

BE SURE TO BREAK A LEG: THEATRICAL MYTH,  
RITUAL, AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN TODAY'S  
THEATRE - A PERFORMANCE THESIS

by

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## ABSTRACT

Theatre is an art form with a rich history of myth and ritual. This study takes a look at that history, as well as the current state of this art with regard to this history. A survey and in-person interviews were conducted to determine current theatrical participants knowledge of and experience with specific myths and rituals of the theatre, as well as their personal feelings about these things. The performance itself took place on November 21, 2015, in the Jerry Williams Acting Studio at West Texas A&M University. This performance thesis examined four specific myths and rituals of the theatre: the magic circle, the phrase, “break a leg,” the play *Macbeth*, and the ghost light. Origins of each were explored as well as feelings of some of today’s performers and directors with regard to them.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Theatre is an art form that holds a rich history of myth and ritual. As defined by Clyde Kluckhohn (1942), “Ritual is an obsessive repetitive activity – often a symbolic dramatization of the fundamental “needs” of the society” (p. 78) and “mythology is the rationalization of these same needs, whether they are all expressed in overt ceremonial or not” (p. 78). Kluckhohn (1942) also states, “myths are expective, repetitive dramatizations” (p. 64). For those involved in theatrical pursuits, myths and performance rituals tend to be as common and expected as there being an audience in attendance on opening night.

As a person with a strong performance background, I am no stranger to these myths and rituals. In my experience, there is magic circle, a ritual which brings together cast and crew before performances for a group recitation in chorus saying something along the lines of, “there is magic in the theatre, the theatre is magic, and truly blessed are those who are able to share their talents with others;” there is also the “break a leg” saying rather than to wish good luck, and also the theory of the ghost light, which suggests that a theatre should never be darkened completely, lest ghosts should take that opportunity to wreak havoc on the theatre, as well as many more. What exactly made

these rituals so important? How did theatre myths become commonplace, such as the very utterance of the word “Macbeth” being thought to bring tragic luck to any theatre company involved in the mention? Where did all of these myths and rituals begin, which of them are still in practice today, and what are contemporary reactions to it all?

Before these questions can be addressed, one must look at the history of theatre itself. Where did theatre begin? What brought about the act of play and performance? Understanding the beginnings of this art form and what it entails aids in the understanding of its rich history of myth and ritual.

### **Rationale**

Historically, theatrical myths have been widely accepted within the theatrical community, as well as the rituals associated with them (Dundes, 1994). Kluckhohn (1942) states, “myths and rituals jointly provide systematic protection against supernatural dangers, the threats of ill-health and of the physical environment, anti-social tension, and the pressures of a more powerful society” (p.77). Relatively little research has been done in recent years to discover what myths and rituals remain in place in the theatre world and how current theatre participants feel about them. This research could potentially benefit today’s performers and directors by first explaining where these myths and rituals began, then suggesting which remain important to the theatre community and how different members of the theatre world feel about it all. As evidenced by the work of Kluckhohn (1942), “myth and ritual satisfy a group of identical or closely related needs of individuals” (p. 65). Arming those in the theatrical world with this historical knowledge as well as contemporary reactions to it all could save those who are new to the theatre feelings of embarrassment and discomfort when first encountering these

traditions. In addition to this, the myths and rituals of the theatre are sometimes overlooked in the typical theatre history course, and these aspects of the theatre can be enjoyable as well as beneficial to learn about.

The purpose of performing this thesis is to illustrate through means of performance itself how ritual is inherent in the process. Sainer (1975) explains that ritual and ceremony tend to include formal and repetitive action, “The formality is one of attitude: the performer has a sense or awareness of occasion, he is being called on to allow the manifestation of an act, a gesture which is set off from those acts which are taken for granted” (pp. 42-43). While this touches on the aspect of ritual being a part of the act of performance, Sainer (1975) further illustrates the importance of performance itself:

One of the pervasive beliefs, then, among the theatre ensembles in America, is not only that the rite, the ritual, the ceremony changes the spectator, awakening him to certain perceptions and insights, but also that the performer has the potential for transcending his present state and attaining greater purity. The performer wants to make a change and be changed. The ritual is his tool for allowing the community of performer-spectator, ensemble-audience to succumb to something larger and nobler than itself. (p.52)

Rozik (2014), describing someone acting as a character, says, “they engage in imprinting human images on their own bodies, which by deflection of reference evoke images of characters in the presence of audiences” (p. 520). To a performer, this statement implies the necessity of interaction between performer and audience; the performance is being given to the audience, the audience receives it and all that it entails.

Sharing stories of those who have first-hand experience with practicing these rituals and witnessing the unfolding of these myths in such powerful ways would be best exhibited through performance, rather than through written words. Mark Rafael (2008) explains, “even as a reader is involved and compelled by a story he is reading, he is aware of the book in his lap” (p. 25). Performance takes that book from the lap of the reader and allows them to view what words they might have read performed with emotion and feeling. It is one thing to write down what a person has experienced, leaving the words lying on the page, subject to the interpretation of the reader, but it is another thing entirely to repeat people’s words as they might have said them. Marinetti (2013) explains, “theatre studies has long been revising its notion of performance away from its semiotic roots (which saw it as a text to be read according to a multitude of sign systems) to an all-encompassing phenomenon that characterizes all forms of cultural representation” (p. 310). It is my hope that through this act of performance, the audience feels the power of these rituals and understands the contributions they may offer to today’s performances.

This study showcases the history of the theatre, as well as what a theatrical production entails both technically and performance-wise. In addition to this, my aim is to identify where these well-known myths and rituals began. This information gives an insight into the performer and the act of the play, which most any supporter of the arts would find interesting, but performers and directors would surely find useful.

### **Literature Review**

As stated by Langley (1990), “All theatre, from ancient times to the present, has been rooted in amateur activity that reflects people’s urge to imitate and their delight in

watching others engage in the activity” (p.241). According to Brockett and Hildy (2008), anthropologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believe theatre to have originated from myth and ritual; this theory of the beginning of theatre involves the earliest days of societal development. To summarize, Brockett and Hildy (2008) explain that in the formation of a society, members become aware of forces that seem to control the ability to acquire food and stay well and safe; without knowledge or understanding of natural causes, myths develop to explain what may cause this natural cycle of positive and negative occurrences. These myths eventually become stories acted out by the eldest members of this society to educate the younger generations on proper behavior within their group. To enhance the storytelling, anthropologists believe that those sharing these myths would employ the use of costumes, masks, and props (Brockett & Hildy, 2008).

Supporting this theory of the origin of theatre, Kahan (1985) describes the first actor as, “very likely a hunter in prehistoric times who described to his fellow tribesmen his adventure of that day” (p. 27). Kahan (1985) goes on to surmise that this actor likely used gesture, exaggeration, impersonation, and quite possibly parts of the animal from the hunt to aid in his storytelling. Eventually, according to contemporary evidence, costumes, masks, music, and other enhancements were used to aid in the storytelling process (Brockett & Hildy, 2008; Kahan, 1985). This would indicate that all aspects of theatre, even those that are technical, were formed together and in the earliest days of our civilization.

