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“When America sings for you”: Hamilton’s impact on the American historical canon

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Abstract:

This thesis discusses how Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical reconfigures the canonical view of early US history. The thesis discusses three different aspects of Miranda's musical: the first being its placement in the poetic canon of the US and the underlying mythology of this canon. A comparison *Hamilton* to the poetry of Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes shows a shared appraisal of the foundational ideals of the United States. In extension to these ideals, Northrop Frye's trajectory of myths and mythology serves as a framework to interpret certain American cultural norms and values, and how *Hamilton* abides by these. The second chapter analyses *Hamilton's* use of the medium of theatre, specifically in relation to Broadway. The site-specific nature of theatre connects the audience with the actors. In *Hamilton*, this connects the past with the present. The third chapter illustrates how the style of hip hop is used as poetic style in *Hamilton*, and how the hip hop subculture is reflected in its themes. With its adherence to themes of community and knowledge, Miranda shows how the aesthetic of hip hop is as integral to the American self-identification as the knowledge of early US history.

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1. Introduction

The success of Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* was not a given. When he first presented his new concept album at the White House Poetry Jam in 2009, the audience reacted with incredulous laughter. Since then the self-styled hip hop musical went on to win eleven Tony's, a Grammy, and a Pulitzer in 2016 (broadway.com 2016; grammy.com 2016; pulitzer.org n.d.). The New York Times' review of the musical simply opened with the sentence: "Yes, it really is that good." (Brantley 2016). Much of the praise revolves around *Hamilton's* innovative combination of early US History and modern New-York-centric hip hop, making its subtitle, 'an American musical', exceptionally fitting. But more importantly, the distinctly American stylisation of the play can tell us a lot about the attitude of present-day Americans towards their own history, and by extension, what it means to be American. While critics seem unanimously enamoured with *Hamilton*, scholars debate whether the praise is warranted as a contemporary representation of history.

1.1 Literary review

There are two main tendencies in the critical debate surrounding *Hamilton* that can be identified: that of the academic historians and that of the literary critics. Between these two camps there are two major points of contention and one main agreement.

The first difference between the historians and the literary critics lies in how they view the use of history in *Hamilton*. The historians tend to critique the musical for its factual inaccuracies, anachronisms, or biased view on the historical Alexander Hamilton's life (Carp 2017; Isenberg 2017; Magness 2017). The common thread among this group of scholars is that they regard *Hamilton* as a historical text. I argue that this approach is unsuitable as a critique of *Hamilton*. It holds the play up to an unreasonable and unachievable standard, as historians have different interpretations of history amongst themselves. Secondly, and more crucially, *Hamilton* is not, and has never been a historical text. Rather, it is a piece of art and should be examined as such.

Conversely, the literary scholars tend to focus more on how *Hamilton* makes history more accessible to a broad audience (MacDonald 2018; Mayora 2018; Skala 2018; Viator 2018). These scholars welcome the involvement of minority actors and use of hip hop as an innovative mode of story-telling. Furthermore, the tendency of these literary scholars is to focus on a single theme in *Hamilton* and approach the text from this angle. The problem with this

approach is that it leads to a fairly descriptive analysis of the play. If one is only concerned with one theme of the text, it becomes exceedingly easy to overlook the poetic undercurrents, which connect the play to a larger network of literature, or a canon.

There is, however, one point of agreement between critics and scholars alike: *Hamilton* is a positive influence on the field of public history. The broad appeal of the musical has garnered interest in historical monuments (Skala 2018) and Miranda's ceaseless efforts in making *Hamilton* accessible through ticket lotteries further promotes the history it conveys (MacDonald 2018). Even academic historians, though critical of historical inaccuracies in the musical, still express appreciation of the play's creative retelling of Revolution-era history (Carp 2017). While I agree with this praise, it is my contention that *Hamilton*'s literary characteristics are more relevant to examine than its influence on public history. *Hamilton* is primarily a piece of poetry, one with a distinctly American aesthetic. Therefore, this thesis aims to analyse this national aesthetic as it relates to the musical's style and its substance, rather than its historiographic qualities, as argued in the following section.

1.2 Thesis statement & chapter overview

In this thesis I argue that Hamilton reconfigures the canonical understanding of early US history. I will examine this from three different perspectives: the reinterpretation of a shared American Mythology, the stage of Broadway, and the use of hip hop.

This three-pronged approach is reflected in the structure of the thesis: Chapter 2 examines the mythology and American poetic canon as it features in *Hamilton*, Chapter 3 discusses the medium of theatre and its effects on *Hamilton*, and Chapter 4 analyses how hip hop is reflected in the stylisation of *Hamilton*.

Chapter 2 examines how *Hamilton* fits into the American poetic canon, as it is one aspect of the play which I argue scholars rarely consider. To analyse these poetic merits, I divide the chapter into two parts. The first section of Chapter 2 compares Miranda's musical to the poetry of Walt Whitman. Like *Hamilton*, Whitman's poetry exalts several features of US history to a mythologized level: from the ideological foundations to the characters of the Founding Fathers themselves. Both writers engage with a shared understanding of 'America' and American identity, which is what I refer to in this thesis as the American Mythology. This

American Mythology is explored further in the second part of Chapter 2, wherein I use Northrop Frye's interpretation of mythologies. To Frye, a mythology is a system of stories or myths which reveal a shared understanding of the world. But while Miranda's and Whitman's contribution to such a mythology are based in poetry, I argue that the American Mythology pervades throughout the entire cultural landscape. Yet it is important to note that *Hamilton* is not just a piece of poetry: it is theatre. This mandates an entirely different level of interpretation, which I analyse in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 3, I argue that *Hamilton* performs a poetic ritual of national memory, rather than pure history. Since poetry and theatre have different origins and artistic functions it is relevant to examine how the very medium of *Hamilton* contributes to its overall message. The first part of Chapter 3 therefore identifies the ritualistic aspects of theatre as a medium and discusses how *Hamilton* uses this to encourage audiences to engage with the past and present of the United States as it unfolds on stage. The second part of the chapter discusses the site-specificity of *Hamilton*, as I argue that the effect which New York City has on *Hamilton* is completely unrecognised in current scholarship. Since *Hamilton* is a Broadway production, New York City is not only the setting of the play: it also acts as the stage. To understand the full ramifications of this duality, I use a Foucauldian analysis and compare *Hamilton*'s use of space and time to the site-specific production of *Suitcase*, staged at Liverpool station in 2008. Both *Hamilton* and *Suitcase* use the stage as an incorporated part of their text, which draws attention to the temporal connection between the audience and the story being performed. In *Hamilton*, New York City thereby represents both a real-time present and an imagined past. But this connection to New York City is not only a question of stage and setting, it is also present in the very stylisation, as elaborated upon in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, I examine the use of hip hop in *Hamilton*. As a hip hop musical, *Hamilton* borrows many influences from hip hop as a genre of music and the subculture surrounding it. To elaborate on the style and substance of hip hop, I turn to two scholars of the history and philosophy of hip hop: Oware (2018) and Parker (2006). These two scholars describe the stylistic devices used in hip hop as a genre of poetry. This includes the use of sampling and rap battles, which are both present in *Hamilton*. Moreover, Parker and Oware provide valuable insight into the underlying philosophy of old-school hip hop. This philosophy is especially relevant in examining how Miranda incorporates the aesthetic of hip hop, a style associated with a socio-economically disenfranchised demographic, into a story which encompasses US history as a national narrative.

This leads me to conclude that *Hamilton* reconfigures our understanding of US history, rather than subverting it. It does so by re-telling a mainstream story of the Founding Fathers using the contemporary poetic language of minorities in the United States, namely black Americans and Latin-Americans. Furthermore, the medium of theatre makes this inclusivity especially effective, since it places audiences and actors face-to-face opposite each other. This bridges the gap between the performed past on one hand and the present in which it is performed on the other hand, as both epochs are based in New York City. In short, *Hamilton* conveys an American aesthetic in its style, substance, and staging.

Finally, due to the site-specific nature of the play, I do not comment on any of the scenography or dramaturgical details of the production. As mentioned before, I examine the play primarily as a piece of poetry. Therefore, this thesis is based upon the lyrics of the original Broadway cast recording (Miranda, 2015). I would furthermore like to express my sincere gratitude to two people: My supervisor, Jesper Kruse for his helpful advice and frequent meetings which kept me on track and kept me motivated. I would also like to thank Professor Helen M. Whall of the College of the Holy Cross for her suggestions and words of encouragement during the initial stages of my research.

2 The poetics of *Hamilton*

The following chapter aims to discuss *Hamilton* and its place in the canon of American poetry. Outside of the musical merits of the play, the lyrics read as a tribute to the United States and what it means to be an American in 2015. To place *Hamilton* into an American literary context, I compare the lyrics and themes of *Hamilton* with two other prominent American poets: Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes. Yet, while the comparison reveals different attitudes towards the United States, the poetry of Whitman, Miranda, and Hughes does not account for the underlying cultural norms and values which are essential to American literature. Therefore, the second part of this chapter examines the mythology which sets the foundation for American literature, and how it features in *Hamilton*.

2.1 Whitman, Miranda, and the mythological canon of the US

Whitman's moniker as 'the Bard of the Union' is fitting, as much of Whitman's poetry glorifies the United States on several levels: its people, its history and, perhaps most revealing, its ideology. While *Hamilton* obviously does not mirror *Leaves of Grass* in style and tone, the message and attitude towards the United States are similar. Miranda clearly admires the poetry of Whitman (twitter.com 2015), however, *Hamilton* is not a modern-day replica of *Leaves of Grass*. Rather, I argue that they undertake very similar projects, but from different historically-bound points of view.

2.1.1 Democracy: Ideas about ideals

The first point of comparison in this thesis between Miranda and Whitman is the appraisal of the ideological foundation of the US. Where Whitman's poetry emphasises democracy and republics as fundamentally peaceful undertakings, Miranda's image of democracy is more contentious and a continuation of war and struggle.

Throughout his poetry, Whitman presents himself as a staunch believer in democracy and in the Republic. He presents an attitude towards democracy as the definitive quality marker of a civilised society. This is perhaps most evident in his poem *Election Day, November, 1884*. In this poem, Whitman juxtaposes the event of an election with the majestic natural features of the American continent, favouring the small act of an election as the most powerful feature of the Western world. Therefore, Whitman refers to it as:

“—This seething hemisphere's humanity, (...) the still / small voice vibrating—
America's choosing day”

(Whitman 2013, 594)

In contrast to the grandiose natural features such as waterfalls, mountains and other dramatic landscapes, the election itself is described as a range of small but dynamic actions across the country. Elections are thereby a performance of the quintessentially American values of democracy and active citizenship.

In contrast to Whitman, Miranda frames democracy as a battlefield. Act 2 of *Hamilton* mainly follows Hamilton's political career and features little direct violence; yet it is marked by an underlying atmosphere of violence, similar to Act 1. One recurring feature of Miranda's style of storytelling is his frequent use of call-backs to earlier lines. An example of this is when Washington rephrases his own advice given to Hamilton during Act 1:

“Dying is easy, young man / Living is harder”

(Miranda, Right Hand Man 2015)

“Winning was easy, young man / Governing's harder”

(Miranda, Cabinet Battle #1 2015)

Yet, contrary to the bloody battles of Act 1, the conflicts in Act 2 are marked by political intrigue, personal vendettas and deals made behind closed doors. This is also explored in the song *The Room Where It Happens*, where Aaron Burr relates one such deal from an outsider's perspective:

“In God we trust / But we'll never really know what got discussed / Click-boom then it happened / And no one else was in the room where it happened”

(Miranda, The Room Where It Happens 2015)

The song has a sinister tone as Burr tries to understand what is happening and relay the sparse information to the audience. This contrasts to Whitman's view wherein democracy is virtuous because it involves the masses. Miranda presents a more cynical view, one wherein the decision-making process is not only out of the public's hands: it also occurs outside the public eye.

Another point of contrast between the two poets is lies in their views on the electoral process itself. In *Election Day* the “choosing day” is highly romanticised and placed as the ideal societal act. Whitman equates democracy with peace:

“a swordless conflict, / Yet more than all Rome’s wars of old, or modern
Napoleon’s:) / the peaceful choice of all,”

(Whitman 2013, 594)

This compares the effect of the election to that of warfare, as a new leader arises in both instances. But to Whitman, elections are by their very nature peaceful, as they involve every citizen on equal footing with the electable politicians. For instance, Whitman emphasises the masses of voters, rather than the individual politicians. The only time he references any winners of an election are in the final lines:

“These stormy gusts and winds waft precious ships, / Swell’d Washington’s,
Jefferson’s, Lincoln’s sails.”

(Whitman 2013, 595)

This invocation reveals a very interesting aspect of Whitman’s view of democracy. To Whitman, leaders arise as a consequence of democracy, rather than actively developing it. This means that to Whitman, democracy is not only peaceful and a feature of a sophisticated society, it is also a state of nature, something that *creates* good and virtuous people.

