Montage

Art, books, diverse creations

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Merritt Janson plays Emilia Lanier, the "dark lady" (perhaps) of the sonnets, to Gabriel Field's Shakespeare in Robert Brustein's *The English Channel*.

The Actor Explores

Theatrical students refine their craft near two Squares: Harvard and Red.

In Moscow there are 200 theaters, and the drama students from Cambridge who study there can see plays every night in the company of impassioned audiences. "The theaters there are *packed*," says one such student, actress Merritt Janson, who in June completed the singular program in theater arts offered by the Harvard-affiliated American Repertory Theatre (ART) and the venerable Moscow Art Theatre (MXAT) School.

During three months in Russia, she and 17 other young actors, four dramaturges, and one voice student watched three- to four-hour-long plays performed in Russian. They read *War and Peace* and played scenes from the novel in English, sometimes using Tolstoy's prose for dialogue. In one scene, Janson played Countess Rostova as she, with her daughter Natasha, confronts the news that Natasha's brother Petya has been killed in war. Two master teachers from the Moscow school, assisted by translators, coached the players, who found themselves immersed in an environment "totally out of your comfort zone," Janson says, adding, "That only heightens your sensitivity to the text."

The Institute for Advanced Theatre Training, as the joint program is known, was born in 1987 at the ART as a training ground for professional American theater. Eleven years later it began its exclusive collaboration with the MXAT School, which the celebrated Russian director Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko established in 1943. (He and Russian theatrical legend Konstantin Stanislavsky, author of *The Actor Prepares*, had in 1897 founded the Moscow Art Theatre itself, where three of Anton Chekhov's four major stage works had their world premieres.) The Institute's students—about 45 are enrolled at any one time, ranging from recent college graduates to well-established actors—study for five semesters (including the Moscow residency) in the course of two years. They work six days a week, morning, noon, and night, at all aspects of their craft. Graduates receive

Photograph by John Stratton McCrady

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both a master of fine arts degree from the MXAT and a certificate of achievement from the ART.

All Institute actors may audition for ART productions, and many are cast; Janson, one of the most accomplished of the group, won two such roles. The trainees' first assignment (given by former ART artistic director Robert Woodruff) was to write a 10-minute stage piece, a "one-man show," drawing on their personal lives. Janson performed a dramatic scene based on an experience from the *Wanderjahr* she took after graduating from Colorado College. "I traveled around the United States on trains, taking odd jobs in the places I stopped," she recalls. "On the way from Albuquerque to Chicago, our train struck a woman on the tracks, and she died." In her piece, Janson brought to life several characters based on train passengers, showing their contrasting reactions to the shocking news from the conductor.

In a solo piece of this kind, the performer is also writer, director, costume designer, and more. But an ensemble actor also draws upon a range of skills requiring an impressively varied training; in Moscow, for example, the students tackled acrobatics, ballet, and fencing along with the "Stanislavsky system." In Cambridge, where the program is based at the Loeb Drama Center on Brattle Street, they learned another acting theory, Practical Aesthetics, developed by playwright David Mamet and actor William H. Macy. "Many theater programs teach a particular method—for example, that of Stella Adler," explains the ART's executive director, Robert Orchard.

ANDREW BRILLIANT

In *Betty's Summer Vacation* by Christopher Durang '71, cast entirely with Institute students, Janson played Mrs. Siezmagraff.

Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

Editor's note: "If anything can go wrong, it will," officially identified as "Murphy's Law" in our copy of John Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations,* struck six months ago when a technical glitch short-circuited all e-mails addressed to this department. The error was only recently discovered. We apologize to all whose messages appeared to have disappeared into the ether.

Huston Paschal wants to know where Hermann Hesse wrote of how the time of year of one's birth affects when—seasonally speaking—one is most happy.

Andrew Schmookler seeks the source of "True insincerity is hard to find."

Peter Panken, struck by the assertion "Age is a thief" in Sarah Gruen's novel *Water for Elephants,* would like to learn of ancient formulations of this idea.