No discussion of theatrical history would be complete without mention of Ancient Greece. It is widely believed that the early Aegean civilizations indirectly influenced most of Greek drama due to their gods, heroes, and history being the “foundation for

Western literature” (Brockett & Hildy, 2008, p. 10). Thespis is said to have invented tragedy, which is considered the first form of drama, in 534 B.C.E.; Thespis is credited with using set (a cart), costume (masks), and dialogue (assumed to have been exchanged with a chorus leader), all of which are reasons he is widely accepted as the first actor (Brockett & Hildy, 2008). Only three names of dramatists from the fifth century B.C.E. aside from Thespis are known: Choerilus, who was known for work in costumes and masks, Pratinas, who is credited with creating satyr plays (farce), and Phrynichus, who is said to have introduced female characters into the world of drama (Brockett & Hildy, 2008). Due to the lack of surviving texts from this period in time, our only basis for knowledge of Greek tragedy is from works by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (Brockett & Hildy, 2008).

A major shift toward the drama known today happened in the fifth century B.C.E. when the actor Aeschylus added a second actor to the practice of drama, creating the possibility of face-to-face interaction and conflict on the stage (Brockett & Hildy, 2008). Comedy was “the last major dramatic form to receive official recognition in Athens,” which occurred in 487-486 B.C.E.; Aristotle believed comedy was born out of improvisations of leaders of phallic songs, particularly crediting Epicharmus with the move to comic form (Brockett & Hildy, 2008, p. 15). Dramatic festivals were held to honor the Greek gods, and in particular, Dionysus, who is considered to be the god of fertility, wine, and revelry; it was at these festivals that drama competitions were born (Brockett & Hildy, 2008). Overall, Ancient Greece is credited with the introduction of play, actor, incorporating music and dance into drama, the use of costumes and masks, the construction of stages and staging, and dramatic competition, as well as Aristotle’s



characterization of drama as consisting of six parts: plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle (Brockett & Hildy, 2008).

These theories of the beginning of theatrical practices give insight not only into the performance aspect, but the technical aspect as well. No theatrical production would be complete without the scenery, lights, sound, special effects, and costuming, all of which are key components of the technical side of theatre (Ionazzi, 1992). These aspects, too, have much to do with the ritual aspect of theatre. According to Koschmann and McDonald (2015), the majority of research done regarding rituals emphasizes individual agency and the importance of individuals who use rituals to accomplish any number of cultural purposes; they also note the key component of intentionality as a part of agency. Recognizing this individual agency, this intentionality to reach a common goal, it is easier to accept the idea of theatre groups as their own culture.

Along those lines, Mikhail Bakhtin's work on Carnival and the Carnavalesque comes to mind when analyzing the culture of a theatre group. Bakhtin (1998) states that, "Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act" (p. 250). Bakhtin (1998) recognizes elements of carnival as being a part of the theatre world and further explains carnival as the suspension of hierarchical categories and human responses related to such categories. In carnival, "all distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people" (Bakhtin, 1998, p. 251).

Technical theatre involves many aspects of theatrical productions; from the scene designer to the costumer, the lighting designer to the sound designer, and every job in

between – the fact is, each relies on the other to create a seamless production (Brockett, 1969). Each designer works with a crew to aid them in the execution of his or her design; in turn, these designers must regularly discuss plans with one another to ensure a harmony of design, which must all be in line with the original vision of the artistic director (Brockett, 1969). This further solidifies the need for agency, intentionality, and community within the theatrical world.

As to the beginnings of the myths and superstitions of the theatre, Richard Huggett (1975) explains:

The theatre is an enclosed, isolated world with its own rules and laws, its own traditions and disciplines; and however accurately it may appear to mirror real life it is, in fact, obstinately and justly cut off from it. The sailor, soldier, airman, coal miner, steeplejack, fisherman, all these people lead dangerous lives and are naturally superstitious, but it is not our bodies which we actors endanger, but our hearts and souls; it is not bullets nor storms nor bombs nor cave-ins we fear, but the most deadly and unpredictable and relentless of all natural forces—public opinion and fashion. It is precisely in this sort of artistic and emotional hothouse that superstitions take root and flourish. (p. 16)

Recognizing that, it is easier to understand the possible origins of theatrical superstitions, and why certain rituals and myths may have developed. Huggett (1975) continues to explain different superstitions within the theatre, including the following: unlucky colors (yellow and green), unlucky numbers (specifically, 13), and unlucky properties (such as real food, real money, real jewelry, real antiques, and more). Explaining the superstitions surrounding good-luck wishes, Huggett (1975) explains,

The ritual of good-luck wishes on first nights is fraught with superstitious distaste and it is getting worse within our lifetime. To wish good luck to another person, so they say, is to part with it yourself. It also means that you are inviting the hostile and rather contemptuous intervention of the gods if you draw attention to your desperate need for fortune. (p. 64)

Brownell and Miner (2011) explain that the saying “break a leg” likely comes from different takes on wishing a person the need to bow a considerable amount because of the great reception of his or her performance.

With regard to the theory of the ghost light, most any reference will describe a ghost light merely as a light left on the stage when the theatre is locked up for the night (Brownell & Miner, 2011; Ionazzi, 1992), though Brownell and Miner (2011) also note that “belief in ghosts is widespread in the acting community” (p. 34). The attachment of actual “ghosts” to the ghost light is one of those theories that seem to fall under the mystery of theatre lore.

Macbeth’s cursed history is noted as “one superstition so old, so all-consuming, so intimidating, that just about everybody in the theatre believes it” (Huggett, 1975, p. 153). Brownell and Miner (2011) explain the curse of Macbeth in the following way:

Initially, producing the play itself was not said to invoke bad luck. In fact, it’s one of the Bard’s most popular plays. But quoting lines, character names, or the title during production of *other* plays is considered very bad luck and invites actual physical harm (even death) to the offender. One of the more rational explanations for this is that repertory companies would often have *Macbeth* as a standby production if a new show flopped. So any mention of *Macbeth* during a show was

bound to provoke suspicion among the cast that things were not going well at the box office. (p. 43).

Huggett (1975) describes *Macbeth* itself as “the murkiest, gloomiest, and most despairing of all the classical tragedies” also stating, “it is a play entirely obsessed and pulsating with wickedness, and it generates such a powerful aura of evil that even to read it can make a sensitive person tremble” (p. 154). The real-life examples of what are believed to be *Macbeth*-related tragedies are legion; enough for it to be said that a person could write an entire book on the *Macbeth* curse alone (Brownell & Miner, 2011). One of the most well known incidents is referred to as “The Oldham Tragedy” (Huggett, 1975). The Oldham Repertory Company decided to stage *Macbeth* in 1947, and just two nights after its opening, Harold Norman, the actor playing *Macbeth*, was actually stabbed during the staged swordfight between *Macbeth* and *Macduff*; he was rushed to the hospital and seemed to be responding well to surgery, but exactly one month after the stabbing, Norman died from general peritonitis (Huggett, 1975). Norman was later said to have been quoting *Macbeth* against the advice of his colleagues six weeks prior to his tragic death (Huggett, 1975).