Whitman’s romantic presentation of democracy is in stark contrast to the approach *Hamilton* takes. Miranda seems disinterested in the elections themselves and satirises the fickle nature of voters. The song *The Election of 1800* has many instances where the chorus seems less interested in the politics of the candidates, and more concerned with the personalities of Jefferson and Burr:

“I don’t like Adams / Well, he’s gonna lose, that’s just defeatist / And Jefferson / In
love with France! / Yeah, he’s so elitist! / I like that Aaron Burr! / I can’t believe
we’re here with him! / He seems approachable? / Like you could grab a beer with
him!”

(Miranda, *The Election of 1800* 2015)

Miranda presents democracy as a process with its own flaws and biases due to human nature, rather than the ideal form of government depicted in Whitman’s poetry. Furthermore, while there are female voices present in the excerpt above, Miranda draws attention to the fact that they would not have had the right to vote in the 1800 election. Therefore, Burr’s campaigning amounts to him literally wooing the voters:

“Shake hands with him! / Charm her! / It’s eighteen hundred, ladies, tell your
husbands: vote for Burr!”

(Miranda, *The Election of 1800* 2015)

In *Hamilton* the process of a democratic election is dynamic like in Whitman's description, but moreover, it is volatile. The *Election of 1800* ends with Hamilton having the final say by endorsing Jefferson, leading to Jefferson's victory. Where Whitman celebrates the democracy and the electoral process as the triumph of the majority voice, Miranda displays the less flattering traits of this form of government such as the infighting and pageantry.

2.1.2 Euhemerism and satire: The Founding Fathers

Miranda and Whitman's views on the founders themselves are another contrasting aspect of their poetry. In *Leaves of Grass* the first presidents feature as harbingers of virtue. *Hamilton*, on the other hand, shows a more critical view of the Founding Fathers, but not by much.

In his poetry, Whitman elevates the Founding Fathers to mythological archetypes through his poetry, which complements his views on democracy as the definitive marker of an enlightened civilization. This is reminiscent of an ancient practice: euhemerism. The term is derived from the 4th century BC writer Euhemerus, who wrote *Sacred Inscription*. In it, he stated that the gods of the Greek pantheon were great kings of past civilizations, who had posthumously been deified by their subjects. This practice of hero-worship is not unique for the ancient Greeks, as many similar examples of euhemerism can be found across world cultures, from Japan to Mesoamerica (Roubekas 2017, 165). It is often attributed to pre-literary cultures, yet Whitman is an author who practices euhemerism on historical figures, whom we know primarily as real people. Aaron (1994) notes that Whitman's worship of the Founding Fathers was in fact a feature throughout his life:

“He likened them (the authors to the Constitution, ed.) to ‘some mighty prophets and gods’, the architects of ‘the greatest piece of moral building constructed’” (Aaron 1994, 49).

Euhemerism very accurately describes the type of hero worship visible in a lot of American art, especially in Whitman's poetry. While the object may be of a secular origin, its artistic representation has an almost religious air to it. This is especially clear in *The Centenarian's Story* wherein Washington, whom Whitman was particularly inspired by, features like a landmark:

“And is this the ground Washington trod? / And these waters I listlessly daily cross,
are these the waters he cross'd, / As resolute in defeat as other generals in their

proudest triumphs? / I must copy the story, and send it eastward and westward, / I must preserve that look as it beam'd on you rivers of Brooklyn.”

(Whitman 2013, 341)

The ground itself bears Washington's presence across time. In the poem Washington is a key figure who features the intergenerational connection between two soldiers. The memory of Washington is elevated to provide a moral message and a duty to preserve and promote his memory. Thus, Washington becomes a euhemeristic representation for the ideology and nation he fought for.

Where Whitman places Washington on a pedestal of near-divinity, and Miranda deconstructs this pedestal. He does not exalt the Founding Fathers to the status of demi-gods, rather, he equates them with contemporary character types. This happens through subverting the expectations of what these historical figures looked like. One of *Hamilton's* most noticeable features is the so-called counter-colour casting: all the historically white figures are played by non-white actors. Whall (2018) explains the effect of this casting choice:

“When a powerful, handsome black actor with a shaved head comes onstage, America's primary founding father takes on a new vigour (...) through the power of artistic representation and acting skill, audience members should realize the metaphoric truth: not only can a black man play an historically white Washington, a black man could become an historical president” (Whall 2018, 247).

This is one of the ways in which Miranda radically alters the Founding Fathers in a contemporary worldview. Another instance is with the introduction of Washington as the General in *Right Hand Man*. The title reveals his portrayal throughout the play: a successful and energetic military leader. This is especially clear in his role as Hamilton's mentor. Though the relationship between Hamilton and Washington is akin to a teacher/student relationship, the language used frames it more as a commander/soldier relationship. As described in section 2.1.1, Washington counsels Hamilton using military-coded language and restates earlier remarks made during the war:

“Go home, Alexander / That's an order from your commander”

(Miranda, *Meet Me Inside* 2015)

“Figure it out, Alexander / That's an order from your commander”

(Miranda, *Cabinet Battle #1* 2015)

Once again, Washington's identity is first and foremost as a military man. However, his first solo *History Has Its Eyes on You* recounts his failures rather than triumphs. This makes Washington seem not only human, but outright vulnerable. Washington is thus not a one-dimensional archetype in Miranda's play, but a rounded and flawed character. This sympathetic air is also present in the song, *One Last Time*, where Washington resigns his position as president. The pivotal moment in US history is in *Hamilton* attributed to Washington's own wisdom, further cementing him as a father-figure. He explains to a distraught Hamilton why his decision is not only his personal choice, but a sacrifice which will secure the stability of the nation:

“If I say goodbye, the nation learns to move on / It outlives me when I'm gone / Like the scripture says: / "Everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree / And no one shall make them afraid." / They'll be safe in the nation we've made”

(Miranda, *One Last Time*, 2015)

This proves why Washington especially was deserving of the nickname ‘the Father’ (Miranda, *A Winter's Ball* 2015) as well as other positions of power like ‘the General’ or ‘Mr. President’. Rarely outside Burr's narration is Washington is rarely addressed with anything outside titles and honorifics, cementing his authority within the story. This authority is determined, not by Washington's position and status, but by his character and nature.

Though he holds Washington in high regard, Miranda does not relegate him to a character archetype to fit his poetic narrative. Similar to Whitman's poetry, in *Hamilton* Washington marks the beginning of US history and his character becomes a symbol for history itself. It is therefore extremely telling that Washington's main lyrical motif is the phrase “history has its eyes on you” which is repeated throughout the major ensemble pieces (Miranda, *Non-Stop; Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story* 2015). The repetition of this phrase reaffirms the idea of the United States as a historical community, which both Hamilton and the audience are a part of. Therefore, Washington depicts the inception of the United States and with it, its values and ideals, which will be discussed in section 2.2. Though Washington's characterisation is decidedly and earnestly human, he is still to a degree venerated as the epitome of the Founding Father. Even so, Washington is not exempt to historical criticism from the present. In a distinct but ambiguous line, Miranda sows doubt about the virtuosity of George Washington, unlike anything Whitman would ever express:

“[Laurens:] Black and white soldiers wonder alike if this really means freedom
/ [Washington:] Not yet.”

(Miranda, *Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)* 2015)

Washington’s response is perhaps the most ambiguous in the entire play. It refers to the Revolutionary War in the context of the song, but it also foreshadows the distinctive lack of freedom for the black population in the United States. Washington, like many of the other Founding Fathers did own slaves, though this fact is omitted in the musical (mountvernon.org 2019; Isenberg 2017, 298). But as argued above, Washington’s function in the play is that of a mentor and an exemplary figure at the dawn of the nation’s founding. The line “Not Yet” in *Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)* is the closest Miranda comes to explicitly referencing Washington’s involvement in slavery. While historians will argue that one cannot cherry-pick historical facts, I argue that in the case of George Washington, Miranda has no choice. Calling the first president of the United States a slaveowner would not only be a subversion of the canonical view of Washington as a liberator, it would be paramount to treason. Therefore, the line in *Yorktown* is the only reference to this darker part of the Founding Father’s biography, but its effectiveness lies in its ambiguity. Washington is one of the most revered figures in *Hamilton* and acts as a representative for history at large. Yet not even ‘the General’ is immune to Miranda’s critical approach from a 21st century point of view.

2.1.3 Rhetorical devices: Song and classical poetry

Songs and singing have been considered synonymous with poems and poetry since antiquity. In Whitman’s poetry this link to ancient Greek and Roman literature is clearly stated. In *Hamilton*, the connection is less transparent.

Whitman’s poetry has a quasi-religious tendency in the subject matter, but also in his poetic style. Whitman’s main inspiration, for example, was not the fixed meter and rhyme of other poets. Rather, he imitated the cadence and rhetoric of religious sermons, which in turn draws upon many features of Classical orations (poetryfoundation.org, Walt Whitman n.d.). For example, Whitman wrote praises to the imaginary personifications of America and Democracy, using many rhetorical devices found in classical Greek or Roman poetry.

“For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme! / For you, for you
I am trilling these songs.”

(Whitman 2013, 137)

Much of Whitman's poetry, especially concerning America, is not presented as a poem but as a song. Many translations of Homer's works open with a similar invocation of muses using song. One example is Lombardo's translation of the Iliad from 1997 "Sing, Goddess, Achilles' rage," (poets.org n.d). Whitman was not the first writer to use mythology in this manner; in fact, it was common for humanist writers of the Renaissance to summon the muses (Ellis 2007, 7; Milton 2001, 1). The effect of this imitation is that poets associate themselves with the classical poetic forms of singing, giving the writing a sense of timelessness or a connection with an idealised classical era. By depicting democracy itself as timeless, Whitman gives it an air of the eternal or the divine. Whitman's poetry draws upon these classical traits and thus creates poetry out of myths.

In contrast to the frequent personification of America and American ideals in *Leaves of Grass*, Miranda uses this poetic device in a different manner. In *Hamilton*, America is only personified twice, once in the opening song *Alexander Hamilton*, and again in the final song *The World Was Wide Enough*

"Oh, Alexander Hamilton / When America sings for you / Will they know what you overcame?"

(Miranda, Alexander Hamilton 2015)

Contrary to Whitman's more passive America, to whom the songs are dedicated, Miranda's America actively sings. Like the personification of democracy, America becomes a source of contention between Miranda and Whitman. Is America the object of a song, passively exalted as an ideal by the people? Or does America represent a shared experience of its people, i.e. the Americans? The chorus in *Alexander Hamilton* seems to convey the latter. America is synonymous with its people and their shared memory of one Founding Father. And as the line suggests, this memory can be flawed or incomplete. By posing the question: "Will they know what you overcame?" the chorus implies that the song which America sings for Hamilton leaves out some of his achievements. Another interpretation is that America does not place Hamilton's achievements into the context of his extraordinary personal struggles as 'the bastard orphan'.

The second time America is compared to a song is in Hamilton's final monologue in *The World Was Wide Enough*:

"America, you great unfinished symphony, you sent for me"

(Miranda, *The World Was Wide Enough* 2015)

Here Hamilton addresses America as a song, which is more reminiscent to Whitman's use of the metaphor. Like Whitman, Miranda conveys a belief in the timelessness of America by comparing it to a song. The way in which Hamilton addresses America is similar to invoking a muse to sing through him, the implication being that America existed before Hamilton. This means that Miranda does not characterise Hamilton as a creator of America, as his contributions may be finite, yet the idea of America is not. The song continues, and Hamilton's legacy is carried on by future generations.

2.1.4 Style and substance: Hymns and hip hop

While I initially stated that Whitman and Miranda do not use the same style to convey their message, there are some similarities between Whitman's sermon inspired style and Miranda's contemporary use of hip hop. Firstly, these styles are associated mainly with American literature. This makes both *Leaves of Grass* and *Hamilton* fundamentally American, not only in substance, but in style as well. Moreover, this stylisation reveals something about the lens through which the poet in question sees America.

For Whitman, with his ceremonious and sermonising style, America is something to be praised or exalted like a preacher might praise God in a sermon. But what he praises is not necessarily religious, in fact Whitman often praises the secular. In *I Hear America Singing*, Whitman describes the worker and various types of manual labour and praises them for their song:

“Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else / (...) / Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.”

(Whitman 2013, 33)

These songs are in the first line of the poem referred to as 'carols', connotating a religious hymn of sorts, but to Whitman, the hymn is the distinct song of the individual, or rather their free and unbound spirit. Whitman does not give praise to a god in this poem, but he does not need to. The motif of a carol and the action of singing a hymn as an expression of one self and one's occupation is holy enough to Whitman. The everyday *is* the divine.

As an alternative to hymns, *Hamilton* uses hip hop to tell its story. Hip hop is also referred to as “poetry of the streets” (Parker 2006, 21). This shows that Miranda views the

mythological from the perspective of the working-class, unlike Whitman, who describes the everyday and working-class through religious imagery. In *Hamilton*, the phrase “I’m just like my country / I’m young, scrappy and hungry” features in two songs: *My Shot* and *Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)*. Miranda does not equate the individual and the working-class with something divine like a song. Instead, he personifies the budding nation with connotations of disenfranchised youth, a connotation most often associated with rappers and hip hoppers as will be further explored in Chapter 4. This image also entails an air of determination and energy: two traits which feature in the phrase’s reprisal in *Yorktown*. Here, the phrase is repeated in the context of the decisive battle. It is rapped, rather than sung, not only accentuating the fast pace of the song, but also invoking images of and rebellion. As will be discussed in the following chapters this is not only a staple of hip hop’s aesthetic, but of the United States’ foundational myth.

