among them Paul Ricoeur, who revitalized the philosophical importance of signs, symbols, and metaphors, and with whom Kearney studied as a graduate student in Paris; and Jacques Derrida, who founded the philosophical and literary movement known as deconstruction, and with whom Kearney carried on exceptionally warm and genial discussions, despite their philosophical differences. (Derrida died in 2004; Ricoeur, a year later.) One of those books, dealing with Kearney's philosophy of the imagination, is titled *Traversing the Imaginary: Richard Kearney and the Postmodern Challenge* (Northwestern, 2007), edited by Peter Gratton and John Panteleimon Manoussakis; the other is *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (Fordham, 2006), edited by Manoussakis, who studied with Kearney at Boston College as a graduate student from Greece. Now a visiting professor at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, Manoussakis says the two areas that have absorbed most of Kearney's intellectual energies—the imagination and the sacred—were relegated to the peripheries of contemporary philosophy until recently. "Richard's work made them topical again," says Manoussakis, who explains that the "after God" slant of his book's title refers to Kearney's move beyond the highly conceptual, logically proved, well-defined God of the old philosophers to a God of "possibility" who defies definition. This is the God who refused to reveal himself when Moses desired to see his face in the burning bush, and whose signs must remain open to interpretation, a God who "neither is nor is not," but may be, Kearney has written.

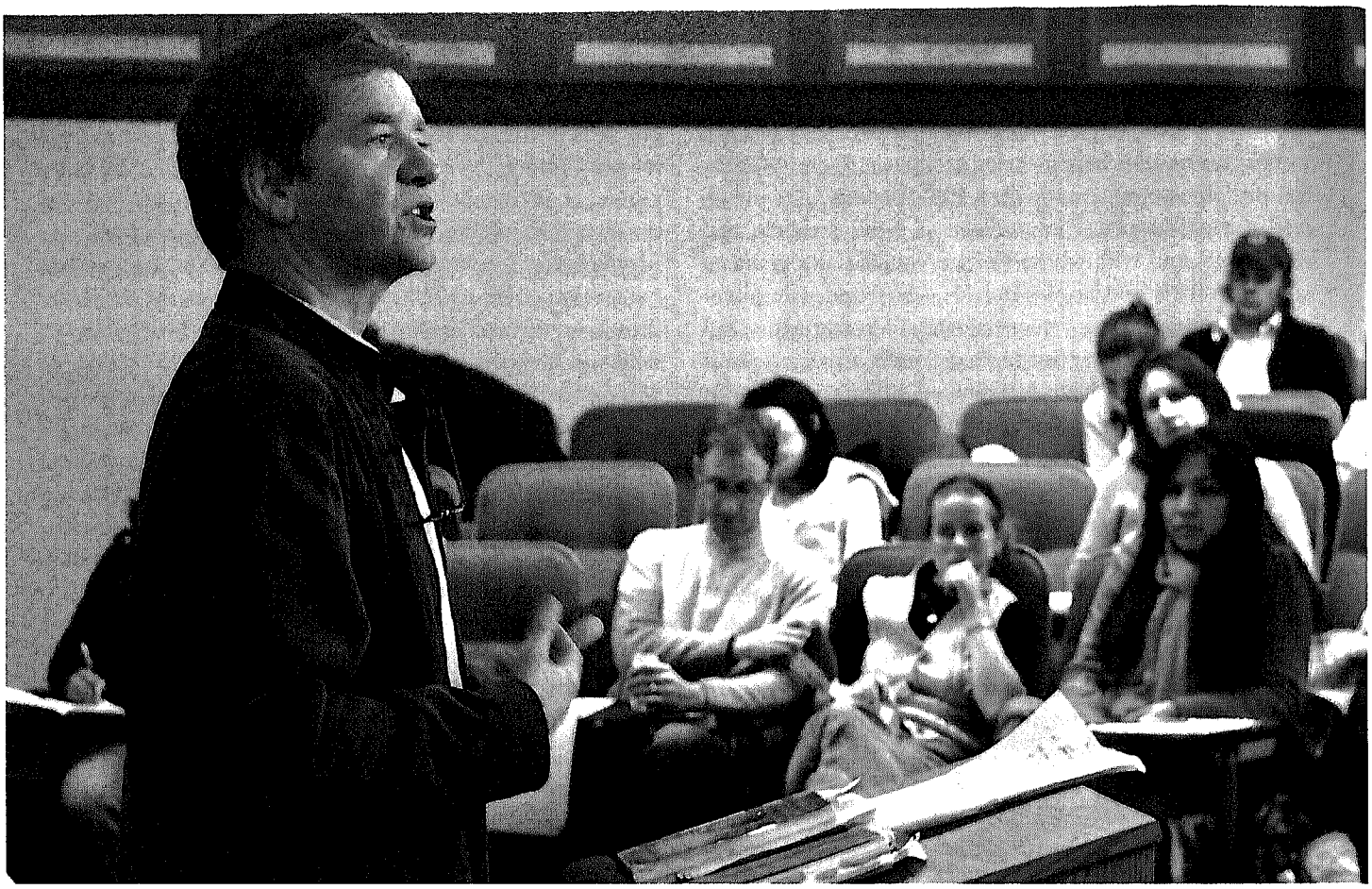
And so Kearney finds himself not only a writer of philosophy but also a writer about whom philosophy is written. Within the profession, this is something of an ontological leap. There are names for people who have arrived at this juncture, and they are Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Hegel, and Heidegger, along with, of course, a multitude of others. But if there's an asterisk to be put after Kearney's name and those of others who sit in the Hall of Fame of contemporary philosophy, it's to indicate that not many people outside of the discipline are lending an ear to these individuals. Few philosophers today are found in the marketplace like Socrates at the Acropolis; most are isolated in lecture halls or academic conferences—tending, so the critics say, more to philosophy's puzzles than to life's problems.