As to historical origins of these superstitions, Huggett (1975), and other scholars who have covered the topic, remain aloof. It is generally accepted that, as Huggett puts it, “their origins are lost in the mists of theatrical history” (p. 41). According to Huggett (1975), some theatrical myths seem to have their origins based on actual events, such as those regarding the use of real antiques or real jewelry as properties and the likelihood of their being stolen or appearing dull to the audience. Another example of myths developing from actual events is the use of real food, which had the tendency to cause

sickness; other examples of myths, though, still remain a mystery (Huggett, 1975; Brownell & Miner, 2011).

Understanding where theatrical myth and ritual began and what some of the more well-known and practiced superstitions of the theatre are, as well as how those currently involved in theatrical pursuits feel about it all, provides a solid foundation of understanding for the beginning theatre participant. This study seeks to aid in providing that foundation by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: What are myths and rituals currently in practice in theatre communities?

RQ2: How do performers and directors perceive these myths and rituals?

### **Theoretical Approach**

When looking at the history of theatrical ritual and folklore, the natural theoretical perspective to work with seems to be Clyde Kluckhohn's theory of myth and ritual (1942). Kluckhohn (1942) postulates that myth and ritual go hand-in-hand, they belong together; this theory also says "the general point is that in both sacred and secular spheres myths give some fixity to the ideal patterns of cultures where this is not attained by the printed word. The existence of rituals has a similar effect" (p. 61). Kluckhohn (1942) also recognizes that ritual participation does not require knowledge of the myth it is tied to, though he mentions some level of discrimination from those who do know the myth being aimed toward those ignorant of the origin of the ritual. That is where this information would be beneficial to those new to the theatre or wishing to have a better understanding of the culture of a theatre.

Joseph Campbell was a preeminent scholar, author, and professor, primarily with regard to the topic of mythology (Campbell & Moyers, 1991). In *The Power of Myth*, a

book involving Joseph Campbell being interviewed by prominent journalist Bill Moyers (1988) Campbell states, “The ancient myths were designed to harmonize the mind and the body” (p. 87). Campbell further illustrates this point by saying, “the myths and rites were means of putting the mind in accord with the body and the way of life in accord with the way that nature dictates” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988, p. 87). Kluckhohn (1942) explains that myths and rituals are vital in the transmission of cultures as well as deterrents of culture change; further explaining, he states that myths are charming because they are familiar, myths and rituals promote community within a culture, and that “myth and ritual satisfy a group of identical or closely related needs of individuals” (p. 65). With regard to theatrical myths and rituals in particular, Kluckhohn’s position that “myths and rituals are reinforced because they reduce the anticipation of disaster” (1942, p. 69) seems appropriate. All of this information further illustrates the points that a theatre group is a culture in and of itself, and one that holds myth and ritual closely as a part of its culture.

This theory directly relates to the idea of theatrical rituals still in practice today stemming from the theatrical myths that have stood the test of time. My use of this theory is through the lens of performance ethnography. Victor and Edie Turner (2007) explain that performance ethnography is about showing not only the thoughts of a culture, which can be done through written word, but also the feelings and will of that culture, which are more easily revealed through performance, where emotion and passion might be displayed. Chrysochou (2014) further drives this point through writing, “the very question of seeing is not only intimately linked, in Kantian terms, to representation and perception but is also a bodily experience that is inscribed on the flesh” (p. 643). Seeing,

therefore, is a much more effective means of gaining understanding of other cultures and their practices.

### **Methodology**

Due to the nature of this study, qualitative methodology was used. As noted by Lindlof and Taylor (2011), the primary reasons for conducting a qualitative study are as follows: understanding a person's experience and perspective through his or her stories, accounts, and explanations; discovering the language forms used by certain persons; gathering information about things that cannot be observed as effectively by other means; learning about the past; fact-checking accounts of other sources; obtaining efficient data collection. The sole purpose of the interview process in this study was to understand the feelings of those in the theatre culture regarding the rituals, myths, and superstitions within the confines of that group. The most obvious means of gathering that information was through in-depth interviewing of participants, as the interviewing process allows for those participating to go beyond the questions I may ask and offer their own input, perceptions, commentary, and such on the topics we naturally came across during the course of our conversations.

Criterion sampling was used to find participants for this study. The specific criteria each participant needed to meet included the following: have been involved in theatrical productions in any capacity, be that technicians, performers, directors, or educators at the educational or community theatre level, have some understanding of or experience with myths and rituals of the theatre, and be over the age of eighteen. Snowball sampling was also used in a limited capacity, as two participants contacted and encouraged four other participants to be a part of this study. Participation was based on

voluntary response to be a part of this interview process. Fifteen people, aged 18 or older, with varied ages, demographics, theatrical participation levels, and geographic locations, make up the participants of this study. The interview process continued until it seemed that the interviews had reached redundancy. In-person interviews were recorded using an iPod with a recording mechanism, and were then transcribed and filed in a secure location. Interviews conducted online were printed off and filed in a secure location.

In-depth interviews were used to assess knowledge of and feelings toward rituals and myths associated with theatre in contemporary society. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), interview guides offer a flexible and informal approach to the interview process, leaving the interviewer the freedom to drop or add questions and improvise based on responses. For this reason, I chose to use an interview guide during my in-depth interviewing process. Participants were encouraged to elaborate in their responses and to add whatever they thought might benefit the study in any way. A copy of the interview guide can be found in Appendix A.



## **Chapter Summary**

The previous discussion has explored the origins of theatre, some of the myths and rituals associated with the theatre, as well as possible origins for those myths and rituals. In addition to this, the myths and rituals theory, performance ethnography, and qualitative research methods were discussed with regard to their use in this study.

## CHAPTER II

### INTERVIEWS AND DATA ANALYSIS

As discussed in the previous chapter, qualitative methodology was used to obtain data with regard to theatre participant's perception of myths and rituals in the theatre. Prior to the interview process, I conducted a pilot study through the use of an online survey using the online tool Survey Monkey. One hundred respondents answered the following questions regarding theatrical rituals and superstitions: what pre-performance rituals, if any, do you or your students engage in; what superstitions, if any, do you or your students recognize; what is your reaction to the phrase, "break a leg"; what is your reaction to the mention of Macbeth within the theatre; participants were also asked to provide any additional information they might have with regard to rituals and superstitions within the theatre as well as their geographic location and most frequent role in the theatre. Responses primarily came from people living in the state of Texas, though responses were received from places as far away as Los Angeles, California to New York, New York and many states in between including Missouri, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Minnesota, and Oklahoma.