While both *Hamilton* and *Leaves of Grass* use specific styles of verse to support their respective messages there is a major division between the environments in which these two styles originate. The hymnal style of Whitman’s poetry preaches universality, but hip hop is fundamentally a style which belongs to the black population of the US, having originated in New York City in the 1980s. These origins will be further discussed in Chapter 4, but it does leave the comparison of *Hamilton* and Whitman’s poetry at an impasse. Whitman did not write explicitly for or against slavery, and his attitudes towards the black Americans were inconsistent and often contradictory. But to understand *Hamilton* one must understand the American literary canon and how it evolved, especially in regard to racism and the periods after slavery.

2.1.5 Miranda and Hughes: Minority representation in a literary canon

The Harlem Renaissance allowed black writers, such as Langston Hughes, to express their own view of America. This period belongs also to the American literary canon which *Hamilton* is a continuation of, especially in terms of critiquing the American Mythology from the point of view of the disenfranchised.

Hughes’ poem *Let America Be America Again* refutes the perceived universality of American ideals. The poem itself is almost a pastiche of something Whitman may have written, with the first three verses are presented a similar panegyric manner as that of the Bard. Hughes then interjects each of these verses with simple objections: “America never was America to me.”

(Hughes, 1994 189). Thereafter he goes on to describes the experiences of people who throughout US history have been marginalised or oppressed:

“I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart, / I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars. / I am the red man driven from the land, / I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek”

(Hughes, 1994 190)

While Hughes draws inspiration from a shared cultural canon, i.e. the poetry of Whitman, he disrupts it to reflect the reality which he inhabits. Hughes thereby reveals the inherent hypocrisy of a nation built upon the ideals of equality and liberty, while profiting off slavery and the subsequent oppression of black Americans. Where Whitman romanticises, Hughes satirises.

Despite subverting the canonical understanding of American values, Hughes still subscribes to one important aspect of the American Mythology: the relentless belief in progress. The second half of *I, too* describes an optimistic tomorrow, wherein the segregation and discrimination of Hughes contemporary society would be looked upon with shame:

“Tomorrow, / I'll be at the table / When company comes. / Nobody'll dare / Say to me, / "Eat in the kitchen," / Then.”

(Hughes 1994, 46)

Likewise, in *Let America Be America Again*, Hughes outright denies that the ideals of equality historically have applied to him and black Americans, but that this is not permanent:

“I say it plain, America never was America to me / And yet I swear this oath—
/ America will be!”

(Hughes 1994, 191)

Like Whitman, Hughes shows a belief in the individual in spite of oppressive circumstances. The message of *Let America Be* is one of solidarity among the disparaged. Yet, if one is faced with injustice, then it is the responsibility of the individual to resist and overcome. This belief in the individual's responsibility for prosperity is comparable to Whitman's appraisal of the American people described in 2.1.3 and 2.1.4. Thus, both Whitman and Hughes share an ideological belief in progress at the hands of the individual.

Hamilton resembles the poetry of Langston Hughes in that it echoes many themes of solidarity and equality for the oppressed. As mentioned in sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, *Hamilton* takes an ambiguous approach towards many of the themes of America which Whitman praises as virtues. Hughes and Miranda resemble each other in that they take their point of departure in historical injustices rather than political philosophy and ideals. Hughes raises awareness on of the history of black people in the United States as being a history of degradation and cruelty, and the dignity of black people in spite of these injustices. Being set at the beginning of US history, *Hamilton* instead uses foreshadowing to draw attention to these injustices:

“Or will the blood we shed begin an endless / Cycle of vengeance and death with no defendants?”

(Miranda, My Shot 2015)

“[Laurens:] Black and white soldiers wonder alike if this really means freedom /
[Washington:] Not yet”

(Miranda, Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down) 2015)

Both lines are formed as questions, the first one rhetorical and the second being more ambiguous, as discussed in section 2.1.2. Where Hughes’ poetry looks back at the past, *Hamilton*, Laurens, and Washington implicitly predict the future, meaning the period between the historical plot and the present in which the play is performed. This relation between the imagined past and performed present will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Another similarity between Hughes and Miranda is that their poetic styles are heavily inspired by popular music genres. Hughes was renowned for using contemporary styles of jazz and blues to get his message across (Hughes 1994, 4). Like Whitman, there is close attention to cadence and rhythm, but it is shorter and more forceful.

“I am the people, humble, hungry, mean— / Hungry yet today despite the dream”

(Hughes 1994, 190)

Despite not having any melody, *Let America Be America Again* resembles a jazz song in its cadence. This is echoed in *Hamilton* with a line of similar rhythm and wording: “I’m just like my country / I’m young, scrappy and hungry” (Miranda, My Shot 2015). The line almost resembles a pastiche of *Let America Be*, and both emphasize belonging to a people, rather than having the country act as an outside agent like Whitman does. But the similarity is not only in

the wording but in the use of a linguistic style most associated with a music genre. Both poets use a popular music genre of their respective era. This poetic appropriation of a contemporary musical style makes the pressing message more accessible and popular, as it fits into a larger subculture.

Though Miranda seems to have more in common with Hughes than with Whitman, a crucial commonality between Miranda and Whitman is their outlook on the United States, and how that sets them apart from Hughes. Hughes is associated with the Harlem Renaissance, which celebrated black culture and black artists. This created visibility for a demographic which had largely been ignored as a part of the American cultural landscape. Thus, Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance created a distinct cultural canon for an underrepresented group. With *Hamilton* Miranda does not engage with this alternate canon. Instead, minority artists tell the story of the United States as a whole in *Hamilton*. Using a style related to Hughes' jazz, Miranda conveys a message that resembles Whitman's America. The United States of *Hamilton* is therefore the ideal of the inclusive and the universal, which transcends ethnicity and race.

2.2 Frye and the American Mythology

US history can be compared to a mythology throughout the American identity, and not just in the case of poets like Whitman and Miranda. According to Northrop Frye, a myth is one story within a wider system of stories, i.e. a mythology. Myths and mythology are therefore the foundation for a given culture's self-representation (Greene & Cushman 2012, 906). Frye's use of mythology is similar to the theory of archetypes in a psycho-analytical framework. But where someone like Joseph Campbell or C.G. Jung would look at characters as archetypes, Frye instead views plot structures as the archetypes, or mythologies (Frye 1980, 28). The following chapter demonstrates how the American Mythology consists of specific plot structures and how these are presented in *Hamilton*.

2.2.1 Liberalism and Thomas Jefferson

The political ideology of Liberalism is the first aspect of the American self-representation which functions as a myth. Frye claims that myths are founded in a culture's pre-language infancy:

“I shall restrict the word myth to its more familiar sense of culturally early narratives, which come from a time when concepts and arguments and abstractions had not yet appeared in language.” (Frye 1980, 28).

Mythologies rarely have any discernible author; instead, they belong to a social group, stemming from a period before a literary tradition. But in the context of US history, there are no early cultural narratives outside literature. Pre-colonial era aside, the foundation of the United States was built upon concepts and abstractions which were prevalent in the literature of the time. The main difference is that this literature did not exist in poetry or fiction, which Frye claims. Instead they were devised in non-fictional treatises and documents. The Declaration of Independence is one such document which asserts the ideas and values of the country, but it is not a piece of poetry. It is instead a political document declaring independence from a colonizing force and a manifest of the Enlightenment Age's philosophy. This philosophy states that:

“all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (Jefferson et.al, 1776).

Here the unalienable rights are granted by a divine force as opposed to a monarch. It is a political statement in terms of which government form is most desirable, but moreover the quote reveals a distinct philosophical attitude towards the individual, namely the responsibility of an individual:

“But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, (...), it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security” (Jefferson et.al, 1776).

A population is not only entitled but compelled to secure their own happiness and prosperity. This reveals an ethical precept within the Declaration of Independence which transcends political doctrine. In comparison to Frye's analysis of the Bible as a mythological text, the ethical statements become a cultural doctrine.

“The arts form a rhetorical echo or chorus to the principles of morality and religion (...) Man, therefore, in the traditional Christian myth, is also born with a goal ahead of him, the raising of his state to the human level which is closer to what God intended for him.” (Frye 1980, 46)

Like the biblical mythology, the mythology instituted in the Declaration of Independence presents man with an aim to chase. While the core values of early Liberalism serve as a basis for the political system, they are also at the centre of the American cultural identity and consequently, its mythology.

Although the ideals and values of early Liberalism are present in *Hamilton*, they are not taken at face value. Instead, Miranda critiques them using ambiguous language. The song *My Shot* displays this doubt about the idealism of the Revolutionary War.

“[Hamilton:] And? If we win our independence? / Is that a guarantee of freedom for our descendants? / Or will the blood we shed begin an endless / Cycle of vengeance and death with no defendants?”

(Miranda, *My Shot* 2015)

By posing this question Miranda foreshadows the bloody history of the United States which would follow nation's founding. It is unclear whether this vengeance refers to further tensions between the British and the Americans, or amongst Americans themselves, especially since the play already draws attention to the slave-trade and its tragic underpinnings in its first song (Miranda, *Alexander Hamilton* 2015). Nonetheless the rhetorical question posed in *My Shot* foreshadows years of continuous struggle over the ideals found at the foundation of the Revolutionary movement.

Another example of the ambiguity of Hamilton's attitude towards the Enlightenment age's ideals is in the characterization of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson's contributions are praised and acknowledged in the play before the character appears on stage:

“[Eliza/Angelica/Peggy:] "We hold these truths to be self-evident / That all men are created equal" / [Angelica:] And when I meet Thomas Jefferson / I'mma compel him to include women in the sequel!”

(Miranda, *the Schuyler Sisters* 2015)

Yet following his introduction in Act 2, Jefferson's person is cast in an unflattering light. Within the first song *What'd I Miss?* there are allusions to his relationship with Sally Hemmings (monticello.org n.d.), and his attitude is arrogant and over-confident. Though credited as the author of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson does not live by these ideals. Hamilton is the first to point out these discrepancies:

“A civics lesson from a slaver. Hey, neighbour / Your debts are paid 'cause you don't pay for labour / (...) / And another thing, Mr. Age of Enlightenment / Don't lecture me about the war, you didn't fight in it”

(Miranda, Cabinet Battle #1 2015)

The nickname ‘Mr. Age of Enlightenment’ underlines the ambivalence towards Jefferson’s character. On one hand, it references his euhemeristic legacy, as Jefferson embodies the ideological foundation of the USA. On the other hand, the tone of the line is highly sarcastic. The epithet comes from Hamilton, Jefferson’s political opponent, though it can also be read as Miranda himself calling Jefferson out on his hypocrisy, as Miranda explains in an annotation of the lyrics: “This line actually feels like we’re in a time machine and we actually get to speak truth to the real Jefferson — things that we could never say to him.” (genius.com n.d). In *Cabinet Battle #2* however, it is implied that Jefferson does believe in the virtues he preaches.

“[Jefferson:] But sir, do we not fight for freedom? / [Washington:] Sure, when the French figure out who's gonna lead 'em”

(Miranda, Cabinet Battle #2 2015)

This indicates that Jefferson truly believes in the ideals which he advocates for, but on an overly idealistic level. There is therefore a sense of pragmatic scepticism towards Jefferson’s idealism. Though Miranda is critical of Jefferson as a historical figure, the ideals he stands for are still worth striving for.

The belief in liberal ideals of freedom and equality is apparent in the repeated line “raise a glass to freedom” and the character most associated with it: John Laurens. In his very first line, Laurens is cast as *Hamilton’s* champion of the abolitionist cause:

“But we'll never be truly free / Until those in bondage have the same rights as you and me”

(Miranda, My Shot 2015)

Where his comrades Lafayette and Mulligan’s verses revolve around personal ambition or social mobility, Laurens has a clear political goal. His adherence to abolishing slavery defines his character. Furthermore, it is a cause which is equated with freedom. Lauren’s last words are: “We'll never be free until we end slavery!” (Miranda, Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down) 2015). Similarly, Hamilton’s final words are an echo of a phrase which up until that point has only been said by Laurens: “Raise a glass to freedom” (Miranda, the Story of Tonight; the Story of Tonight (Reprise) ; The World Was Wide Enough 2015). Historians have

noted that the real Alexander Hamilton was not committed to the abolitionist cause; in fact, he had slaves of his own (Carp 2017, 292; Isenberg 2017, 298). Consequently, showing Hamilton and Laurens working tirelessly against slavery as in the song *Stay Alive* gives the impression that Hamilton was more anti-slavery than may have been the case. Yet the repetition of Laurens' line in *The World Was Wide Enough* shows the abolitionist cause is a part of the ideal of freedom.