Kearney has done his share of philosophizing among the philosophers on their disciplinary and subdisciplinary turfs. He is, after all, a *hermeneut* (the word comes from the Greek god Hermes, who interpreted the messages of the gods), someone who deals in hermeneutics, in theories or methods of interpretation. But partly because, as a hermeneut, he inhabits the tradition of Continental, or European, philosophy, which takes an interest in larger questions of culture and meaning (unlike, by reputation, the mostly English-speaking analytical, or linguistic, philosophers, who take an interest in the structure of sentences), and partly because of what he admits is the "actor" in him, Kearney has deliberately staked out a role as a rare public philosopher. From the Catholic-Protestant turmoil in Northern Ireland to the bitter fruits of religious fanaticism embodied in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and beyond, he has applied himself to considerations of some of the world's serious and seemingly intractable issues, gaining a hearing through his books and increasingly through the mass media. "Richard is a genuine philosopher, in the sense that for him, it's not merely a profession or a field of scholarship. It's a lived experience, a meaningful experience," says Manoussakis.

Kearney does not draw unflattering distinctions among philosophers. What he describes is a difference between the "existential" philosophers—by which he means thinkers like Socrates, Kierkegaard, and Sartre, who threw themselves into the agora, or marketplace, of ideas—and the "speculative" philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle, who systematized philosophical thought and created academies (and in latter days were endowed with chairs). "I'm between these two" traditions of philosophical engagement, Kearney tells me in an interview in his living room, sitting in a deep chair between a bookcase containing more than a few of his speculative works and a magazine rack that holds an anthology of Beatles songs (an acoustic guitar, his, stands in a corner). "If I had to choose, I'd be on the side of the existential thinkers, but"—he adds, as if to say he's not letting go of his professorial chair—"it's a dialectic."

Without a doubt, Kearney has lately been tending toward the existential. Four years ago, he began practicing yoga, initially to help cure a case of insomnia, but he recalls that from the moment his yoga instructor in Boston told him to "let your eyes move down from your head to your heart," he knew he was on a journey that would last for a long time. In a matter of months, he was in India (with his wife and children), visiting an inter-religious ashram run by Sacred Heart nuns. They linked him up with a youngish yogi who taught him poses that involved loosening the jaw, neck, and eyes, in addition to a series of breathing exercises, all of which are associated with a spiritual descent into the cave of one's heart.