#### *Survey Findings*

The findings of this survey indicated the following: contemporary theatre groups overwhelmingly practice some form of magic circle (84% of responses listed "magic

circle” or “circling up” as pre-show rituals), recognize “break a leg” as the only way to wish a good show (88% of responses cited the sharing of the phrase “break a leg” as an important theatre ritual to uphold), view the mention of Macbeth in the theatre a punishable offense (71% of responses held strong views against the mention of this play), and cite magic circle, break a leg, Macbeth, whistling in the theatre, and the ghost light as the most recognized rituals and superstitions of the theatre.

The details of magic circle were as varied as a theatre’s season of shows, though the idea seemed to be the same for all – gather the cast and crew together just before the curtain goes up and have everyone join hands and focus on the task at hand. As for “break a leg,” it seemed almost universally accepted, though there were a few survey participants that expressed displeasure over this particular ritual. One in particular wrote, “I don’t say it... I’ve seen the legs break!”

The myth of Macbeth seems to be met with either a reverent fear or an unabashed disgust. Responses to the question of how one might react to hearing the word Macbeth in the theatre ranged from “I roll my eyes when the inevitable ‘that’s bad luck’ is uttered by a student” to “Aaaaaaa!!!! Go outside immediately. Appease theatre gods with complicated ritual.” Many, in fact, detailed a complicated ritual in response to this question. Said ritual typically entails leaving the theatre, spinning around a time or three, spitting, and occasionally reciting lines from another of Shakespeare’s plays, often showing a preference for a recitation from the character “Puck” of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Overall, the results of this survey indicate that, at least at the community theatre and educational theatre levels, the common myths and rituals of the theatre are recognized, carried out, and mostly respected by those participating in this art form.

### *Interviews*

Armed with this information and after receiving approval from the University's Institutional Review Board, I began scheduling one-on-one in-depth interviews with personal friends and acquaintances I know to be currently involved in theatrical pursuits. Over the course of four weeks, I conducted nine in-person interviews and six electronic interviews for a total of fifteen. Five other people were contacted and agreed to participate via an e-mailed list of questions, but none of those participants returned their responses. The fifteen interviews led to eventual redundancy in most responses, so the remaining five interviews were deemed unnecessary. Interviews done in person were conducted at a mutually agreed upon location, usually a local coffee shop or the participant's office, and they were recorded using a recorder application on an iPhone. These interviews were later transcribed and filed in a secure location. The six online interviews were printed off and filed in a secure location as well.

### *Participants*

All fifteen participants are currently or have recently been involved in theatrical productions, and fourteen of the fifteen participants are Texas residents, while one is a resident of the State of Oklahoma. Of the fifteen participants, six are male and nine are female. Nine of the participants are primarily performers on stage, while six are primarily directors/educators, though those six also spend time on the stage as performers, as well as backstage as technicians, designers, and volunteers at both educational theatre and community theatres. The participants range in age from early 20s to late-middle age. All participants shared one clear quality: an eagerness and openness to discuss any topic related to the theatre.

### *Identifying Themes*

Each participant cited specific emotional connections to the ritual of magic circle. Every interview involved a bit of discussion on this topic. Participants were asked what ritual of the theatre, if any, they most looked forward to, and overwhelmingly they answered magic circle. One participant stated, “I love ‘magic circle.’ It brings everyone together before a performance in focus and makes me feel like I’m part of a family.” When asked if participating in a theatre where myths and rituals of the theatre were ignored, one participant said, “When I did *Footloose* in Austin, TX, the cast would gather before the show to warm up and get any notes, but there was no unifying circle or ritual performed. It bothered me. The show always seemed to be missing something. Magic, I guess.” Another participant said, “There’s just something so lovely about having your whole team together, amped up for a great show, looking each other in the eyes, holding hands and reciting those magical words. It’s by far one of my favorite things during a show.” The overarching theme in each interview seemed to be that theatre participants feel as though magic circle brings a closeness, camaraderie, and sense of team to the group before a performance is undertaken. According to my participants, when this ritual has been forgotten, its absence has been felt and that impacted performance quality.

All participants recognized the ghost light, the dangers of saying or quoting *Macbeth* in the theatre, as well as the practice of saying “break a leg” as important rituals or myths to understand in the theatre. Most people are quick to announce that they understand the logical reasons behind many of the rituals and myths, such as the ghost light being lit to avoid accidents or not whistling in the theatre because it used to signal cues and you could end up calling down a flat at an inopportune time and the like, but at

the same time, there is a hesitancy among most involved in theatrical pursuits with regard to going against these rituals. The overarching theme of these interviews tended to be these myths may or may not be true, but why tempt fate? Nearly all participants felt the myth and ritual aspects of the theatre key parts of the culture and necessary to maintain the beauty of this art form.

As a person who still considers herself a member of the theatre community, I would say for myself that magic circle is an experience that moves me, an experience that prepares me to go from being in my own head, to being in my character's, and an experience that furthers my love, respect, and level of comfort with those I am sharing my circle with. I was part of a theatre company once that did not have a magic circle ritual and I certainly feel that it affected the work we did. The company was not as cohesive as it might have been had we participated in a magic circle together and we went from running around backstage, getting in hair/makeup/costume, and talking as ourselves, right into "places." This, in my opinion, makes the act of getting into character more challenging than when the time is taken to slow things down, reflect on the task ahead, and focus your energy on moving forward as a team as is the case when magic circle is done.

As to the ritual of wishing everyone to break a leg, I am a firm believer in following established traditions and can honestly say that I have never chosen to go against it. In fact, when I first began seriously pursuing theatre at the undergraduate level, telling others not to wish me good luck but to break a leg actually gave me a sense of pride. I enjoyed the inclusiveness of the act, which really may be why all of these myths and rituals are dear to me, and to many of us in the theatre. Theatre is a culture that so

easily can become one's home. The sense of camaraderie and community that comes from putting all that you have into a work of art with others is really an unmatched type of bond that I have yet to find elsewhere.

For my own personal views with regard to the superstitions of the ghost light, mentioning or quoting from Macbeth, or any of the others, really, I would have to say that I am of the crowd that believes these myths should be respected, whether they are grounded in logical reasoning or not, and that one should not tamper with the magic of the theatre in such a way as to disregard these things which are held in high regard by some. Part of sharing art with others is showing mutual respect, and part of that respect is an openness to and understanding of differing views. I do not know about there being ghosts in theatres, but I would rather not be in a theatre by myself and I am comforted by the ghost light's presence. I am not certain anything would actually happen as a result of Macbeth being said or quoted from in the theatre, but I would rather not test it out on myself. Fortunately for me, I am unable to whistle decently, so the whistling superstition has never really been an issue for me. These are my feelings on these topics, but I know many people who feel strongly about ghosts existing and being present in theatres and Macbeth quoting to be a dangerous game. I would never want to hinder someone's ability to give their best performance or make them feel like their feelings were invalid. Again we return to the theme of why tempt fate? It seems that the theatre has a large number of myths, rituals, and superstitions, and that most of those, at least as reflected in my participant base, are recognized and respected by theatre participants in today's theatre.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has looked at the methods of data collection used in this study, the respondent's involved, and the information provided by those involved in the data collection process. Further, my own positions on those topics covered in the interview process were discussed.