2.2.2 The American Dream and the characterisation of Hamilton

While the Declaration of Independence sets forth the values and ideals of the American Mythology, the American Dream is the myth that best encapsulates these ideals. First coined in the 1930s by James Truslow Adams, the notion of the American Dream has been through many changing interpretations. What started as “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” (Clark 2007), has also become synonymous with homeownership and material prosperity in later years, as well as equal opportunities for all American citizens, naturally born or not (Clark 2007; Shiller 2017). But despite different interpretations of the American Dream, there is an underlying myth which illustrates the American mindset. The American Dream is a story which builds on the notion that circumstances or social status are irrelevant, and that tenacity and self-reliance are keys to achieving individual happiness.

One glaring problem with the American Dream in terms of equal opportunity and prosperity is that it does not reflect reality. Multiple recent studies have shown that social mobility is on the decline in the US (Da Costa 2017; Mathur 2018). Even so, one study found that the general perception of social mobility in the United States is still optimistic:

“An American born to a household in the bottom 20% of earnings, for instance, only has a 7.8% chance of reaching the top 20% when they grow up. Americans surveyed thought the probability was 11.7%.” (Americans overestimate social mobility in their country 2018)

This begs the question: Why is there still a belief in the American Dream present in contemporary US society? Some may argue that it is a question of faith and optimism, but that would mandate a sociological or psychological explanation. As I argue that the American Dream is a myth, it is therefore more relevant to examine how the myth is constructed. According to Frye, myths function as outlines for stories in a given culture, and thus their stylisation depends on the story-teller (Frye 1971, 135). The main advantage of the American

Dream is that it is so highly customizable for any audience due to its focus on individuality. The American Dream preaches self-reliance as a personal virtue, while simultaneously building upon the Enlightenment Age's ideals of liberty and equality. As a mythological narrative, the American Dream functions as an overarching myth of how the United States itself progressed from a collection of oppressed colonies to a global superpower. But this progression builds upon the individual tenacity and persistence of its people, who likewise work towards upward social mobility and prosperity. This narrative structure applies to any story and yields the same moral message: that the individual's own happiness is their own responsibility. Therefore, the American Dream serves as a promise of a reward for individual capabilities.

In *Hamilton* the American Dream does not represent an objective, but rather a set of virtues. This is expressed in the very introduction of Hamilton's character:

“The ten-dollar Founding Father without a father / Got a lot farther by working a lot harder / By being a lot smarter / By being a self-starter”

(Miranda, Alexander Hamilton 2015)

The first trait described is Hamilton's relentless work-ethic. Throughout the play there are many instances wherein Hamilton works tirelessly towards a specific goal, even to the detriment of his personal relationships. An example of this is in the song *Take A Break*, wherein Hamilton declines taking a break with Eliza and Angelica. Instead he obsessively works on convincing Congress to approve his debt plan, first introduced in *Cabinet Battle #1*. To Hamilton, his work is an opportunity which is seen in the refrain of *My Shot* at the end of *Non-Stop*: “[Hamilton:] I am not throwin' away my shot!” (Miranda, Non-Stop 2015). Thereby Hamilton's career is a means to an end. Furthermore, Hamilton's tirelessness is depicted as extreme. This is again made clear in *Non-Stop* by Burr and the chorus:

“How do you write like you're / Running out of time? / Write day and night like you're / Running out of time”

(Miranda, Non-Stop 2015)

Hamilton demonstrates a relentless engagement in his work which Burr and the chorus express astonishment at. Thereby it is not just Hamilton's dedication which is notable, but the energy he puts into his work.

In addition to his work-ethic, Hamilton is also called a self-starter. This could connote his independent and self-sufficient nature. In a culture so insistent on individualism and personal drive, Hamilton's reputation as a self-starter is practically a cardinal virtue. Yet this is not entirely accurate, as Hamilton's advancements are in large part due to his friends and allies recognising his talents. As an example, Hamilton himself does not convince Washington to give him a position of command. Instead it is Lafayette in the song *Guns and Ships*:

“We can end this war at Yorktown, cut them off at sea, but / For this to succeed,
there is someone else we need / [Washington:] I know / Hamilton!”

(Miranda, *Guns and Ships* 2015)

Likewise, Hamilton's his journey to New York City was the result of a collective effort from his community as described in the song *Alexander Hamilton*. Therefore, the moniker of a self-starter is not suitable as an expression of Hamilton's self-sufficiency. Instead, the 'self-starter' refers to his destitute background. Hamilton's origins are from a place of no privilege whatsoever, as Burr repeats throughout the play with the phrase: “How does a bastard, orphan ... (etc..)” (Miranda, *Alexander Hamilton*; *A Winter's Ball*; *What'd I Miss*; *Your Obedient Servant* 2015). In all cases, the title draws attention to the contrast between Hamilton's impoverished origins and his advancements in the story. These advancements are dependent on Hamilton's inherent talents and his own qualities, rather than the result of a having a wealthy family or a high quality education. Therefore, being a self-starter is not indicative of Hamilton's independence of social influences, but rather, it refers to a set of essential qualities or talents within Hamilton which are unrelated to his environment.

As implied in *Alexander Hamilton*, Hamilton's defining talent is his intelligence. This intelligence is mainly expressed through writing, and this application will be further explored in section 4.3. Yet for a large part of Act 1, Hamilton is reluctant to apply his writing skills as he argues with Washington:

“[Washington:] Your reputation precedes you, but I have to laugh / [Hamilton:]
Sir? / [Washington:] Hamilton, how come no one can get you on their staff? /
[Hamilton:] Sir! / [Washington:] (...) Nathaniel Green and Henry Knox wanted
to hire you / [Hamilton:] To be their Secretary? I don't think so”

(Miranda, *Right Hand Man* 2015)

Once Washington convinces him that his talents are best used off the battlefield, Hamilton sees this as an opportunity and true to his nature, he seizes it. In relation to the line at the beginning of *Alexander Hamilton* that he: “Got a lot farther by working a lot harder / By being a lot smarter / By being a self-starter” (Miranda, *Alexander Hamilton* 2015) the three qualities which characterise Hamilton’s ability to reach the American dream represent different aspects of his character. His work ethic is an expression of Hamilton’s greatest virtue, his self-sufficient attitude refers to his inherent talents, which include his intelligence and writing skills.

While these traits all refer to what gets Hamilton farther, they do not tell us a lot about what Hamilton is getting farther towards. Hamilton’s American Dream is not as explicit as achieving material wealth or necessarily creating a comfortable life. In *My Shot* Hamilton introduces himself and his motivation, which could be counted as the first inkling the audience gets towards his goal:

“Don't be shocked when your history book mentions me / I will lay down my life
if it sets us free / Eventually, you'll see my ascendancy”

(Miranda, *My Shot* 2015)

The implication is that Hamilton wants to create a name for himself, which will be remembered throughout history. For the majority of Act 1, this is equated martyrdom, as Hamilton frequently expresses his willingness to die for the Revolution (Miranda, *My Shot*; *Right Hand Man*; *Meet Me Inside* 2015). After nearly being forbidden to do so by Washington in *Meet Me Inside* Hamilton’s goal shifts. Following the events of *Meet Me Inside* Hamilton intends not only to survive the war and start a family with Eliza, but to continue making a name for himself by developing the United States’ financial policies. Hamilton’s goals are thereby more abstract and far-sighted than simply gaining material wealth: he wants to establish a legacy. This theme of a legacy is crucial in *Hamilton* and will be further explored in sections 3.2 and 4.4. But as an aspect of the American Dream, Hamilton’s legacy is the goal he works towards. And it is only in his final line that he reflects on what this goal actually means:

“Legacy. What is a legacy? / It’s planting seeds in a garden you never get to see
/ I wrote some notes at the beginning of a song someone will sing for me”

(Miranda, *The World Was Wide Enough* 2015)

This connects his political with his military career, since in both cases Hamilton devotes his life to a cause greater than himself: The United States. This makes Hamilton’s American Dream

a reflection on his contributions to the nation. Furthermore, this philanthropic dedication to the nation as a goal adheres to the idea of the American Dream as a short-hand for social mobility. Hamilton expresses this social mobility in the final monologue of *The World Was Wide Enough*:

“You let me make a difference / A place where even orphan immigrants / Can leave their fingerprints and rise up”

(Miranda, *The World Was Wide Enough* 2015)

As discussed in section 2.1.3, the difference Hamilton makes is finite in the larger context of the US, but it invites others like him to continue his legacy. By repeating the phrase “rise up”, first heard in the context of the revolution in *My Shot*, Hamilton expresses the possibility of rising above one’s social circumstances, and moreover, a moral obligation to do so. Hamilton’s legacy thereby amounts to the American Dream.

2.2.3 The Cultural Melting Pot and Miranda’s Immigrant narrative

One aspect of the American Mythology that proves controversial is the idea of the Great Cultural Melting Pot. It lies in extension of the American Dream insofar that natural-born citizenship is not a prerequisite for being considered an American. This lies in contrast to the European concept of nationhood as one homogenous people (Clark 2007). However, the myth of the Great Melting Pot was not always at the forefront of the American self-identity. Like the American Dream, the Great Melting Pot was only incorporated into the American Mythology much later. One example of this is the Statue of Liberty and what it represents for different groups of Americans.

Although the Statue of Liberty denotes liberal ideology, this is not the only interpretation available. The Statue is a replicate of the Roman goddess Libertas or Lady Liberty. She holds a torch in her right hand and a stone tablet with the date of American Independence “July 4 1776” inscribed in Roman numerals. This link to Roman mythology creates a connection between the ancient republic Rome and the modern republic of the USA. This is similar to how Whitman created a connection between his poetry and the classical poetry of Ancient Rome and Greece. However, the ideological symbolism of the Statue of Liberty connotes a different, although related moral about liberty and republicanism. The Statue of Liberty stands in New York Harbour, near the historical immigration hub Ellis Island. For many immigrants, the Statue of Liberty would have been the first thing they saw upon arriving in the US. For someone who does not understand the political implications, the

Statue instead carries a quite different meaning. This is underlined by the poem inscribed on the pedestal of the statue: *The New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus.

“Give me your tired, your poor / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free /
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-
tost to me / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

(Lazarus 1883)

In contrast to the republican-oriented symbolism, Lazarus instead paints a vastly different picture: Lady Liberty is a figure who welcomes the disenfranchised and the exiled. In lieu of a message of conquest and victory in the name of liberty, Lazarus' poem focuses instead on the promise of freedom and most importantly, equality. According to Frye, this is a feasible phenomenon in myths. Mythologies are social constructs, in the sense that they are created and recreated by poets, who each inhabit a given social context. Depending on the contemporary issues which face the poet in question, myths may come to represent entirely different things (Frye 1980, 7). This is what both the poetry of Langton Hughes and the statue's inscription prove. Though it does not ignore Liberalism, Lazarus' poem adds another factor to the mythology which belongs to an entirely different group: the immigrants. The myth of the immigrant coming to the United States to achieve the American Dream overlaps quite neatly with the mythological foundation of the country which states: “all men are created equal.” (Jefferson et.al 1776). Thus, the two interpretations of the Statue of Liberty overlap. It functions as an icon of early liberal ideology and as a symbol of the American Dream and implied prosperity for immigrants arriving in New York City.

Like the statue of Liberty symbolises a multifaceted understanding of ‘the American promise’, *Hamilton* presents audiences with a similarly complex view of what it means to be American. This happens namely in its characterization of Hamilton as an immigrant. It is never explicitly stated where Hamilton is from, just that he is from a “forgotten spot in the Caribbean” (Miranda, Alexander Hamilton 2015), thus implying that he has a stronger affiliation to the United States than his birthplace. Yet his rivals often use the epithet of ‘immigrant’ as a slur against him. In the song *The Room Where It Happens* Burr refers to “two Virginians and an immigrant walk into a room” (Miranda, The Room Where It Happens 2015), and in *We Know* Burr, Madison, and Jefferson use ‘immigrant’ to underline the scandalous nature of Hamilton's perceived corruption:

“[Burr:] An immigrant embezzling our government funds / [Jefferson/Madison:] I can almost see the headline, your career is done / [Burr:] I hope you saved some money for your daughter and sons / [Burr/Jefferson/Madison:] Ya best g'wan run back where ya come from!”

(Miranda, *We Know* 2015)

In both cases ‘immigrant’ does not only connote a foreignness, but rather, a lack of any discernible community. They disregard Hamilton’s original birthplace but underline that his alien nature. This xenophobic attitude is more related to the rhetoric of Miranda’s contemporary society, rather than the political reality of the time. As Magness notes, Hamilton would have been viewed as a fellow subject of the British Empire, not a foreign immigrant (Magness 2017, 499). Thus, Miranda uses the xenophobia towards Hamilton to show an intrinsic part of the immigrant experience in 2015. Yet the status of being an immigrant does not exclude Hamilton from claiming an American identity. While he does use the epithet of ‘immigrant’ to describe himself, Hamilton asserts himself as being unabashedly American. This is best exemplified in a line from *My Shot*, which is repeated in *Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)*: “I’m just like my country / I’m young, scrappy and hungry”. Hamilton’s dual identity of an immigrant and an American exposes the ambiguity of the American self-representation: being American is not necessarily dependent on the heritage of being a natural-born citizen of the US. What matters makes one American is how one contributes to the betterment of American society. This betterment of the United States in *Hamilton* is also a duality. Firstly, it relates to Hamilton’s biographical accomplishments as the first Secretary of Treasury, among other undertakings. Secondly, it underlines Miranda’s own contribution to the American mythological canon. *Hamilton* is a piece of poetry which partakes in the American Mythology from the point of view of an immigrant who is just as intrinsic a part of the American historical canon as the other American-born Founding Fathers.