Allen Veaner hopes someone can point him to the source of the statement: "I make up a game and start to play; if I perceive I am losing, I change the rules."

Brent Ranalli asks if Immanuel Kant declared that even a lawbreaker finds aesthetic satisfaction in his own punishment.

Kristen Zacharias requests the author and original place of publication of an essay about a professor who teaches informal logical fallacies to a female student and falls in love with her, only to be rebuffed as she identifies all the fallacies he uses in trying to persuade her to marry him. One plea is "You must love me."

Dorothy Richardson requests a source for the poetical reference(s) in the following bit of dialogue from *A Trip to Niagara, or Travellers in America,* an 1828 play by William Dunlap: "A traveller's delight is the remains of cities and temples, the proofs of Time's resistless power—as the poet says,—Give me broken pillars and obliterated inscriptions, bricks from Babel, and mummies from Egypt."

Carol Pruitt is looking for a poem, from the 1920s or earlier, containing the line, "My cousin Clarence came to town with windows on his eyes."

Karen Walton inquires, "When a patient dies despite the fact that his laboratory tests and vital signs are normal, it is said that he died 'in Harvard balance.' What is the origin of the phrase?"

Elizabeth Atkins seeks the author and title of a story, read in the 1950s, about a string quartet whose members, when given access to a famous collector's library of scores, would rather play than eat.

"error for chance" (March-April). Fred J. Emery, former director of the Federal Register, amplifies the answer in our July-August issue: "It is true that I frequently used 'Regulation is the substitution of error for chance' in speeches in the 1970s. I think I always gave credit to its true author, former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. I believe I so notified Paul Dickson in the 1980s, but once in print.... I guess being given credit for this observation is not the worst thing that ever happened to me, although I usually softened it by preceding it with 'All too often....'"

"conduct our lives" (July-August). Fred Shapiro, editor of the *Yale Book of Quotations,* suggests the source is Kant's statement [often called his categorical imperative], "I ought never to conduct myself except so that I could also will that my maxim become a universal law," from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals,* section 1 (translation by Allen W. Wood).

"pluck...the counterpane" (July-August). Roger Netzer suggests James Thurber echoed Mistress Quickly's account of the death of Falstaff: "For after I saw him fumble with the sheets,...I knew there was but one way..." (*Henry V,* act 2, scene 3).

Send inquiries and answers to "Chapter and Verse," *Harvard Magazine*, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, or via e-mail to chapterandverse@harvardmag.com.

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Off the Shelf

Recent books with Harvard connections

I'll Drink to That: Beaujolais and the French Peasant Who Made It the World's Most Popular Wine, by Rudolph Chelminski '56 (Gotham Books, $27.50). "Everyone knows Beaujolais, or thinks he does," writes the author. After reading this saga of the wine and people of Beaujolais—in particular Georges Duboeuf—most readers will have learned much they *didn't* know—and been warmly entertained along the way.

Elvis Is Titanic: Classroom Tales from the Other Iraq, by Ian Klaus (Knopf, $24). Klaus spent a semester in 2005 at Salahaddin University in Arbil, teaching American history to Kurds who were more tuned in to Elvis and other pop-culture exports than to U.S. national values, as they and he tell in a captivating memoir. Klaus is now pursuing a Ph.D. in history at Harvard.