## CHAPTER III

### PRODUCTION CONCEPT

This thesis project was born out of love for theatre, curiosity about the myths and rituals surrounding the art, and my own interest in the practice of these myths and rituals in contemporary theatre. With this in mind, I decided on a minimalist production concept for this performance. The idea of minimalism is one that I wished to convey through each aspect of the performance. Keeping the set design, properties, and stage blocking minimal helps to maintain a focus on text, which is at the heart of myths and rituals.

#### *Set Design and Properties*

In following this concept, the set design is simple: down center stage there is a ghost light. Up center stage, behind it, stand two black set cubes stacked on top of one another with a mannequin leg propped up against them symbolizing the phrase, “break a leg” (Figure 2). Stage left has a black set cube with a red lantern on top of it to symbolize the magic circle (Figure 1). Stage right has a black set cube with both a copy of the Oxford version of the Macbeth script, my own personal copy of the script, on a small easel as well as a golden crown borrowed from the WTAMU theatre department, on top of it to symbolize the play, Macbeth (Figure 3). The cubes are placed in such a way that the cubes form a semi-circle at the back of the space. This is the entire set. The ghost light is center stage so that in all of the performance, the audience can understand the

“spirit” or “spirits” of the theatre are at the center of this performance. The audience seating consists of rows of chairs facing the stage space.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

### *Use of Color*

In keeping with the minimalist theme and the idea of maintaining focus on the text, everything is black and white, from the set to my costume, as well as the props, with

the only exception being the red lantern symbolizing the magic circle. This aids in the projection of simplicity, minimalism, and also seems to fit in with themes of ritual and superstition.

### *Stage blocking*

The performance begins with the ghost light on, directing all audience attention toward the light itself. At 11:00 am, from behind the ghost light, I say, “The great Bard himself, William Shakespeare, wrote, ‘All the World’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.’ Today I will share some of the stories of those players with regard to their time on the stage.” At this point, I move to the stage left cube to begin my discussion on the magic circle. While covering magic circle, I will touch the lantern to discuss its symbolism. From there I will move to up center stage to discuss the phrase “break a leg.” After this discussion I will move on to the stage right cube to discuss *Macbeth*. I then walk back to the ghost light to discuss a bit of that history and share some of the ghost stories my participants shared with me. I will end the performance back behind the ghost light where I will say, “Again taking from Shakespeare, I recognize that parting is such sweet sorrow, but I thank you all for joining me on this journey through the world of theatre, and I wish you all good fortune, and great magic in your playing.”

### *Advertisement*

Once the production date was set, a poster design was decided on to advertise the performance. Dr. Hanson and I created the original concept for the poster, though Brittney Thoene created the actual physical design. The poster design was also based on minimalism, black and white colors, and a focus on text, with a central focus on the ghost light. Posters were hung in the West Texas A&M Campus Fine Arts Complex, as well as

the Amarillo College Experimental Theatre, the Palace Coffee Company in Canyon, the Buffalo Bookstore in Canyon, and several other locations in Amarillo. The poster was also posted on various social media sites.

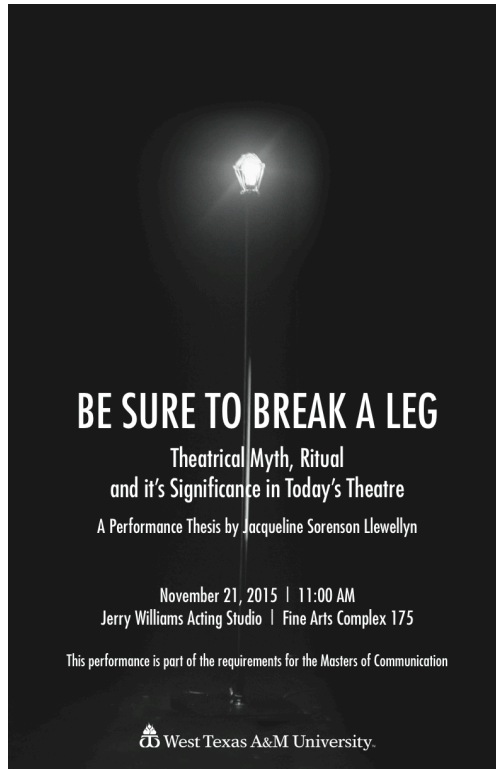


Figure 4

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has discussed a minimalist production concept for the thesis performance to enhance the effects of text and mood with regard to the topic of rituals and superstitions. Set design, color, properties, costume, and blocking were explained in relation to this concept.

## CHAPTER IV

### SCRIPT

*Begin with only the ghost light shining, curtains drawn over mirrored wall, set laid out with ghost light downstage center, magic circle station upstage left, break a leg station upstage center, and Macbeth station upstage right. Magic Circle station consists of one black cube holding a red lantern, Break a Leg station consists of two stacked black cubes with a mannequin leg propped against them, Macbeth station consists of one black cube holding a black cauldron.*

*Center Stage, at ghost light*

The great Bard himself, William Shakespeare, wrote, ‘All the World’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.’ Today I will share some of the stories of those players with regard to their time on the stage.

*(Move Upstage Left to Magic Circle station)*

Theatre is an art form with a rich history of myth and ritual. In fact, anthropologists believe that theatre may have actually begun in the earliest days of societal development, when people, unable to understand natural causes, believed there must be unseen forces controlling the circumstances of their day-to-day living. In order to warn their descendants of these forces, myths were created and then handed down

through acting them out. From this early tradition, it is believed theatrical practice was born. Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth* wrote, “Myth basically serves four functions. The first is the mystical function... realizing what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are, and experiencing awe before this mystery... The second is a cosmological dimension, the dimension with which science is concerned – showing you what shape the universe is, but showing it in such a way that the mystery again comes through... The third function is the sociological one – supporting and validating a certain social order... It is the sociological function of myth that has taken over in our world – and it is out of date... But there is a fourth function of myth, and this is the one that I think everyone must try today to relate to – and that is the pedagogical function, of how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances.”

The Greeks, building on these traditions of relaying myths, later gave us a more refined version of theatrical practice, which eventually led to the theatre we know today. They introduced us to character and costume, set and staging, Aristotle’s six parts of drama: plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle. This is our history, and it is important to understand your history when you want to look at development.