Hearing Kearney tell of this spiritual search, it is easy to call up images of pop mysticism, of John, Paul, George, and Ringo excursing to India in 1968 to try on transcendental meditation with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. But even aside from the fact that the Beatles didn't go nearly so far as to spend three days and one night in a cave by the sacred Ganges River alone and without food (as Kearney did), Kearney's passage to India is more reminiscent of other



BOVE: PL 518, Kearney's "Philosophy of Imagination" class, in the Fulton Debate Room
:LOW: In December at the faculty seminar "Meaning and Transcendence," Christopher Constas (A&S honors faculty), Mary Joe Hughes, and Kearney

notable journeys, according to Francis X. Clooney, SJ, a professor of comparative theology at Harvard Divinity School and a former Boston College theologian, who helped connect Kearney with the Indian nuns.

Though ambitious young professors of philosophy may not see it as a solid career move, the journey to India has been undertaken before by great philosophical seekers of wisdom, beginning with Hegel and Schopenhauer in the 19th century, Clooney points out. "I think someone like Richard, with his credentials in place, is able to show that now, in the current global context, fixed boundaries—like those between East and West, or philosophy and theology—are not all that intellectually interesting. What's interesting is crossing those boundaries," the Jesuit says.

Traversing boundaries is no slight part of Kearney's contributions to philosophy, including the philosophy of religion. In recent years some scholars have spoken of a theological turn in philosophy, and Kearney's work "signals one of the most compelling and challenging engagements with this turn," Manoussakis writes in his introduction to *After God*. In discussing Kearney's writings, scholars tend not to linger over what could be considered his retail contributions—Kearney's concept of the God "of possibility," for instance. They are more likely to dwell on his wholesale contributions, notably his methodological approaches to unpacking philosophical questions.

There are times when philosophers trade primarily in big ideas, such as "I think, therefore I am," which was Descartes's answer to the question of what he could know with absolute certitude, and Kant's categorical imperative (don't do anything you wouldn't want everyone else in the world to do in identical circumstances). In professional philosophy, this is not demonstrably one of those times. In the introduction to his 2001 book *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion*, Kearney himself says he doesn't have a name for the philosophy of God that he is "adumbrating."

Today, the people who are seen as making genuine contributions to philosophy are often the ones who are turning new corners of conversation and moving beyond stock philosophical choices rather than drumming up grand notions. There is, for example, the middle way that Kearney is forging between the so-called hermeneutics of suspicion, with its wariness of received wisdom, and the hermeneutics of suspension, or affirmation, which seeks to retrieve what's valid in traditions and in systems of knowledge. Kearney does have a name for this approach, though not a sexy one—"diacritical hermeneutics," a way of philosophizing that is critical yet dialogical, open to truth and transcendence.

KEARNEY'S FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES DESCRIBE HIM as warm and unpretentious, able not only to converse as an equal with preeminent philosophers, but also to do spot-on impersonations of his fellow professors, usually in front of them. He and Anne belong to an ongoing faculty seminar at Boston College called "Meaning and Transcendence," which meets three times a semester for lunch and discussion as part of an effort by the University, together with the Jesuit community, to "keep religion in the conversation of academic life," says Mary Joe Hughes, who coordinates the group and is assistant director of the A&S Honors Program. Seminar member Vanessa Rumble, an associate professor of philosophy who is an authority on Kierkegaard's existentialist thought, recalls that she felt "intimidated" when Kearney first joined the 10-member group, and wondered if the discussion would continue to be lively and unfettered, with such an internationally ranked heavyweight in the mix. But, she says, "What Richard has always brought to the table is his generosity, his modesty, his amazing talent for explaining complex things in the most everyday way."

Rumble and some others speak admiringly of Kearney's "showmanship" in the classroom and lecture hall, yet that's not what I saw when I sat in on his undergraduate class, "Philosophy of Imagination," attended by about 75 students in Gasson 305 on a sticky September afternoon. Looking down, most of the time, at his notes on the portable lectern, he was subdued and, aside from the occasional motioning of