2.3 Summary

This chapter has discussed the thematic aspects of *Hamilton* in the context of an American poetic canon. The canon is characterised by a distinct mythology about the US, including a euhemeristic view of the Founding Fathers, democracy as a universal ideal, and the political philosophy of early liberalism as an ethical manifest for the individual. Writers like Whitman, Hughes, and Miranda all base their poetry around this shared mythology but differ in their approaches to it. Whitman glorifies the United States and its virtuosity in accordance with the ideals stated above, while Hughes points out the exclusion of especially black Americans from

this narrative. Miranda takes an altogether different approach. While *Hamilton* subscribes to the same overarching myth of a rags-to-riches story, it does so by framing Hamilton's life as an immigrant narrative. Yet these dual identities of Hamilton as an immigrant and as a Founding Father are not mutually exclusive. Hamilton is an immigrant who contributed to the US's foundation on the same level as his natural-born counterparts. Thus, Miranda expands the American Mythology to include minority voices, rather than having them adhere to a separate chapter of the American Mythology.

3 The theatrics of *Hamilton*

Establishing *Hamilton* as a text that draws upon a larger American Mythology, rather than US history exclusively, leaves us with an understanding of its textual merits. Yet, *Hamilton* is not strictly literature, it is also a piece of theatre. And not just theatre, it is a Broadway-production. To understand how this affects the story *Hamilton* tells about the United States and Americans, we need to understand the scene upon which the narrative is performed. This chapter explores different aspects of theatre as an artform and how *Hamilton* uses these in its storytelling.

3.1 Theatre as a ritual

If the roots of western poetry are mythological, then the roots of western theatre are ritualistic. The origins of theatre were rituals performed to honour Dionysus. These rituals originally used masks, a trait which would be brought into the practice of theatre in the 5th cent BCE. The masks were an essential part of both early Greek theatre and the Dionysiac rituals “... for Dionysus is the god of the mask by which Greek actors literally and figuratively concealed their “real” identities.” (Kallendorf & Kallendorf 2012, 298). This incorporation of masks blurs the lines between fiction and reality. Likewise, an actor pretending to be someone else also shows a disconnect with reality. Besides honouring a god, the ritualistic nature of theatre is also present in Aristotle’s term *catharsis*. Aristotle describes catharsis as the release of emotions built up during a play (Kallendorf & Kallendorf 2012, 300). While there is some debate on how to interpret this term, one of the most common definitions is that catharsis is a form purification. In extension to this, catharsis is comparable to the ritual of exorcism, where the violent passions stirred up among the audience are exorcised:

“The spectators, too, are possessed, then relieved, as the emotions and the daimones pass away from them in an emotional exorcism, or catharsis” (Kallendorf & Kallendorf 2012, 306).

This definition lends itself well to theatre as a ritual, as acting out a tragedy functions as a ritual of emotional purification, in the same vein as the sacrificing a goat is a ritual of religious purification. In both cases participants go through a process of purification through the mediation of an outer influence, either a priest, or in the case of theatre, an actor. This emotional ritual is what gives theatre its mystic nature: the transcendence of the natural and orderly world into the divine and chaotic.

The ritualistic interpretation of theatre has drastic implications for the mythology presented in *Hamilton*, since *Hamilton* can be interpreted as a tragedy. This is especially clear in the ritualistic cleansing of emotions, or catharsis. We see this in the characterisation of Burr as a tragic villain, or a tragic hero in his own right. In the introductory song *Alexander Hamilton*, Burr reveals himself to be the future villain of the story, and with this knowledge the audience is aware of Hamilton's fate: that he will eventually be killed by Burr. Those who are familiar with the historical accounts of Alexander Hamilton's life will already be aware of this ending, but as a dramatic storytelling technique, the foreshadowing cements the play as a tragedy. Frye describes the plot or mythos of a tragic plot as being the triumph of fate, the will of the gods, or the law of nature over the tragic hero's mortal intentions (Frye 1971, 208). In *Hamilton* the battle does not rage against the gods or nature, but history. And the character most preoccupied with his role in history is Aaron Burr, cast as the tragic villain. Miranda gives Burr two major functions in the play as both the villain and the narrator. As a narrator he presents historical events to the audience, giving him an omniscience about the history which he is a part of, as established in the very first song: "And me? I'm the damn fool that shot him" (Miranda, *Alexander Hamilton* 2015). But despite being aware of the path he is set on, Burr still laments this fate after it has come to pass:

"History obliterates / In every picture it paints / It paints me and all my mistakes / (...)/ Now I'm the villain in your history / I was too young and blind to see... / I should've known / I should've known the world was wide enough for both Hamilton and me / The world was wide enough for both Hamilton and me"

(Miranda, *The World Was Wide Enough* 2015)

By Frye's definition of tragedy, this should make Burr the tragic hero in *Hamilton*, as he is defeated by his own fate. Yet, he does not refer to it as fate or destiny but history. He is the villain or the damn fool who shot Hamilton and he knows that he will be forever libelled for this by generations to come. Therefore, the triumph of history or fate in the trajectory of a tragedy comes at the expense of two characters. The first is Hamilton, who is killed by his friend, and the second is Burr, who is condemned by future historians as a murderer. Burr's tragic fate as the villain in our history delivers the moment of catharsis. The audience, having witnessed his own development in tandem with Hamilton's, sees him humanised and thus redeemed. "Whereas Adams and Jefferson have their flaws revealed, Burr acquires other dimensions than those of the 'fool' who shot Hamilton." (Whall 2018, 246). Burr is throughout the play presented in a sympathetic light, as his motivations and ambitions mirror those of his

rival Hamilton. One example is how the two men contrast each other in the song *Dear Theodosia*:

“[Hamilton:] I'll do whatever it takes / [Burr:] I'll make a million mistakes /
[Burr/Hamilton:] I'll make the world safe and sound for you”

(Miranda, *Dear Theodosia* 2015)

Where Hamilton vows to defend his new-born son, Burr displays his anxieties about being a father. By having Burr contrast Hamilton's flaws and virtues, Miranda shows how the two men's relationship develop throughout their lives. Through a poetic reinterpretation of his character Burr is no longer the “damn fool” who shot Hamilton, but a cautious, patient man who was set upon a path he could not avoid. Thus, the ritual cleanses both the audience of their emotions, and cleanses Burr of his legacy as a mere historical murderer.

3.2 Theatre as an interaction

In extension to poetry being based on a mythology, theatre is a performance of mythology. But as a ritual this performance needs participants. Theatre requires two types of participants to be physically present in the ritual: the actors and the audience. Additionally, it depends on a suitable location and formalised code of conduct which limits its execution. Literature does not have these constraints. To give an example, a reader can bring a book onto a train to read, without needing the author to be physically present. A theatre-goer does not have this mobility. Theatre needs an audience to be physically present to witness the performance of the actors. This does not necessarily relegate an audience to being passive spectators however. The interaction between actors and audience is paramount for a play's stylisation. It is no coincidence that the term breaking the fourth wall, though often used in literature, is mainly associated with drama. While often used for comedic effect, there is also a moralizing or enlightening effect in addressing the audience directly. This was among others explored by dramatist Bertolt Brecht, who attempted to engage the audience from passive spectators to actively reflecting on the actions upon the stage (Freshwater 2009, 46-47). The interaction between audience and actors was more jarring and more interactional than the normal and more predictable ‘culinary theatre’ (Freshwater 2009, 47). An example of a fourth-wall breaking interaction with the audience is found in the closing soliloquy of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: “And this weak and idle theme, No more yielding but a dream” (Shakespeare 5.1 414-415). The final monologue blurs the boundary between the audience and

the actors. Although Shakespeare breaches the imaginary borders between the audience and the cast, he does not acknowledge it as the meeting between reality and fiction. Instead he describes it as a dichotomy between being awake and asleep. To compare it to the masks of Dionysiac rituals, the actors do not take off their masks entirely, instead they move it slightly to reveal that there is a face underneath. Breaking the fourth wall is a way for actors to directly communicate with the audience, something which literature does not achieve in the same face-to-face manner. Returning to the ritual and religious origins of theatre, the medium has often been used to communicate a moral or a comedic message and breaking the fourth wall is exceptionally useful for this purpose. By crossing the threshold between the fictional into the space inhabited by both actor and audiences, the playwright can directly communicate a moral to the audience.

While there are many fourth wall breaks in *Hamilton*, the most interactive aspect of the play is the character of Eliza. She is essentially the antithesis to Burr. Where Burr is passive and resigned to his fate, or his role in history as he refers to it, Eliza seems uninterested in her role in history: “We don't need a legacy / We don't need money” (Miranda, *That Would Be Enough* 2015). This is in direct contrast to her husband, who is shown to be very preoccupied with the legacy he leaves behind. Instead Eliza refers to ‘the narrative’ and is very proactive in shaping it.

“Oh, let me be a part of the narrative / In the story they will write someday / Let this moment be the first chapter / Where you decide to stay”

(Miranda, *That Would Be Enough* 2015)

Rather than having Eliza ask her husband to let her be a part of his life, Miranda frames their relationship as an act of storytelling, which it essentially is from the perspective of the playwright. But Eliza wants to shape their story instead of letting a disconnected hand write it for them. This view of her life as a story within a story is repeated in the song *Burn*. She does not confront or leave Hamilton, instead she removes herself from his life story:

“I'm erasing myself from the narrative / Let future historians wonder / How Eliza reacted when you broke her heart / (...) / Watching it burn / The world has no right to my heart / The world has no place in our bed / They don't get to know what I said”

(Miranda, *Burn* 2015)

By destroying the evidence of her love for her husband, Eliza takes control of the role she would otherwise be expected to play: the role of a betrayed wife or a victim of adultery. With *Burn* Miranda gives Eliza privacy to her grief creating a paradox. *Hamilton* is a biographical work and by its nature, readers should ideally have access to all aspects of the subjects' life. Yet Eliza actively chooses not to involve historians or audiences her heartbreak. By burning the letters, she excludes the world to her story and denies Hamilton his role as her husband. This is not where Eliza's story ends however. Following her husband's death in *Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story*, Eliza actively returns to the narrative. This time it is not for her husband's story but for her own. She describes in detail how she would go on to undertake the task of preserving her husband's legacy, support the abolitionist cause and open the first public orphanage (Miranda, *Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story* 2015). This act of narrating her own story as well as her husbands in the face of her creator or author, reveals the play's moral. Like her husband, Eliza is proactive and self-sufficient, not materially, but in terms of her legacy. It is precisely this legacy she invites the audience to engage with in a face-to-face manner unique to theatre alone. When Eliza poses the question: "And when my time is up / Have I done enough? / Will they tell our story?" she symbolically passes the baton to the audience. As Whall argues:

"This metamyth makes it a moral imperative to tell the stories of slaves, colonized Native Americans, abused immigrants, neglected women and any other whose story has been suppressed. Ultimately, this myth that announces itself as a myth preserves core American values in a way that not only brings audiences to their feet but also inspires audience to act according to those values." (Whall 2018, 248)

Hamilton expresses an imperative to keep the legacy of Alexander and Eliza Hamilton alive. However, Whall's analysis does not take the ritualistic elements of theatre into account. The audience is actively brought into the narrative and involved with the Hamilton legacy, both Eliza's and Alexander's. And similar to how Brecht uses fourth-wall breaks to actively involve the audience, Miranda uses Eliza's final plea to the audience as an invitation to include themselves in the act of telling their story. This is why *Hamilton* could not have been anything else than a stage play, as the message is entirely dependent on being orally presented to an audience, who are placed in the same time and space as the actors are.

Eliza's invitation to the audience is meaningful because *Hamilton* is a poetic retelling of history, rather than a fictional story. Instead of treating history as a mythologised past

separate from the present, Miranda focuses on the legacy of the Hamiltons. The main difference between Burr's 'history' and Hamilton's 'legacy' is that a legacy is dynamic. Legacies are given to future generations and can thereby be reinterpreted through poetry, as Miranda proves with his musical. It is not simply a poetic retelling of past actions or achievements, it is a ritual storytelling of memory and reiteration of a legacy which a past hero left for future generations. But in *Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story*, Miranda emphasises that this is not necessarily the only way to interpret the story of Eliza and Alexander Hamilton. The chorus asks, "will they tell your story?", yet they also imply 'how will they tell your story?'. Miranda thereby invites the audience to actively engage and shape the narrative. Thus, the audience takes part in the ritual of theatre and in a ritual of memory.