Those who have participated in the theatre are typically familiar with the ritual of magic circle. For those who are not familiar, there is a tradition in most theatrical communities that involves gathering the cast and crew together prior to the opening curtain of a show. At this time, each member of the group will join hands, typically right over left (*physically cross arms right over left in the tradition of magic circle*), and that is an important aspect of the ritual for many, and in chorus they will say something along the lines of “There is magic in the theatre. The theatre is magic. And truly blessed are

those who are able to share their talents with others.” Aside from that recitation, this circle time is a chance for the director to share encouraging words and last-minute reminders with the cast and crew, as well as a time for each member of the team to rally around one another and prepare themselves to share the work of art they have been creating together for however long the rehearsal process has taken. This coming together is an important aspect of the performance ritual to many. In fact, nearly every participant interviewed for this study cited magic circle as the most important ritual of the theatre, and each participant who had experienced working in a theatre where magic circle was not practiced cited an overall negative experience in each of those instances.

One participant told me that working in a theatre in Austin, TX where there was no pre-show circle of any kind always left her feeling like the performances lacked something... probably magic, she said. Another participant told me that working in a theatre with no magic circle left her feeling like “something was missing every time.” Without that starting line as she called it, the play lost energy, focus, and cohesion. Nearly everyone interviewed for this study mentioned a sense of unity and closeness coming from magic circle, noting it as something that brought everyone together and really made each person involved in the production feel like part of the team. One participant explained that before a show, everyone is busy in their own little worlds, putting on makeup, joking with one another – but when it’s time to do magic circle, everyone leaves those worlds and comes together with focus and determination to put on a good show. In my own experience, part of the magic of magic circle is in leaving this world for a moment. You unite with your team, you share technical and sentimental words with one another to prepare you for this departure, then, when you’ve said and



done what you've needed to say and do, you are ready to be the character you will portray. You are ready to leave this world behind and immerse yourself in the world you and your team have created.

*(Pick up lantern, sit on its black cube)*

I chose this lantern to symbolize the magic circle in this performance. A lantern is something unified, it is one piece, a circle of working parts, and it's purpose is simple – to bring light where it is needed. I think the same can be said about magic circle. It is a moment in time, where every hardworking piece of the theatrical puzzle unifies, becomes one circle linked together, a community of working parts – and the circle certainly brings light to those who are a part of it, as evidenced by the many testimonials given on its behalf. There IS magic in the theatre, and the theatre certainly IS magic. There may be no folks more blessed than those who are able to share their talents with others.

*(Stand, Replace lantern on cube, Move Upstage Center to Break a Leg station)*

When you impart good wishes to someone before a performance, it is customary to say, “break a leg,” rather than good luck. This tradition has become fairly important to many performers and technicians within the theatre. In fact, a survey of 100 theatre participants found that 88% of those involved in the theatre find this to be the only appropriate way to wish someone well before a production. One person I interviewed told me he had no superstitions, but his spouse was present at the time of the interview and laughed at his response, reminding him that he had once given a family member a scolding for wishing him “good luck” prior to a performance. Overall, those interviewed stated that this is one theatre ritual they love. For most people, it gives them a sense of fun and inclusiveness that they appreciate from being a member of the theatre

community. For some, they just love this part of theatricality, having a lucky phrase unique to their art form.

There are several theories as to the origin of this saying. Most commonly you'll hear about the term referring to breaking a curtain leg because it has to keep raising due to all of the audience applause or people hoping you have to bow so much from all the applause you receive that your leg might be in danger of breaking! As with most myths, the story has changed over time, but the tradition remains. No matter the origin, it is definitely one theatrical ritual still in place today.

*(Move Upstage Right to Macbeth station)*

The play which must not be named. That may be a very Harry Potter-esque reference, but myths can be as powerful in this world as they are in that fictional one. Referred to by many as *The Scottish Play*, by some as "MacB," and to others simply by its name, this play has stirred up a great amount of discussion throughout theatrical history. It is widely believed that the mention of its name within a theatre can bring about any number of horrible occurrences. It has become such a widely held belief in fact, that counter-curse rituals have been created to ward off trouble from those who forget its power. One such counter-curse I have personally practiced, in honor of a friend I recently offended by saying the name of this play in her theatre. I excused myself (at her request) and left the theatre by an exit door that led to the outside of the theatre. I turned three circles (*turn around once to indicate this action*), spit on the ground (*mime spitting on the ground*), and quoted Shakespeare, just not this particular play. I knocked on the theatre door, and my offended friend graciously allowed me back into the theatre. As most of my respondents will attest, regardless of your personal beliefs with regard to these myths and

rituals, it is the best practice to respect them as you respect your fellow actors and technicians. This practice helps to maintain the warm and inviting atmosphere that generally exudes from the theatre.

As to the origins of this myth, it is said that at the time it was written there was upheaval about the fact that Shakespeare chose to have 3 witches as characters and that he wrote actual curses in his script as text for them. As for productions of the play being cursed, there have generally been stories handed down about theatre's closing permanently after doing a run of this script, as well as actor's actually dying after performing in this show. Now, these stories have been explored to some extent, and the logical explanation seems to be that struggling theatres, in the hopes of drawing a crowd and raising substantial funds, have often selected this particular show as a last-ditch effort to recover. Consequently, not being successful enough to save them, they had to fold anyway following the production. That may explain one side of this supposed curse, but what about the deaths and other mishaps?

One particular incident is referred to as the Oldham Tragedy. In 1947, the Oldham Repertory Company decided to stage a production of this show at their theatre. Harold Norman played the title role, and just 2 nights into the run, Norman was actually stabbed during the staged swordfight. One month later he died from complications due to the stabbing. Later, members of the company came forward saying that Harold Norman did not believe in the superstition of Macbeth and that he brought his fate upon himself by making fun of it and refuting its power. Whatever the cause of this death, it did not help this play's reputation. Is there power in this curse? It's not for me to say, but I encourage you to exercise caution. As previously mentioned, the overall feeling of most participants

of the theatre is to respect the myths and rituals that have been handed down over the ages.

*(Move Down to Center Stage Ghost Light)*

Finally, we must discuss the theatre's most infamous patrons, its ghosts. No matter which side of the debate you're on when it comes to whether or not ghosts exist, there is no denying the chilling quality in some people's experiences in the theatre.

One participant shared stories with me about her theatre ghost. Her eyes brightened just sharing details about his escapades with the electricity in the theatre space she works in. Apparently, she is not the only person working at her theatre who has had run-ins with this spirit. He frequently makes his presence known by turning lights on and off. While no one seems to be afraid of him, those who have had experiences with him like to leave the theatre immediately after one of his light shows, just in case that's what he's requesting. One particular incident she recalls involved a student of her theatre making fun of the ghost of their theatre, he called the ghost names and made fun of the idea of its existence – and after he was reprimanded by the teacher, the fire curtain, which had never been dropped in its 50 year existence, inexplicably dropped and stopped about 3 feet from the stage floor. Deciding to remain level-headed and not jump to conclusions, she assumed the rope must have broken since it was so old, but when maintenance came to remove the curtain from the stage, they asked her how she got it down. When she told them it fell, the maintenance workers told her that wasn't possible because the rope was intact. They went ahead and ran new lines to put the fire curtain back in place. At the next rehearsal, the same student decided to tempt fate again with his goading of the theatre ghost. Before his teacher had a chance to reprimand him again, the curtain fell once more.