With Hollywood's Martin Scorsese and Gregory Peck, 1997

Kearney finds himself not only a writer of philosophy but also a writer about whom philosophy is written. Within the profession, this is something of an ontological leap.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Gary Wayne Gilbert; above courtesy of Richard Kearney

reading glasses, free of gestures (quite unlike the animated interview he gave to Gilsenan a month later in his living room, where he gestured fluidly to emphasize the salutary effects of a more porous identity among the Irish). When I asked Kearney about this, he seemed surprised for a moment to hear the observation, but then he explained, "I almost feel, when I'm lecturing, that I have to contain the actor in me. I have to keep it calm." Although I also saw him subdue his inner actor at a campus lecture that he hosted, featuring a Hindu inter-religious scholar from India whose full name is Siddhartha, Kearney says he especially wants to keep it calm in the classroom, to balance out "an extremely audio-visual culture" (which was illustrated by his students who glanced at their cell phones and clicked open laptops after taking their seats in Gasson 305). Ever the hermeneut, he says his objective in class is to turn all eyes on the text. Outside of class, Kearney keeps the door to his office wide open on the third floor of Campanella Way; he says he "dreads sabbaticals" because of the separation from students.

With poet Seamus Heaney, 1983

Hearing of his spiritual search, it is easy to call up images of John, Paul, George, and Ringo excursing to India in 1968. But Kearney's passage to India is more reminiscent of other notable journeys.

Kearney was born in Cork on December 8, 1954, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. "I used to get a holiday for that" in Ireland, he recalls fondly, remembering not just the days off from school but also the "festive" faith his mother imparted year-round. He says growing up with his sister and five brothers in a well-off family (his father and grandfather were medical doctors), he never experienced religion as threatening or dogmatic, and when he went to board at Glenstal Abbey in Limerick for high school, the Benedictines, fresh from studies in Paris, introduced him nd his fellow students to the views of iconoclasts such as reud and Nietzsche and Sartre (with whom the adolescent Kearney exchanged letters).

After graduating from University College, Dublin, Kearney went to Montreal to study for his master's at McGill University with the renowned communitarian Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor, who later pointed him back across the ocean to Ricoeur (a French Huguenot) and the University of Paris for his doctoral stint, which he wrapped up in 1980, as he headed back to Dublin with his new wife, Anne.

The young professor at University College quickly hit stride as the founding editor of *The Crane Bag*, a quarterly journal he had started while still in Paris in 1977 and which became a literary scene that attracted the likes of U2's Bono and the poet Seamus Heaney. In broaching the idea that people in Northern Ireland might be British or Irish or both by choice, Kearney found his political voice, but he also drew antipathy from Catholics who insisted on sole Irish sovereignty over the North. The anonymous death threats that surfaced in his mail seemed serious enough that he called in the authorities. He acquired some obsessed admirers too, including, as he relates, the wife of a Middle Eastern diplomat posted to Dublin who followed him and his family to France when he became a visiting professor at the University of Nice in 1998.

One day in Dublin, in the early 1990s, Kearney strode out to University College's parking lot to find his car dismantled, wheels tossed around and roof ripped off; though the dismantler was never prosecuted, Kearney says the police suspected an "inside job" pulled off by a faculty member with a blistering case of professional envy. "Kearney has sometimes been punished for refusing to stay in his box," an article in the *Sunday Independent* noted years later, recalling the parking lot offense as well as "personally vindictive reviews" of Kearney's books in the popular Irish press and in academic journals.

Brendan Kennelly, a celebrated Irish poet who spent this past fall as the Burns Library Visiting Scholar in Irish Studies at Boston College, says he always felt Kearney's move to America had partly to do with jealousy among colleagues. "You know, the academic world is full of all kinds of jealousies. I don't think he is too bothered by that [now]. He's a going forward kind of person," Kennelly said in an interview in the Irish Room at Burns. "He bears no animosity toward Ireland. And increasingly, what you hear is praise of him in Dublin."

PHOTOGRAPH: Courtesy of Richard Kearney

Indeed, if there's one thing Kearney wants to say about his exit from Ireland, it's that he didn't leave in a huff. When I asked him if the reviews of his books were "vindictive," he let out a big laugh and said, "All the time," then spoke almost nostalgically about Irish political commentary in general. "I'm not the only one who went through this," he emphasizes. Kearney does say, with comic understatement, that his trials during the 1990s "were threatening to interfere with my peace and calm" (he also says he walked under the black sun of depression for a while). His pick of words is revealing; Kearney was growing more solicitous of his inner intellectual life. He was exercising his option as a philosopher, the choice that landed him, by decade's end, at Chestnut Hill.