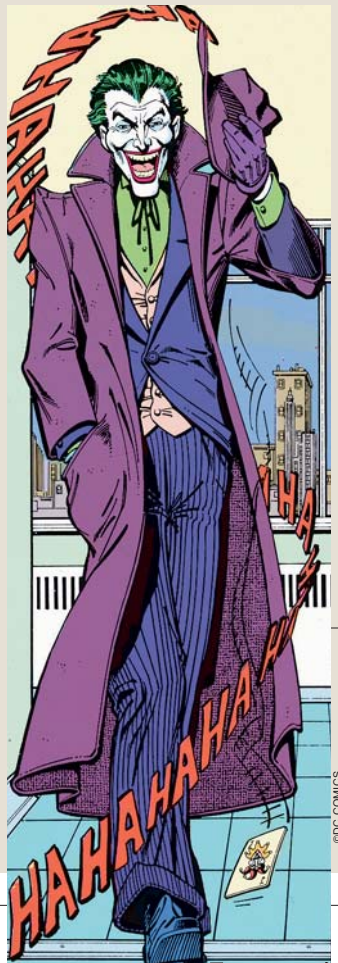
Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean, by Douglas Wolk '91 (Da Capo Press, $22.95). A critic evaluates comics of yesteryear and today in a serious and witty book for hardcore fans and curious newcomers.

Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History, by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Phillips professor of early American history and 300th Anniversary University Professor (Knopf, $24). Ulrich begins with three classic works in feminism, by Christine de Pizan, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Virginia Woolf, to explore how women make history either by doing the unexpected or recording and remembering it. She wrote the title of this book as a sentence in a 1976 scholarly article, but the words have escaped into popular culture and now appear on T-shirts and bumper stickers.

Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance—and Why They Fall, by Amy Chua '84, J.D. '87 (Doubleday, $27.95). Throughout history, the secret to global dominance has been tolerance of diversity. Yet, in virtually every instance, multiculturalism has tipped empires into decline. The Duff professor of law at Yale asks whether the United States has reached that point.

Are the Rich Necessary? Great Economic Arguments and How They Reflect Our Personal Values, by Hunter Lewis '69 (Axios Press, $20). Here's a highly readable book about economics and values. Posing such questions as "Are the rich compatible with democracy?" Lewis provides a punchy "no" argument, followed by a "yes" one. He is co-founder of the global investment firm Cambridge Associates.

Wagner Moments: A Celebration of Favorite Wagner Experiences, edited and annotated by J.K. Holman, A.M. '69 (Amadeus Press, $12.95, paper). Holman, chairman of the Wagner Society of Washington, D.C., takes testimony from 107 people, ranging from Marcel Proust to Willa Cather, about how the music of Wagner illuminated their lives. This is ideal bedtime reading for Wagnerians, especially those who like to take their "epiphanies and awakenings" lying down.



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The Joker. Writer Steve Englehart and artist Marshall Rogers brought to their late 1970s *Detective Comics* work, writes Douglas Wolk, "an Art Deco-inspired design sense and a loopy, decadent air."

"We try to give students multiple approaches. There's vocal and movement work. [ART actor and teacher] Jeremy [Geidt] does mask work. It takes six to eight months for the students to realize the value in all of this, and put it together for themselves."

The goal is to develop versatile theatrical performers. Janson says the training "causes you to really seek out which parts of these techniques resonate with you. Acting is about availability," she explains: "Using everything from the top of your head to the bottoms of your feet. You're not just acting from the shoulders up. It's the whole body."

> "Acting is about availability. Using everything from the top of your head to the bottoms of your feet. It's the whole body."

For example, she exercised her musical skill last winter in an ART production by playing blues piano onstage for her role as Junia, the ingénue in Jean Racine's rarely performed 1669 play *Britannicus,* set in the Rome of Nero but played in modern dress. Previously, she had deployed her athleticism as the "girl in the bear suit" in *The Onion Cellar,* a cabaret-style piece mounted by the ART at the Zero Arrow Street Theatre. Moving from that role to Junia, in which Janson was scantily costumed, was, she quips, "going from bear to bare."

Britannicus ran for more than two dozen performances, but Janson explains that from the actor's standpoint, "Every night, you're at the beginning of the story—the story hasn't been told yet. You have to allow the audience to come *with* you, through the play. If it's all handed over to them, if the performers make it too easy for themselves, then it will also be too easy for the audience. It's not the job of the actor to show emotion, or show the story—you want to *evoke* emotion from the audience, to enable the audience to *experience* the story."