The student was instantly remorseful – as well as a believer. The curtain has not fallen since.

Another participant was getting ready to leave a work-call one night when the child accompanying her said she wanted to see the costumes. Though nearly everyone else had left the theatre already, she ran the young girl back to the dressing room and showed her the costumes. As they were leaving the dressing room the little girl asked my participant, “Why was that little girl hiding behind the dresses?” My participant responded quickly with, “What little girl? Show me!” When they returned to the dressing room the little girl immediately went to a specific dress and looked behind it and said, “Oh! Well, she’s gone now!” They quickly left the theatre and decided to keep their visits to the dressing room in groups from then on.

On a more positive note with regard to these ghosts, there are people who feel a comforting presence from theatre members past. One of my participants shared a love of theatre with her Dad, and they actually worked on productions together. Now that he is gone, she says she likes to talk with him before she goes on stage and ask him to watch over her. This personal ritual gives her a strength and confidence to perform, and it is a time she looks forward to with each performance.

Another participant mentioned not really believing in theatre ghosts, but acknowledged that many people do believe in them. He said though he was never what you might call a believer, he always had to work by himself in the theatre to complete sets and painting and such, and during some of his late nights at the theatre he would get an uncomfortable feeling – as though he were being watched or something along those lines. After a few experiences like that, he tried to limit his alone time in the theatre as

much as possible. Interestingly enough, this non-believer shared that a good friend and substantial benefactor to his theatre passed away a few years into his work there and that since that time, he has never had any fear of being in the building by himself, as though that person is present in the theatre, “keeping the ghosts away.”

That is the idea of the ghost light itself. It is said to be a sort of protection against theatre spirits who might run amok in your theatre should you leave it completely darkened. The light somehow makes sure they behave. The logical explanation for the ghost light is merely that it is there to protect anyone who walks into a darkened theatre from becoming injured on a set piece or walking into an orchestra pit. However, it’s a little more fun to think of it as a means of warding off ghosts, don’t you think? I do anyway.

*(Move to the Stage Left side of the Ghost Light)*

Whatever your beliefs may be, however you feel about myths, rituals, or superstitions, there are people amongst you who feel very strongly about these things. It is recommended by current theatre participants that you respect these myths and rituals, that you allow people their own variance in their level of belief with regard to them, and that you keep these myths and rituals of the theatre alive. As one participant said, it would be a sad thing indeed for so much history to be forgotten, and so much fun to be missed by the younger generations. Decide how you feel about these things, then respect the choices of your colleagues. We’ve discussed here only a few of the many myths and rituals of the theatre, the magic circle, the phrase “break a leg,” the play-which-must-not-be-named, and the ghost light. These aspects of theatre are a part of its history, and a part many of us who love the theatre hope will remain.

Again taking from Shakespeare, I recognize that parting is such sweet sorrow, but I thank you all for joining me on this journey through the world of theatre. Joseph Campbell, again from his book *The Power of Myth*, wrote “Shakespeare said that art is a mirror held up to nature. And that’s what it is. The nature is your nature, and all of these wonderful poetic images of mythology are referring to something in you. When your mind is trapped by the image out there so that you never make the reference to yourself, you have misread the image. The inner world is the world of your requirements and your energies and your structure and your possibilities that meets the outer world. And the outer world is the field of your incarnation. That’s where you are. You’ve got to keep both going. As Novalis said, ‘The seat of the soul is there where the inner and outer worlds meet.’” Thank you, and I wish you all good fortune, and great magic in your playing.

*Lights out, only ghost light remains*

*Lights back up so no one panics*

Thank you!

## CHAPTER V

### EVALUATIONS

The performance took place on Saturday, November 21, 2015 in the Jerry Williams Actors Studio on the West Texas A&M University campus in the Sybil B. Harrington Fine Arts Building. The performance began at 11:00 am and, including the question and answer session, lasted approximately 30 minutes. There were ten people in attendance in addition to the two thesis committee members able to attend and a bonus committee member, Monty Downs, a faculty member of Amarillo College who sat in to evaluate the performance in Dr. Franken's absence. Each of the committee members and evaluator were seated in front of the performance area and had writing materials to take notes during the performance. A follow up meeting was scheduled for the following Monday afternoon to discuss the performance and the choices that were made.

In my own opinion, I will say that the performance went pretty well. I was terribly nervous and uncertain about how it would go before it began, but at 11:00 am, Dr. Hanson asked if I was expecting anyone else to arrive. After I told her no, she closed the doors and went to the performance area where she explained the performance thesis option, then introduced me to the audience. At that time I went to the stage area and began my performance as it was scripted. I did my best to stay as true to the script as possible. It was mostly memorized, though I decided to use a readers theatre black



notebook to hold the quotes I planned to recite from Joseph Campbell's book *The Power of Myth*. I was able to go through the blocking as I had it scripted, and overall there were not any unfortunate incidents or major slip-ups that I was aware of. I will say that I was hyper-aware of myself, and I felt that my voice was uncontrollably shaky in the beginning minutes. Overall, though, I felt the performance went well. If I had it to do over again, I may have given myself more time with a completed script in the hopes that the additional time would increase my confidence and help me to feel more in control of my voice initially.

The question and answer portion of the performance also seemed to go well, though I did wish I had printed off some of the details of my research and put it in my readers theatre notebook with the Campbell quotes. I felt like it would have benefitted me during that time to have been able to give more accurate information with regard to the demographics of my survey participants, which was one of the questions I was asked.

Dr. Hanson was one of my committee members in attendance at the performance and Monty Downs was my guest committee member present on that day. Each of their evaluations of my performance follows.

## Evaluation of Performance

by

Dr. Trudy L. Hanson

The guiding production concept for Jackie's performance, that of a minimalist setting, while focusing on the spoken word was most effective. As the audience entered, they saw the three black boxes with objects on them and noticed the ghost light in the center. In blocking her performance, Jackie began by standing down



center and then

moved to upstage

right to the lantern, next to upstage center to the leg and

then over the upstage left for the Macbeth display, returning to the ghost light, down center, for her concluding remarks.

Dressed in a simple black dress, Jackie's conversational

approach reached out to the audience. Her careful preparation for the performance was obvious.

The script, as compiled, included stories she had collected from her respondents, as well as information gathered through her online survey. Jackie took us on a journey that explained myth (according to Joseph Campbell), introduced us to common theatre rituals, and had



us consider superstitions that guide performers today. She combined contemporary experiences with historical experiences, as she spoke about the “play that is not to be named.” Her movement and gestures reinforced all that she said. As she talked about the “magic circle,” she demonstrated the crossing of her arms. When she re-enacted the ritual by spinning in a circle that would lift the curse brought by saying the title of the play not to be named, the audience could easily visualize the power of that superstition.