3.3 Theatre as a heterotopia

Though theatre has distinctive constraints of time and space, this is also where it is at its most effective. Using a term from Foucault, theatre is a *heterotopia*. In his essay *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault sets forth six principles to study the phenomenon of heterotopias, or spaces which serve contrasting functions. Of these six principles, three are especially useful for analysing the function of a theatre as a place of ritual. These are the third, fourth and sixth principle. Interestingly, Foucault makes only a passing reference to the theatre as a heterotopia in his third principle:

"The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another" (Foucault and Miskowiec 1984, 6).

The heterotopia functions as a microcosm: a space that encompasses the entire world. Foucault gives the example of a garden being a representation of the universe and the stage in a theatre representing different places in the course of a play.

3.3.1 The third principle: gardens and stages

Foucault mentions that a stage brings together several places that are mutually exclusive. To expand on this, a play may take place in different, mutually exclusive locations, but still be presented on the same stage. This also extends the actors playing the scenes, as they must navigate these represented places guiding the audience to read the stage as the place in question. Here the stage is a more abstract microcosm than the garden in Foucault's example, since it does not only visually present a condensed version of the world, but it also engages

with this version of the world through actors and props. In the microcosm of a stage the world is represented through meticulously planned actions and dialogue, rather than artistic fountains and plants. If “The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1984, 6), then theatre is the smallest parcel of the human experience. Just as the garden has a limited space to represent the order and totality of the universe, so too does theatre have the limited space of the stage and a fixed timeframe to convey universal emotions.

There is a deliberate dramaturgical choice in the casting of *Hamilton* which Foucault’s heterotopia can explain. In the original Broadway cast, actors Daveed Diggs, Anthony Ramos, Okieriete Onaodowan and Jasmine Cephas Jones play different roles in Act 1 and Act 2. While many scholars have already commented on the counter-colour casting, these dual roles also pose a unique aspect of the dramaturgy of *Hamilton*. Having the same actors play different roles shows that Hamilton is completely detached from his allies in Act 1 and is instead surrounded by rivals and antagonists. Thus, the duality marks a shift in tone between the acts. This is reminiscent of the ancient practice of wearing caricatured masks to convey different characters, but in *Hamilton* there are no masks. Using Foucault’s terminology, the actors themselves become heterotopias. The actors’ representation of multiple people poses a paradox since a person can only inhabit one body. The only way these new characters are distinguished from the ones played in Act 1 are through the dialogue and contrasting character personalities. As an example, Jasmine Cephas-Jones plays two very contrasting characters in the show: Peggy Schuyler and Maria Reynolds. Though she has the fewest lines of *The Schuyler Sisters*, Peggy is portrayed as timid and innocent compared to her elder sisters.

“[Peggy:] Daddy said to be home by sundown / [Angelica:] Daddy doesn't need to know / [Peggy:] Daddy said not to go downtown / [Eliza:] Like I said, you're free to go”

(Miranda, the Schuyler Sisters 2015)

In Act 2 Cephas-Jones plays Maria Reynolds, Hamilton’s extramarital lover (Miranda, Say No To This 2015). Not only are the characters complete opposites, but Cephas-Jones’s vocal performance changes noticeably to suit each character. This difference between the performance rests solely on the actor’s ability to represent two mutually exclusive personas. In terms of Foucault’s third principle of the heterotopia, Cephas-Jones presents a condensed version of two women. She does this not by using two different masks, but by her own acting and singing skills. To continue Foucault’s garden-metaphor, while the garden represents the

world through its architecture and carefully maintained flora, an actor represents the world through his or her vocal, facial, or physical expressions. In *Hamilton*, this dual casting highlights the actors craft, and due to the counter-colour casting this prompts reflection on the state of the theatre industry at large:

“Miranda’s exchange system simultaneously makes that audience consider how much talent has been suppressed by directors unconscious of the biases built into realism, let alone the suppression of talent built into corporate, academic and generally professionalized America.” (Whall 2018, 247)

By having actors play multiple characters the audience becomes more aware of the representation than the individual character. This emphasises not only the actor’s ethnicity in contrast to the historically white characters they are playing, but more importantly, it emphasises the actors’ own talent and craftsmanship. As a heterotopia in themselves actors carry the universality of the human experience through their art, similar to the garden carrying the world in its architecture.

3.3.2 The fourth principle: libraries and *Suitcase* (2008)

Though Foucault briefly illustrates theatre in the third principle of a heterotopia, it is much better situated in his fourth principle: the heterochrony. This type of heterotopia encompasses different times as opposed to places. They can accumulate time, as in the case of museums or libraries, which display objects representative of different points in history (Foucault og Miskowiec 1984, 7). They can also be temporally bound, as in the case of a festival, which only lasts a couple of days. The location of a festival is during most of the year completely empty, but this emptiness lies in direct contrast to those few days where the same place is teeming with activity. (Foucault and Miskowiec 1984, 7). Similarly, the theatre and the stage are empty spaces, except for at the time of a performance, when there is an audience and a cast to engage in the art. Furthermore, a stage production can also accumulate time like a museum or a library. One particularly example of a theatrical heterochrony that embodies both the temporary and the historical aspects of a heterochrony was the production of *Suitcase*.

In her article *Theatre's Heterotopia and the Site-Specific Production of "Suitcase"* Tompkins (2012) analyses the 2008 production *Suitcase* as a heterotopia, encompassing multiple aspects of time. The production was staged at Liverpool Station as a single-day performance, commemorating the 1938 *kindertransport*. As a site-specific production, it did

not take place on a stage, but on the real-life location of Liverpool Station, where the first kindertransport arrived (Tompkins 2012, 102). As a heterochrony the train station represented the time of the performance, as Tompkins notes that commuters going in and out of the station had to interact with the performers, and by extension the time being represented in the performance i.e. 1938-1940 (Tompkins 2012, 103). This connects the two points in history placing the audience in Liverpool Station both as it was in the imagined past and as it was during the real-time of the production. The audience actually moved between different points in time.

Like *Suitcase*, the heterochronic nature of *Hamilton* lies between the stage and the setting of the play, because these locations are the same. *Hamilton* opened on Broadway in New York City emphasising the connection between the past and the present in the same location. While there is a significant distance between the historical past in which *Hamilton* takes place and the present in which it is being performed, there is no real physical distance between the two. This spatial proximity allows audiences to interact with the past in a much more tangible way than reading about it, or watching it performed on a screen. Because the audience is physically present with the actors performing, there is an even deeper sense of history ‘coming alive’. Yet the setting and the stage are not the only two roles New York City has to play in *Hamilton*.

In the musical’s lyrics there is a recurring motif of New York City as a place of reinvention. Section 2.2.3 discussed a similar element in the American Mythology: The Statue of Liberty. And like the Statue of Liberty as an icon of New York City connotes cosmopolitanism and the Cultural Melting Pot, *Hamilton* equates New York City with the promise of starting a new life. The Schuyler sisters convey this motif in their introductory song:

“History is happening in Manhattan and we just happen to be / In the greatest city in the world!”

(Miranda, *The Schuyler Sisters* 2015)

Furthermore, there is another recurring line about New York City which further shows the city as being a place of reinvention: “In New York you can be a new man” (Miranda, *Alexander Hamilton*; *Helpless* 2015). Since the Statue of Liberty would not be erected for another century after Hamilton arrived in New York, this line depicts lyrically what the statue depicts visually. In both cases New York City is a place with a reputation for being somewhere for the individual to reinvent themselves, their native origins aside. Thus, in

Hamilton New York City signifies a real location, both historically and currently, as well as a mythological place wherein the American Dream and the Cultural Melting Pot are a social reality. But the significance of New York City goes further than the staging and the lyrics. The city is also embedded within the very stylisation of *Hamilton* as a Broadway production.

3.3.3 The sixth principle: colonies and Broadway

The final principle is more visible in the branding of Broadway as a theatre district, than theatre in general. A heterotopia can either compensate or contrast the places they reflect. Foucault gives the example of the early American colonies, which served to create a perfect society which lay in contrast to the society they left behind:

“... their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled.”
(Foucault and Miskowiec 1984, 8)

Everything in these colonies was organised in a way which exposed the chaotic nature of the surrounding world. But where the example of the colonies seeks to create a perfect and ordered world to contrast the disorganised world outside, art seeks to imitate the chaos, or at least explain it. This is especially true in the case of theatre, as the nature of theatre is to imitate reality by way of *mimesis*. Mimesis is the art of imitation, or “...the copying of reality frequently practiced in theatre” (Freshwater 2009, 38). This copying is not necessarily faithful to reality but distorts or exaggerates it. Through mimesis theatre creates a space of illusions, one which reveals a truth about its surroundings. This is especially relevant in the case of Broadway, which contrasts its surrounding neighbourhoods.

The term ‘Broadway’ has multiple meanings. It is a physical place in New York City, most commonly known for its theatre district. But a ‘Broadway musical’ is shorthand for the style of musical theatre originating in this district. An entirely different understanding of Broadway is as an industry with a very recognizable profile: a brand. In his article *Broadway as Global Brand* Savran (2017) argues that Broadway is a highly localised brand with a very recognizable profile abroad (Savran 2017, 31). It became trademarked by the Broadway League in the 1990s and has since gone global, enjoying enormous success in places like Korea and Germany.

“Simone Genatt, the President of Broadway Asia, notes how musicals function today in the world marketplace: Broadway is an incredibly powerful brand. Much

more powerful [abroad] . . . than in the American system. It really denotes money [and] the best of the West” (Savran 2017, 31)

However, despite global popularity, Broadway as a brand specifically portrays New York City, albeit a specific version of New York City. In the same way in which brothels or colonies organise themselves in contrast to the surrounding world in Foucault’s sixth principle, Broadway organises itself in contrast to the rest of New York City. While it is a physical district in New York City, Broadway represents the fantasy of New York’s musical theatre industry. Its brand denotes a certain American aesthetic in musical theatre, one combining modern musical genres, dance numbers and European-inspired plots. (Savran 2017, 25-26). As studies and statistics demonstrate, this fantasy is mainly accessible to the upper class.¹ Broadway therefore lies in juxtaposition to the rest of New York City, which lies outside the theatre’s fictional performances and outside the social class of the average Broadway attendee. Yet Broadway is an essential part of New York City’s identity, though it is a very exclusive characteristic of the city.

Hamilton juxtaposes the setting of New York City on a Broadway stage with the real New York City outside the theatre. It takes advantage of on the theatrical fantasy of New York City which Savran describes and contrasts it with the historical New York City: one of battlefields, slums and a nation in development. The lyrics of *Hamilton* reference places such as Harlem, Brooklyn and New Jersey. These are all places which still exist today, albeit in very different forms. Where Broadway contrasts the New York City which lies outside the theatre and stages, *Hamilton* imitates this outside world. *Hamilton* subverts Broadway’s aesthetic by

The gross income of the musicals in 2015-2016 (the season *Hamilton* premiered) was \$1,173 million (thebroadwayleague.com, n.d.). By comparison, the box office gross sales in the United States in 2015 were at \$11,129.4 million (boxofficemojo.com, n.d.). Despite only constituting around 40 theatres in downtown New York City, Broadway generates slightly over 1/10th of the revenue the movie industry does across roughly 40’000 movie screens across the United States (natoonline.org) Furthermore, Broadway tickets cost \$105 on average (thebroadwayleague.com n.d.), where movie tickets only cost around \$9 (boxofficemojo.com, n.d.). This demonstrates that Broadway attracts a proportionally large audience, on who are not deterred by expensive tickets. The study *From Broadway to the Bistro* shows a more in-depth analysis of the demographic, though it should be noted, that this study is not limited to New York, but was conducted over 34 states. Nonetheless, the overarching trend shows that attendees of musical plays are usually highly educated, high income and very interested in supporting the arts (McCleary, Lattimer & Clemenz 199, 201). Thus, Broadway’s industry is not only lucrative, it is also exclusive.

substituting its own sixth principle heterotopia it. In an interview with the Atlantic Miranda states:

“This is a story about America then, told by America now, (...) and we want to eliminate any distance between a contemporary audience and this story.” (Delman 2015).

This ‘America now’ is pivotal to understanding the Miranda’s perspective as a playwright. The America he represents is in complete contrast to the America often associated with Broadway. The counter-colour casting and use of hip hop as the main musical influence in *Hamilton* imitates the multi-ethnic makeup of New York City today onstage. Section 2.2.3 discussed the immigrant narrative as it relates to the character of Hamilton himself. Similarly, the cosmopolitan nature of New York City is reflected in how Miranda organises the play as an imitation of the New York City outside Broadway.