JUST AS HE HELPED TRIANGULATE THE WARRING identities of Northern Ireland, the Charles B. Seelig Professor has continued to be a bridge builder among movements and disciplines in the academic world. He keeps at least one heel dug in hermeneutics, particularly in *phenomenological* hermeneutics, whose hallowed figures include the German Hans Georg Gadamer, a former visiting Boston College professor who held that authentic truth can be found, but in conversation with texts, traditions, and communities of interpretation. At the same time, Kearney has engaged productively with deconstructionists like the late Derrida who adhere to notions of the elusiveness of truth, including the sheer contingency of moral and religious truth, a view that Kearney says he can appreciate given the insalutary ways people behave when they feel they've cornered the truth. Indeed, *The God Who May Be* is, in part, Kearney's response to what he sees as the attitude among some believers that God can be "defined A–Z . . . locked up as a thing and possessed" by one religion or another—a triumphalist stance that he says can lead people to fly planes into skyscrapers.

Kearney is often drawn dialogically to those who "can rightly pass" for atheists (as Derrida once said of himself), but he is no atheist and rightly passes for an Irish Catholic, as he describes himself in conversation. In his writings, however, notably in *The God Who May Be*, he is harder to place:

> I would say that if I hail from a Catholic tradition, it is with this proviso: where Catholicism offends love and justice, I prefer to call myself a Judeo-Christian theist; and where this tradition so offends, I prefer to call myself religious in the sense of seeking God in a way that neither excludes other religions nor purports to possess the final truth. And where the religious so offends, I would call myself a seeker of love and justice *tout court*.

There goes Kearney, seesawing between suspicion and affirmation, between the familiar and the less certain. That's the back and forth of diacritical hermeneutics, which he didn't fully articulate until his post-9/11 book, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (2003), where he interrogates the tendency among terrorists to perceive Westerners as monsters. In this book, Kearney assesses the response of the West (particularly of the United States after the Trade Center attacks), which has been, Kearney argues, to go in pursuit of monsters, or evil ones, too. That way of imagining the enemy can cloud political judgment, making it harder to look the monster in the eye and see a bit of resemblance to one's self, Kearney said in a series of radio interviews he gave to David Cayley of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in early 2006. In the book, he proposes an attitude adjustment courtesy of diacritical hermeneutics: "to make the foreign more familiar and the familiar more foreign," so as "to make us more hospitable to strangers, gods, and monsters, without succumbing to mystique or madness," and without forgetting the difference between victims and aggressors.

Kearney's way of philosophizing draws what might be called a constructive response from deconstructionists. John D. Caputo, formerly of Villanova, now of Syracuse University, who is a leading American advocate of deconstruction and is skeptical of most religious claims, wrote glowingly in *After God*, for instance, of Kearney's passion for the God "who is yet to be what God can be; the God who, as one might say in American English, hasn't shown us anything yet." For his part, Kearney thanks deconstructionists and moral skeptics for challenging accepted distinctions between good and evil, "light and horror," even as he demands of them nothing less than a rousing affirmation that Dachau and September 11 really were monstrous, as he does in *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*.

At the moment, Kearney's bridges are extending beyond philosophy and academe, or perhaps just to the existential limits of his identity as a philosopher. He has turned again to fiction, penning what he terms a "spiritual diary" novel about India, more than a decade after serving up two highly readable novels, *Sam's Fall* and *Walking at Sea Level*, which earned critical praise from sources such as the *Times Literary Supplement*, but are difficult to track down in the United States. He is also busy working with artists and other collaborators on what he describes as an inter-religious liturgy that will be performed internationally as a choreographed play, showcasing the wisdom of five faith traditions (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist), in what sounds, from the suddenly breathless way he explains it, like a spiritual cross-cultural *Riverdance*. It is reasonable to guess that these and other labors will further define Kearney as a philosopher of the sacred, although identity is an elastic notion when applied to someone who, as Kennelly says of him, "never accepts the weary finality of a definition." ■

William Bole is the coauthor, with Bob Abernethy, of *The Life of Meaning: Reflections on Faith, Doubt, and Repairing the World* (2007).