But perhaps, the most interesting moment of the performance happened in the final segment. Jackie walked over and plugged in the ghost light and then came down



center and stood in front of the light. From my vantage point, Jackie’s position in front of the light created this aura (almost a halo effect) around her face. She, indeed, brought the ghost light and its stories to life for us.

Jackie’s decision to use the readers’ theatre black notebook for the quotes from Joseph Campbell’s *The Power of Myth* called attention to the text and helped listeners contemplate how myth and ritual impact our daily lives in significant ways. Jackie’s performance was animated, yet natural. Her conversational approach created a relationship with her audience that often exists between storytellers and their listeners.

Monty Downs response to  
Jackie Sorenson Llewellyn

Master's Performance

Nov. 21, 2015

First, I must say I enjoyed Jackie Sorenson Llewellyn's performance and the work she put into the project. She was very personable and connected with each person there. Jackie presented a professional and pretty thorough look into these four theatrical traditions. The set was simple, yet effective, as was her choice of "costuming." I liked how she tied the chosen props into the performance, too.

Second, I appreciate that she went outside of the Texas Panhandle area to reach participants for her thesis. Many people would simply stay close to home and to the people they know. I believe by going out beyond her comfort zone she obtained some valuable input from around the country and discovered that some traditions are truly widespread.

I really only have a couple of minor critiques for Jackie's performance. Upon entering the space, I noted the set. As a designer, I wish that the mannequin leg and ghost light had been set slightly off-center (one stage right and the other stage left) so that the ghost light would not have been directly in front of the leg. The next thing I noticed when Jackie started was how nervous she was. I know this is always a difficult thing for a performer to overcome, esp., when performing alone. After a few minutes, however, she was relaxed and the Jackie we all came to see. She played well with the audience through her wonderful personality. And the third minor critique is that I felt her

movement was a little too - what's the word? – stealthy? She seemed to “sneak” up on each area as she went through the movement. I would have liked to see a bit more variation of tempo in the delivery and movement.

All that being said, I commend Jackie Sorenson Llewellyn on a wonderful performance and presentation of her findings. I truly enjoyed seeing it and hearing some of the stories behind the traditions. Some I knew, some I had forgotten about and a new one – the Oldham Tragedy.

Thank you, Jackie, for a wonderful mid-morning of theatre and the opportunity to respond.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW GUIDE



## **Interview Guide**

1. When did you first learn about any rituals or folklore associated with the theatre?
2. What are the most memorable stories of this kind you were told?
3. What were your initial feelings about these rituals?
4. Could you describe a time you felt like taking heed of or ignoring these rituals affected a performance?
5. Can you describe any specific memories you have of being personally affected by these rituals?
6. What, if any, is one theatre ritual you enjoy or look forward to?
7. What, if any, is one theatre ritual you dislike?
8. Have you ever been part of a performance that involved a person who determined to go against the unspoken “rules” of these rituals? If so, did you feel that this affected the overall performance?
9. Have you ever purposefully defied an unspoken “rule” of theatrical ritual, such as saying Macbeth in the theatre, or wishing someone “good luck” rather than to “break a leg” before a performance?
10. What, overall, is your opinion of theatrical ritual and its place in today’s performances?
11. Would you personally be uncomfortable working in a theatre where theatrical folklore was ignored? If so, why?
12. How would you advise people entering the theatrical world regarding theatrical ritual and folklore?

13. Are there any stories you would like to add, or comments, regarding theatrical rituals and superstitions and your experiences with them?

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

August 28, 2015

Dear Jacqueline Sorenson Llewellyn:

Your research proposal titled, "**Ritual in Theatre Performance**" was submitted to the full membership of the West Texas A&M University IRB on **July 6, 2015** for an **expedited** review. The IRB may (i) approve, (ii) approve conditionally, or (iii) disapprove proposed protocols and consent forms. The decision of the IRB regarding your proposal was:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Approve
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approve Conditionally
<input type="checkbox"/>	Disapprove

The initial decision of the IRB regarding your proposal was to approve conditionally. The requested changes/clarifications you provided to the committee were satisfactory and moved your status from conditional approval to full approval. Congratulations!

Approval is extended for one calendar year. Should data collection proceed past one year, or should you make changes in the methodology as it affects human subjects, you must resubmit the study to the IRB.

**Assuming all IRB training requirements have been met, procedures involving human subjects may now proceed.**

Upon verifying your successful completion of all training requirements, an official letter of approval from the Graduate School is forthcoming. Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well in your research project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gary Bigham, IRB Chair

APPENDIX C  
PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Trudy Hanson, Dr. Noah Franken, and Mr. Royal Brantley, for their guidance and support throughout the process of preparing this thesis. I would also like to thank Mr. Monty Downs for joining their ranks to evaluate my performance of this thesis. You have all been invaluable educators in my life. While on that topic, I would like to thank all of my teachers, especially the theatre faculty at Amarillo College, Monty Downs, Ray Newburg, and Lynae Jacob, and again, Royal Brantley of the WT theatre program, as well as the graduate communication faculty at WT. This program has improved my life, and I thank you all for your part in that.

On a personal note, I wish to thank my husband, Tyler, without whose love, support, and encouragement I could not possibly have done this. I would also like to thank my precious and patient children, Jack, Marley, and Jolene, who have cheered me on as well. Of course, I would not be here at all if it weren't for my parents, Jack and Jeanne Sorenson, who taught me to love and appreciate the arts, to always give my best, and to passionately pursue that which I love. I also thank Bob and Mary Jane Sloan, who have served as both family and educators in my life. Mary Jane cast me in my first theatrical production when I was just six years old, and we have been family ever since.

Finally, I thank all of my family and friends who have each played a part in making me who I am today. I also thank those who love the theatre. The players, the directors, the technicians, the volunteers, and the patrons – this is for you, for all of us. There is magic in the theatre, the theatre is magic, and truly blessed are those who are able to share their talents with others!

## BE SURE TO BREAK A LEG

Theatrical Myth, Ritual  
and it's Significance in Today's Theatre  
A Performance Thesis by Jacqueline Sorenson Llewellyn

November 21, 2015 | 11:00 AM  
Jerry Williams Acting Studio | Fine Arts Complex 175

This performance is part of the requirements for the Masters of Communication





# Be Sure to Break a Leg

Theatrical Myth and Ritual

Magic Circle

Break a Leg

Macbeth

The Ghost Light



## Jacqueline Sorenson Llewellyn

Jacqueline has a B.A. in Theatre from West Texas A&M University, and expects to receive her M.A. in Communication from the same University this December. She and husband Tyler are proud parents to Jack (8), Marley (4), and Jolene (1). Jacqueline has been a lover and supporter of the arts since childhood and hopes to share her passion for the arts and communication with her own children as well as her community.