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MICHAEL LUTCH

Janson as Junia in Jean Racine's *Britannicus,* with Kevin O'Donnell in the title role.

Janson has been connecting with audiences for a long time. She took dance and music lessons from a tender age, and as a six-year-old in Yardley, Pennsylvania, went with her parents to see a neighbor perform in a play, which prompted her to stand up and declare, "That's what I want to do!" Soon, acting classes joined studies that already included violin, piano, and gymnastics. At Princeton Day School in Princeton, New Jersey, she was active in theater and also played lacrosse, field hockey, and ice hockey.

Colorado College's strong English department attracted her; Janson, "a huge reader," also writes fiction and plays. She had her vagabond year, and another year at the Arcola Theater in London, before returning to the States to work for several years with theatrical companies in New York and Philadelphia. She applied to the Institute because, she says simply, "It was time. This was the program I wanted, with outstanding mentors and conservatory-type training. And I wanted to be directly connected with a professional theater."

After graduating from the Institute in June, she took the starring role of Chevalier in *The Deception* by Pierre Marivaux, presented last summer by the prestigious Theatre de la Jeune Lune at the La Jolla Playhouse in San Diego. Although she is now based in New York City, she will re-create the role this fall on the Theatre's home stage in Minneapolis. She plans to "keep a balance," she says, grinning, "between acting, writing, guitar, piano, and skateboarding." A thoughtful pause. "The best thing," she says, "is to keep training."

—CRAIG LAMBERT

A Poet's Warning

In a witty 1946 poem, W.H. Auden contrasted the way of "experts" with the Hermetic path of the trickster.

by ADAM KIRSCH

In June 1946, Harvard celebrated its long-awaited Victory Commencement. For the first time since the end of the Second World War, alumni and graduates gathered in Harvard Yard—so many of them that the exercises were moved to Tercentenary Theatre. The ceremony was inevitably a time for the University to take stock of all the changes the war had caused, and the even more profound changes that peace was about to bring.

Twenty-six thousand Harvard alumni had served in uniform during the war, and 649 of them had perished. The University itself had been integrated into the war effort at the highest level: President James Bryant Conant had been one of those consulted when President Truman decided to drop the atomic bomb on Japan. William Langer, a professor of history, had recruited many faculty members into the newly formed Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the CIA. Now that the Cold War was under way, the partnership between the University and the federal government was destined to grow even closer.

As if to symbolize that intimacy, the 1946 Commencement saw honorary degrees awarded to the chiefs of the U.S. Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force. More questionable was the choice of that year's Phi Beta Kappa orator: Byron Price, who had served as director of the federal Office of Censorship, in charge of monitoring press coverage of the war. Price used the occasion to deliver a rather ominous exhortation to "the man of letters," whom he accused, 10 months after the war ended, of still not doing enough for national morale. "How often," he asked, "shall the seeker find between these myriad covers an ounce of literary beauty, or a thimbleful of spiritual elevation? We are served a fare of dissoluteness and destruction. We are asked to sneer at man and regard him as no better than the worm. We are invited to improve our minds by studying the endless sagas of criminals and harlots, moving in sordid surroundings, and worshiping only the flesh."

It was against this backdrop of war and peace, and a university caught between them, that W.H. Auden, that year's Phi Beta Kappa poet, got up to deliver his contribution to the festivities. If Auden was listening when Price issued his commissar-like advice to writers, he would have been revolted, but not surprised. In fact, his poem—"Under Which Lyre," impishly subtitled "A Reactionary Tract for the Times"—was designed as a counterblast to Price's brand of official uplift. In 174 witty, neatly rhymed lines, Auden set out his prescient vision of the challenges facing postwar America in general, and the postwar university in particular. Occasional poems usually fade pretty quickly, but even in 2007, the year of Auden's centenary, "Under Which Lyre" remains one of his most charming and perceptive works.

Auden had officially become an American citizen just a few weeks before Commencement. He had been living in the United States since 1939, when he left his native England shortly before the out-

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