

Dr. Valerie Lynn Schrader

Professor Tenure-Line

Communication Arts and Sciences

Title of your research project.

“Another National Anthem:” Public Memory, Burkean Identification, and the Musical Assassins

Description of research. Please provide a few sentences that explain the question and the methods employed in this research project.

In this article Valerie Lynn Schrader examines the musical Assassins through the rhetorical lenses of public memory and Kenneth Burke's theory of identification. Offering a close textual analysis of the musical's script and cast recording, she argues that Assassins, along with its audiences, serves to co-create a public memory of the men and women who attempted to assassinate Presidents of the United States of America. Her article contends that Assassins creates a chilling consubstantiality between the characters in the musical and theatregoers through Burkean identification, which may cause cognitive dissonance for many audience members. Through identifying key themes in the musical, she argues that these both connect with the assassins' motives and are common human experiences, serving not only to create public memory of the stories, but also to humanize the assassins and create a bond between audience and characters – while the song "Something Just Broke" undermines this connection and encourages audience members to identify with the mourning American public.

Did this project include Penn State students as researchers?

No

If yes to the above question, please state where it was published.

New Theatre Quarterly

What problem do you address with your research?

It looks at how identification is created between audiences, the presidential assassins depicted in the musical, and general American public (as depicted in the musical).