3.4 Summary

This chapter examined the ritualistic and site-specific nature of theatre and how *Hamilton* takes advantage of it. As a tragedy, *Hamilton* features both a tragic villain and a cathartic release of emotion. This happens when Burr seals his fate as Hamilton’s murderer, and is thereby condemned to being a villain in US history. Due to its physical constraints, theatre can communicate a message directly to an audience. By placing Eliza at the centre of the story in the final song *Who Lives Who Dies Who Tells Your Story* audiences are included in the narrative of *Hamilton*. The message of *Hamilton* thus compels audiences to actively engage with the history which they are a part of. As a heterotopia the theatre embodies many mutually exclusive places, denoting different times and contrasting these with the real world outside. The heterotopic nature of *Hamilton* is found in its dual casting, as several actors playing separate roles in the course of the play. Furthermore, the staging *Hamilton* as a Broadway play set in a historic New York City is comparable with the production of *Suitcase* at Liverpool Station. The site-specific nature of the two plays connects audiences and actors in the physical space and thus creates an interaction with the shared history being performed on stage. Finally, Broadway as a brand connotes a specific aesthetic of glamour and theatrics, which contrasts the New York City found outside the theatre district. *Hamilton* subverts this by deliberately imitating this outside world through counter-colour-casting and, as will be discussed in the following chapter, through hip hop.

4 The ‘rap aesthetic’ and *Hamilton*

The lyrics in *Hamilton* are based on the style of rap and hip hop, a style which originated close to the theatres of Broadway in New York City. However, this use of hip hop goes far beyond merely a stylistic choice, as the aesthetic of the genre is embedded within the story and characters of *Hamilton*. According to Parker, there are four unique traits in the rap aesthetic: community, history, an authentic identity and class consciousness. While all these traits are present in *Hamilton*, I do not regard the latter as essential to the analysis of the play as a class-oriented approach lies outside my focus. The remaining aspects however, history, community, and bravado feature heavily in *Hamilton*. Yet, before examining the more thematic usage of hip hop it is first necessary to examine how it is used as a stylistic device.

4.1 The Cabinet Battles: non-violent confrontation

The use of hip hop is most overt in the Cabinet Battles. This is where rap is shown not just as a lyrical style, but as a type of improvisational poetry. By framing political debates as rap battles, Miranda draws attention to the similarities between the two arenas. Rap battles and political debates both stress wit, charisma and improvisational skills as ways defeat a rival without using violence. The main difference between the two is that one space has historically been reserved for powerful white men and has historical roots spanning back to Ancient Athens. The other has a relatively short history, only spanning from the late 1970s till now, and is most commonly associated with black working-class youths as a feature of block parties or on the street as a pastime (Parker 2006, 38). The Cabinet Battles feature Hamilton and Jefferson tête-à-tête, with Jefferson having the opening statements in both battles. Here he is established as an idealist who holds the philosophy of Liberalism in the highest regard, as discussed in section 2.2.1. His verses express his motivations but also reveal a personal weakness. While his verses are longer than Hamilton’s, they are not as efficient. In *Cabinet Battle #1*, Jefferson’s rap consists of narcissistic boasts and insults thrown at Hamilton:

“These are wise words, enterprising men quote 'em / Don't act surprised, you guys,
'cause I wrote 'em (...) This financial plan is an outrageous demand / And it's too
many damn pages for any man to understand”

(Miranda, Cabinet Battle #1 2015)

These are classic traits from MC rap battles: outing the opponent as inferior or inauthentic while boosting one’s own image (Parker 2006, 57). However, on a political stage, it does not

have the same effect. In this light, Jefferson's exaggerated insults come off as ad hominem attacks, which cover up the fact that he either underestimates Hamilton, or that he simply does not have any compelling arguments of his own. Hamilton follows suit, insulting Jefferson in a similar vein, albeit more aggressively.

“Thomas. That was a real nice declaration / Welcome to the present, we're running a real nation / Would you like to join us, or stay mellow / Doin' whatever the hell it is you do in Monticello?”

(Miranda, *Cabinet Battle #1* 2015)

Here the rhyme schemes and rhythm are more complex than Jefferson's, as Hamilton manages to fit more syllables into each line. Furthermore, in terms of the content of these rhymes, Hamilton manages to attack Jefferson's character on multiple levels, suggesting that he lives in the past, that he is lazy, or simply out of touch. In theory this should out Hamilton's rhetoric as following suit to Jefferson's fallacies and insults. Yet, as a politician, Hamilton's rap verse highlights his political goals and strategies for American banks. He does not use his limited time to inflate his own ego as much Jefferson does. Instead, Hamilton treats the battle as an opportunity to argue for his political goals:

“If we assume the debts the union gets / A new line of credit, a financial diuretic / How do you not get it? If we're aggressive and competitive / The union gets a boost. You'd rather give it a sedative?”

(Miranda, *Cabinet Battle #2* 2015)

Furthermore, Hamilton's verse in *Cabinet Battle #2* is marginally shorter than Jefferson's: only 8 lines to Jefferson's 16, wherein he effectively and succinctly refutes Jefferson's argument that the United States should aid France in its revolution (Miranda, *Cabinet Battle #2* 2015). While the verse itself is not marked by a high style of prose, it serves the purpose of framing Jefferson's intentions as naïve and futile.

The outcomes of the Cabinet Battles are themselves not very notable. In the first Battle, the result is open-ended and in the second Washington decidedly sides with Hamilton. This should theoretically place the two opponents as equals in the first and Jefferson as the loser in the second. However, this is not the case. The Battles are therefore less about political prowess and more about displaying one's character. As mentioned above, Jefferson is shown as an idealist, and in *Cabinet Battle #2* and his motivations are sympathetic, as they correspond with

his ideals and honouring a treaty. Likewise, in *Cabinet Battle #1*, Hamilton does not get an unambiguous win on the political front, but it is difficult not to accept him as the winner in terms of the rap game.

4.2 Farmer Refuted: pastiche and improvisation

Another well-known trait of hip hop is sampling, and in *Hamilton* it features both in the music and the lyrics. By using pre-existing musical recordings and combining them hip hop artists create unique and innovative sounds. Parker emphasises that this appropriation of pre-existing work is in itself an act of creativity.

“This blending and layering style reflects the chaotic media world that has come to define American (...) culture. It also allowed for people who often lacked the resources to play instruments or write music to create something truly new and unique.” (Parker 2006, 14).

While Parker discusses the musical influences used in sampling, Miranda reworks lyrical influences into something new. The song *Farmer Refuted* opens with Samuel Seabury publicly criticizing the American Congress in song. It uses a harpsichord to accompany the vocals, an instrument denoting a distinctly old-fashioned aesthetic. This contrasts the R’n’B and hip hop-inspired melodies in the rest of the musical, wherein bass and drum beats are more prominent. Furthermore, Seabury’s three verses are all repetitions of the first, with minor breaks when Hamilton starts interrupting. This is where the Miranda samples the lyrics rather than the melody. Hamilton’s lines in *Farmer Refuted* are all rewordings of Seabury’s and these are rapped, not sung.

“[(Seabury) Hamilton:] Yo! (Heed not the rabble) He'd have you all unravel at the / (Who scream) Sound of screams / (Revolution, they) but the Revolution is comin' / (Have not your) The have-nots are gonna / (Interest) Win this / (At heart) It's hard to listen to you with a straight face / (Chaos and bloodshed are not a) Chaos and bloodshed already haunt us”

(Miranda, *Farmer Refuted* 2015)

Hamilton’s lyrics take point of departure in Seabury’s verse by using homonyms and a play on words to create a counter-argument. This recycling of Seabury’s words is reminiscent of how hip hop artists combine samples and short excerpts from different songs to create something new (Parker 2006, 15). Furthermore, like the rap battles against Jefferson, Hamilton’s lines are

characterised by fitting more syllables into each. This changes the rhythm of Seabury's original verses and makes Hamilton seem more fast-talking and quick-witted than his opponents, marking a shift in power dynamics within the conversations of the song. Thus, Miranda manages to incorporate one of the most important musical features of hip hop into the very lyrics of *Hamilton*.

4.3 Community and 'Message Rap'

According to Parker, community is the cornerstone of a rapper's identity. It connotes an alternative to the myth of the self-made man and highlights the importance of a social network in the face of poverty and difficulty.

“Hip hop artists have a sense of community because, as the lyrics about geography show, where they come from is part of who they are.” (Parker 2006, 25)

A neighbourhood is represented by its rappers, with debates continuing over whether hip hop was born in the Bronx or in Queens (Parker 2006, 37). As an artform, hip hop grew out of an impoverished environment in late 1970's New York City, and many successful rappers reference their experiences of poverty and inner-city crime and violence (Oware 2018, 5). But in the case of an identity, rappers have always adhered to a sense of belonging to a specific location. This lies in contrast to Broadway and the theatre more broadly. The theatre is characterised by its ability to represent spaces which are unrelated to the location of the theatre. By contrast, the aesthetic of hip hop depends on being able to project an authentic connection to one borough or neighbourhood. Showcasing a genuine connection to one's neighbourhood is therefore crucial for a rapper in proving a sense of community within that neighbourhood.

In *Hamilton*, community is more abstract than an attachment to one specific neighbourhood. Firstly, there is Hamilton's home community in the Caribbean. As discussed in section 2.2.2 it is stated that the reason Hamilton was able to go to New York City in the first place was because a collection was set up to sponsor him following his writings on the hurricane. But rather than representing this Caribbean community, Hamilton instead sees the United States as his community. Furthermore, Hamilton's community is established in the beginning of Act 1, where he joins the 'Sons of Liberty' (Miranda, Aaron Burr, Sir; My Shot 2015). Hamilton, Mulligan, Lafayette, and Laurens belong to different social classes, but they are bound together by a sense of loyalty to their home: America. Hamilton joins this community based on a shared ideology, but it is clear that he also feels a sense of duty towards his country at large as seen in the repeated line: “I'm just like my country / I'm young, scrappy and hungry”

(Miranda, *My Shot* 2015). When he joins the Sons of Liberty he finds a community based on similar ideals and political values, not only a shared lived experience in a spatially-bound neighbourhood.

The ethos behind Hamilton's affiliation to the United States is more comparable to the rappers' loyalty to their community. In both cases there is a strong moral obligation to give back to said community. This custom of philanthropy has been well-documented since the beginning of hip hop. Afrika Bambaataa's 'Zulu Nation' originated as an organization to rehabilitate the youth and keep them out of crime and poverty (Oware 2018, 6-7). Through organizing street parties and rap battles as a creative outlet, the Zulu Nation provided a positive alternative for disenfranchised or jobless youths in the predominately black neighbourhoods. While the hip hop subculture started out as an environment to relax and have fun in, it gradually changed character. This is exemplified in *The Message* by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, which came out in 1982.

“The song depicts the nihilism, futility, and despair felt by many working-class and poor black people in areas like the Bronx (...) The music was compelling because it connected words with reality for some.” (Oware 2018, 12)

The shift in rap lyrics turned the genre into something entirely different from its party music roots. Rap became an artistic platform for black Americans to represent the issues facing their communities, and in a sense resist it.

In *Hamilton* rap music is analogous to writing as a vehicle for social advancement. In the song *Hurricane* the audience is shown what writing means to Hamilton's identity

“I wrote my way out / Wrote everything down far as I could see”

(Miranda, *Hurricane* 2015)

This underlines one of hip hops most foundational traits which Oware titles 'Message Rap'. The intention behind Message Rap is to describe austere social situations as a form of social activism (Oware 2018, 12). Both *Hurricane* and *The Message* portray the brutality of what each rapper observes in their community and encourage the listener to face and resist the status quo. By emphasising the act of writing as Hamilton's main contribution, rather than his political or military prowess, Miranda presents writing as a basis for social mobility, and indeed, rebellion. As Hamilton describes in *Hurricane*, his writing allowed him to progress socially and in terms of his career, by creating government institutions through his writing.

“I wrote Eliza love letters until she fell / I wrote about The Constitution and defended it well / And in the face of ignorance and resistance / I wrote financial systems into existence”

(Miranda, Hurricane 2015)

Thus, the theme of social activism in hip hop is connected to the history of the US, which was founded on the documents and treatises written by the Founding Fathers. In both hip hop and the treatises writing is the artistic medium of choice for promoting social change. Activism plays a huge part in the rap aesthetic, and by incorporating this into his musical Miranda invokes a tradition in hip hop which is not immediately apparent in the style itself. Writing, and especially rapping are talents which are emphasised as Hamilton’s greatest attributes in the musical. His characterization as a rapper is not simply a mode of stylisation to connect with contemporary audiences. If this was the case rap would simply be a unique stylistic choice. But Miranda incorporates the artistry and ethos of hip hop into Hamilton’s very character, proving that the literary tradition of rap is connected to the larger American tradition of writing one’s way out.

4.4 History and the knowledge of self

The role of knowledge and history is another crucial aspect of hip hop and in *Hamilton*. Knowledge of self or knowledge of one’s identity in relation to a historically-bound heritage is an important part of the social consciousness which early hip hop advocated. It lies in extension to the connection rappers have with their neighbourhoods, but in this case, it is a connection based in time, not place. The emphasis on one’s heritage is essential not only in constructing an individual identity, but to establish a connection with a historically oppressed group. As Parker argues:

“The history lessons help instill a sense of pride in what these ethnic groups have achieved against very stacked odds and gives a sense of what the community has earned that it has been denied through institution policies and racism disguised as the cult of individual opportunity and achievement.” (Parker 2006, 40)

This connection is demonstrated in Mos Def’s rap *Hip Hop* which cites the history of black Americans in relation to the arts which originated in the community: from slavery to the Harlem Renaissance, to rhythm and blues, to hip hop (Parker 2006, 43). History thereby becomes an

identity signifier as well as way to understand one's social reality. This is also why there is such an emphasis on knowledge: it enlightens and gives opportunities to change one's situation.

