

Thomas Beller: Stages of arrival

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Author and associate professor of English Thomas Beller at home in his backyard.
(Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

A young adjunct professor teaching [creative writing](#) at Tulane, whom I had met for the first time just a week earlier, poked her head into my office the other day to say hello. She had a shoulder bag, a cup of coffee, a skateboard, and hanging from her necklace was a small jigsaw-like piece of wood carved into the shape of Louisiana. She wore gray suede shoes with green laces. In other words, a youth.

"I love how you don't have a real desk!" she said, surveying the book-lined cave in which I sat.

"The desk was too big," I said. "It took up too much space."

"Look at all these books!" she said.

LISTEN: [In "The Green Room" podcast, Beller discusses his experience with lead poisoning.](#)

"It's only half. The other half are at home," I said. "Invariably, wherever I am, the book I absolutely need is in the other place. I take books back and forth between my house, my office, the library. I never read any of them. I just ferry them around."

"So many books, I love it," she said. "You can really tell which people have been here a long time by their offices."

"Really?" I said. "How long do you think I have been here?"

"Ohh ... I dunno."

"I got here in 2008," I said.

"Yeah, I was going to say five or 10 years."

As though five years and 10 years were the same thing! Though maybe they are, from the point of view of someone who has been at Tulane six weeks. Eventually she shoved off. She had a class to teach.

I never used to go to my office when I was an assistant professor. For my first years at Tulane I avoided my office at all costs. Now I am an associate professor with tenure, and I like being in the office. It is a narrow cave of books at the end of which is a single window looking out onto an oak tree in the quad. ...

[To read the entire essay, click here.](#)

[*Thomas Beller*](#) is an associate professor of English at Tulane. He is the author of *Seduction Theory*, a collection of stories; *The Sleep-Over Artist*, a novel that was a New York Times *Notable Book* and Los Angeles Times *Best Book of 2000*; *How To Be a Man: Scenes From a Protracted Boyhood*, an essay collection; and [J.D. Salinger: The Escape Artist](#), a biography that won the New York City Book Award for Biography/Memoir. He is a frequent contributor to The New Yorker's Culture Desk,

The New York Times, *and* Travel + Leisure *magazine*.

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