In terms of hip hop, the plot of *Hamilton* takes place in a pre-historic era. Therefore, it does not view history as a question of heritage, but legacy. Building upon the analysis of Hamilton's legacy in sections 2.2.2 and 3.2, legacy connotes a shared future. In contrast, heritage is connected to a shared past. Burr describes this sentiment in *Wait For It*, where he describes the burden of his parents' legacy which pressure him to maintain their status and wealth:

“My grandfather was a fire and brimstone preacher / But there are things that the homilies and hymns won't teach ya / My mother was a genius / My father commanded respect / When they died they left no instructions / just a legacy to protect”

(Miranda, *Wait For It* 2015)

Burr exhibits a ‘knowledge of self’, but unlike the rapper's aesthetic described by Parker, Burr's knowledge is limited only to his family heritage, not his community. One of the main flaws of Burrs character is his failure to commit to something greater, like his community or his identity as an American, which is in direct conflict with Hamilton's aggressive loyalty. But while Burr may neglect the awareness of history, the knowledge of history is at the foreground of *Hamilton*. As discussed in Chapter 2, *Hamilton* is a contribution to a broad American literary tradition. In terms of hip hop it can likewise be viewed as a part of an oral tradition which retells the story of the United States to Americans today. Similar to Mos Def chronicling the development of black Americans' experience, Miranda chronicles a chapter of the all-American historical canon. Though the plot unfolds over a short time span, *Hamilton* still communicates an awareness of the history of the nation and relates it to the audiences of today. The main difference between Mos Def and Miranda is the same as the difference between Langston Hughes and Miranda discussed in section 2.1.5: *Hamilton* is a story from the broader American Mythology, told in a distinctly afro-centric style.

A second element of history in the rap aesthetic is that it offers protection. “Knowing and documenting the history protects the genre itself from the kind of white appropriation that happened to rock and roll.” (Parker 2006, 39). By referencing other MCs, both old school and new school, rappers create a connection between themselves and the rap community. Furthermore, by contributing to the oral tradition of rap, rappers actively take part in keeping

the history alive. Parker gives the example of the song *South Bronx* by BDP, which explicitly names some of the forerunners of hip hop, as well as places and years.

“They tried again outside in Cedar Park / Power from a street light made the place dark / But yo, they didn't care, they turned it out / I know a few understand what I'm talkin about” (Parker 2006, 37)

Here there is a personal connection between BDP and Cedar Park in the form of personal nostalgia, which excludes anyone who do not have any knowledge about the environment at that time. By exhibiting a knowledge or a direct involvement with the Cedar Park, BDP establishes themselves as a part of the historical community of rappers in the Bronx.

In *Hamilton* there is not a personal or nostalgic connection with the history in question. Instead there is an emphasis historical sources and documents. Historical documents are used as song titles, for example in *Farmer Refuted* and *The Reynolds Pamphlet*. Furthermore, the contents of historical documents feature as lyrics, either as being reworded or directly quoted. One prominent example of the latter of a historical document is in *One Last Time*, where Washington and Hamilton's voices blend into one another into near-verbatim recitation of Washington's Farewell Address (Washington 2008). This makes the history aspect of *Hamilton* more reminiscent of the official codified history of the United States, rather than history as an oral tradition as in Parker's trajectory.

The references to places and documents focuses on a textual level when regarding the characters as rappers. But if we examine Miranda as a rapper instead, the knowledge of history is exhibited on a completely different level. By referencing these documents in a similar vein as BDP references locations in the Bronx, he creates an awareness of the historical lineage of the United States as a historical community. Miranda does not describe the heritage of Latin-Americans in the Revolutionary period or examining the effects of slavery as it connects to the present. Instead the knowledge of history Miranda exhibits extends to the entire American population. He broadens this aspect of hip hop aesthetic to include the historical canon of the USA at large.

4.5 Bravado and authenticity

Authenticity in the rap aesthetic is the combination of the elements described above. It depends on one showing knowledge of self and loyalty towards one's community. But moreover, it also entails distinguishing oneself from other rappers and the stereotypes

surrounding young black men (Parker 2006, 53). One aspect of this creation of an identity, as described by Oware, is the hyper-masculine identity of black men, wherein bravado is a common trait in many rap songs.

“Borrowing from the badman and cool pose postures, an artist proclaims he is the best at something, possesses expensive material items, and receives adulation because of his superstar status.” (Oware 2018, 49)

This bravado makes the rapper stand out among his peers by way of either material wealth, sexual encounters, or status. While one could make the argument that it perpetuates damaging stereotypes about rappers in general, bravado and braggadocio is a means of competition in the rap game.

In *Hamilton*, the bravado convention is used as an introduction to different characters. Although each character introduces themselves in different contexts and with unique phrasing, they all share one thematic commonality in their emphasis on intellect:

“[Hamilton:] I'm 'a get a scholarship to King's College / I probably shouldn't brag, but dag, I amaze and astonish / The problem is I got a lot of brains but no polish / I gotta holler just to be heard / With every word, I drop knowledge!”

(Miranda, My Shot 2015)

“[Washington:] Lining up, to put me up on a pedestal / Writin' letters to relatives / Embellishin' my elegance and eloquence”

(Miranda, Right Hand Man 2015)

“[Jefferson:] These are wise words, enterprising men quote 'em / Don't act surprised, you guys, 'cause I wrote 'em!”

(Miranda, Cabinet Battle #1 2015)

“[Philip:] The scholars say I got the same virtuosity and brains as my pops! / The ladies say my brain's not where the resemblance stops!”

(Miranda, Blow Us All Away 2015)

In all cases the characters cite their intelligence as bases for bravado, rather than their wealth or their status. But Miranda also satirises this trait of hip hop. Like Philip's opening verse in *Blow Us All Away*, there are other allusions to characters' sexual prowess as well:

“[Mulligan:] Lock up ya daughters and horses, of course /
It's hard to have intercourse over four sets of corsets”

(Miranda, Aaron Burr, Sir 2015)

The commonality between the two examples above are their light-heartedness which parodies the hyper-masculinity often associated with rappers (Oware 2018, 49). It is a trait which in later years has been associated with rap and hip hop's unfortunate reputation as a sexist genre of music, which could explain why it is played up for laughs in *Hamilton*. Miranda emphasises the intellectualism of the rap ethos rather than the sexist aspects of hip hop.

The opposite of bravado as an expression of superiority is *fronting*. Fronting refers to a rapper either bluffing or claiming a struggle which is not his own. “Those who are frontin’ will be exposed—raps are littered with references to wack emcees, sucka emcees, and fake ass frauds that must be eliminated (figuratively, of course).” (Parker 2006, 57). Parker associates it with class consciousness, as fronting mainly happens when a rapper inauthentically appropriates the struggle of the working class as a basis for their own identity (Parker 2006, 52).

In *Hamilton* class is not a prominent factor. While there is a lot of focus dedicated to Hamilton's status as an immigrant, and thereby a member of the working-class, there are very few references to the class status in the lyrics in the traditional Marxist sense, which Parker uses. Instead the trope is subverted in *Cabinet Battle #2* where Jefferson, in an ad hominem attack on Hamilton states the following:

“Smells like new money, dresses like fake royalty / Desperate to rise above his
station / Everything he does betrays the ideals of our nation”

(Miranda, Cabinet Battle #2 2015)

Where fronting traditionally refers to an appropriation of the working-class experience, Jefferson calls Hamilton out for the opposite reason. By claiming that Hamilton “smells like new money” Jefferson implies that Hamilton is fronting as a higher class than he is and therefore seems inauthentic. This is a strangely un-American sentiment from Jefferson. As discussed in section 2.2.2, socially advancing and transcending one's social class is akin to a cardinal virtue, and it is framed as one of Hamilton's most admirable qualities. Furthermore, the term ‘new money’ is evocative of a distinctly bourgeois disdain of those who climb the social ladder of their own accord. The result is that Jefferson's criticisms of Hamilton in the second Cabinet Battle reflect very poorly on him. So, while the hip hop trope of exposing fronting MC's is used by Jefferson, its use and effect are subverted.

In terms of identity, bravado and the exposure of fronting MCs are two sides of the same coin: they both serve as a means for rappers to distinguish themselves from their peers. Nearly all the characters in *Hamilton* focus on one theme of bravado: their intellect. This challenges the stereotype of hip hop being an overly sexist or shallow genre. Instead, Miranda uses the stylistic device to underline just how important knowledge and intellect are in the hip hop subculture.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed how hip hop functions as the framing device for the retelling of an otherwise archetypal rags-to-riches story. By choosing rap as the main mode of poetry, and subsequently classifying Hamilton as a rapper, Miranda demonstrates the overlaps between the rap aesthetic and a broader American ethos. Like the American Mythology, established in Chapter 2, hip hop adheres to a belief in individual tenacity and a distinct sense of loyalty to one's community. However, there are other facets of hip hop which *Hamilton* incorporates into its stylisation. This includes the emphasis placed on authenticity of identity and the adherence to a historical community. Both aspects are present in *Hamilton*, but they encompass the United States in its entirety, rather than a specific borough. The awareness of history in hip hop is thus a unique characteristic of the genre's aesthetic, and in *Hamilton* it is used to create awareness about US history at large.

5 Concluding remarks

In conclusion *Hamilton* has all the components of a canonical American poem. It adheres to the same mythology as the poetry of Hughes and Whitman, praising values of democracy, self-sufficiency and a disembodied ideal of America. This ideal is not only reflected in American poetry, but in its very self-identification. *Hamilton* thereby engages with a foundational American Mythology, which adheres to the philosophy of liberalism as its moral foundation. The liberal philosophy found in much of early American political documents sets forth a distinctively American ethos about individual responsibility and prosperity. *Hamilton* offers a unique perspective of these seemingly-universal ideals. By framing the play as a rags-to-riches immigrant story, Miranda draws attention to the parallels between ethnic minorities in the United States and the broader American Mythology. *Hamilton* does not create an alternative poetic canon reserved for black and minority artists. Instead Miranda places the minority voice at the centre of the All-American cultural canon. This makes *Hamilton* a retelling of a classical American myth rather than a re-interpretation of a historical account.

Hamilton is a play, and as such there are certain ritualistic aspects to it. This includes the physical presence of an audience and an emotional cleansing by way of the tragic plot. The tragedy of *Hamilton* is two-fold: it is both the murder of Hamilton himself, and in Burr sealing his fate as Hamilton's killer. The other theatrical feature in *Hamilton* is how the audience is incorporated into the narrative itself by a series of fourth wall breaks. The audience is encouraged to actively take part and engage with the legacy of both Eliza and Alexander Hamilton once they leave the theatre. By having Eliza have her story told, while also encouraging the audience to reflect on how to tell their story, *Hamilton's* theme is one of agency, both for the historical characters and for audience members. This is only possible due to the face-to-face nature of a stage production

In extension to this, theatre functions as a heterotopia, wherein mutually exclusive places and times coexist. This is the case for both *Hamilton* and the site-specific production *Suitcase* (2008). In both plays the surroundings are an intrinsic part on bringing history to life. But where *Suitcase* was limited to Liverpool Station, the opening of *Hamilton* was limited to New York City. Because New York City is both the stage and the setting in *Hamilton*, the limits of past and present become more fluid. The American-ness of *Hamilton* is therefore distilled into a very New-York centric aesthetic. The brand recognition of Broadway as a medium connotes a location-based aesthetic of glamour and escapism, which *Hamilton* subverts. The style which

Miranda chooses to tell the story of *Hamilton* represents an altogether different facet of New York City than the aesthetic brand of Broadway.

Outside of being a mode of poetry with its own unique style and cadence, hip hop has its own subculture. This subculture has its own aesthetics and philosophy which are present in *Hamilton*. The sense of community and obligation to give back characterises the legacy of Hamilton himself and the emphasis placed on an awareness of history and shared heritage translates to an awareness of US history at large. Thus, there are significant overlaps between the American Mythology and the rap aesthetic, and these overlaps are at the centre of *Hamilton*. The appraisal of the individual, the striving for prosperity and the view of art as a means of social change are all characteristics of Hamilton himself. Thereby Miranda demonstrates that Hamilton's dual identities as a 'bastard orphan' and a Founding Father do not contrast, but complement each other. In this regard, hip hop becomes an entirely patriotic form of poetry.

Overall, *Hamilton* proves that the canonical understanding of US history is not reserved for distinguished white men as actors or as authors. By making Alexander Hamilton a rapper, Miranda proves that the subculture of hip hop is just as American as the hymns and treatises found at the beginning of US History. By including audiences in the narrative practice of a theatre production, Miranda encourages an interaction with history itself, giving people of today a say in how their story as Americans will be told. *Hamilton* therefore reconfigures the how we understand and interpret the history of the United States by using a contemporary mode of telling its story, yet not the extent of subverting the canon itself. Instead, the effectiveness of Miranda's *Hamilton* lies in proving the multifaceted nature of an American identity.

6 Literature

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