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Telling Her Story: The Representation of Women in *Hamilton: An American Musical* (2015)

Abstract. "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?". These were the three questions that resonated within the walls of The Public Theater, New York City, as what critics would later describe as an outstanding performance came to an end on the 20th of January 2015. *Hamilton: An American Musical*'s author, Lin-Manuel Miranda, has been praised for turning the story of Alexander Hamilton, the United States' first Secretary of Treasury, into an inclusive work of art which has since often been associated with the word "revolutionary". It is undeniable that, much to some historians' joy and others' dismay (Herrera 2018), the musical based on Ron Chernow's 2004 biography *Alexander Hamilton* succeeded not only in modernizing and "humanizing" the image of some of the Founding Fathers, therefore reintroducing them into popular culture, but also in redirecting the projectors towards non-white musical performers by turning what is often told as a white men centered narrative into an immigrant success story. Nevertheless, one ought to question whether the musical truly succeeds in its attempt to 'revolutionize' the historical narrative by analyzing an important aspect of the Founding Era: the lack of importance given to the women who are so often omitted from the narrative. This article will analyze Miranda's representation of Angelica and Eliza Schuyler as well as Maria Reynolds in an attempt to highlight the simultaneous contemporary struggle to integrate feminism into the dramatic and male focused milieu of historical musical theater. To do so, equal importance will be given to the analysis of the audio-visual content of the performance and Miranda's socio-cultural context.

Keywords: new historicism, feminism, Hamilton: An American Musical, Lin-Manuel Miranda, representation of women

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1. Introduction: Shifting the historical narrative

Whether on television or in comic books, for decades, the media has pushed harmful female stereotypes by saturating our screens with tropes such as the Manic Pixie Dream Girl[1], Women In Refrigerators,[2] or the "Strong Female Character"[3]. As a result of the growing popularity of feminism as a social movement in the United States[4], American media and artistic productions have found themselves under scrutiny for their often caricatural and sexualized depictions of women and, therefore, their projection of what they should look and act like. As a result of the rise of feminism, trends such as the emergence of Gender Studies as a discipline in the 1970s and the #MeToo movement –which specifically targets issues of sexism and sexual harassment within the entertainment industry– going viral worldwide in 2017 have affected the portrayal of female characters which is, now, more than ever, subject to serious criticism and academic attention.

Lin-Manuel Miranda, the author, composer, and interpreter of the protagonist in *Hamilton: An American Musical*, has been very open about his support for gender equality in many interviews, including his 2016 interview with Emma Watson for HeForShe –a U.N initiative to promote the cause on a global scale– where, when asked by Watson whether he is a feminist, he responds with, "Yeah, absolutely!" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NbEbkVrVWY 44:53-44:56) before engaging in a short freestyle rap about equality. The musical's writer also marched with his wife and young son in January 2017's Women's March in London (ibid).

It is important to note that while the #MeToo movement went viral on social media in October 2017 and the media coverage of it has focused almost solely on white, cis-gendered actresses in Hollywood, it was originally founded in 2006 by African American activist Tarana Burke to provide victims of sexual abuse, like herself, with the resources and support they need to heal (https://metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/

[1] The 'Manic Pixie Dream, "exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures" (Rabin 2007).

[2] The Women In Refrigerators trope comes from Green Lantern's Volume 3 #54, a number in which Kyle Rayner's girlfriend is strangled and stuffed into a refrigerator by the main villain. This trope makes of the violent killing of the female characters a mere plot device that serves the function of pushing the male character to act heroically in order to avenge the deceased female character (TV Tropes editors).

[3] The "Strong Female Character" trope, also referred to as "Tough Girl", consists of a female character who is given "… qualities that are predominantly perceived as masculine" (Passion Project editors 2018) such as physical strength, strength of personality and a carefree attitude. She experiences little to no character growth and development and is only given value for being a female with male characteristics.

[4] A Study conducted by the Pew Research Center shows that, in 2020, 61% of women in the United States would consider the word "Feminist" as an adequate way to describe themselves. (Pew Research Center 2020)

history-inception/). Since the mediatization of the accusations that led to the popularization of the MeToo movement and hashtag, Miranda has vocalized his disgust with Weinstein on many occasions, both on Twitter (https://twitter.com/Lin_Manuel/status/917721128029827 07) and interviews for various media outlets, notably asking for the rights to the adaptation of hisfirst musical, *In The Heights*, to be taken back from... the Weinstein production company live on the radio (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=se0UNQVGwu8). This shows continuity, whether Pre-MeToo or Post-MeToo, in the Puerto Rican writer's public support for women's rights and the social movements which emerge in an attempt to make a change.

Before diving into Miranda's portrayal of women in his second Broadway show, it is sensible to first discuss the theory which will be used as a tool to do so. The term 'new historicism' was coined by American critic Stephen Greenblatt in his 1982 book entitled *The Power of Forms and the Forms of Power in the Renaissance*, which deals with the literature of the sixteenth-century. In it, he uses the term in an attempt to explain the method he has recourse to in order to analyze Renaissance texts. Greenblatt's analyses of Shakespearian plays are therefore viewed as the foundation of the movement and theory.

Due to the fact that Stephen Greenblatt considers new historicism as more of a practice than a theory or a doctrine and recognizes that one of the theory's main characteristics is how "unresolved" and "in some ways disingenuous" (Greenblatt 1980, 5) his method has been about its relation to literary theory, it is crucial to define the main assumptions and ideas which will be used to frame this analysis. The first idea which will be adopted in this article is based on Foucault's thoughts on Power, Knowledge, and Discourse. In *Discipline and Punish*, the French philosopher describes this relationship as follows: "Power and knowledge directly imply one another" (Foucault 1995, 27) and highlights how "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (idem, 27). What can be inferred from this quote is not only the ability of the person/group in power to create or recreate knowledge to fit their ideas and ideologies but also the fact that said power holder's ability to spread knowledge and even construct truth inevitably implies the creation of power imbalances between themselves and the people they hold power over. Although Foucault is himself not associated with the new historicist movement, these three notions are pivotal to new historicist thought. Indeed, the idea that power in the form of what is chosen to be given out to the public as 'canonical' or meta-knowledge was integrated into the new historicists' practices due to their deep interest in the anecdote and the fact that they, much like other post-modernist movements, reject the idea of the canon. A clear example of this negative attitude towards meta narratives and the notion of 'truth' can be observed through their use of anecdotes (Laden 2004). New historicist's ability to start with a seemingly unrelated historical anecdote reflect said critics' conviction in the pervasive and unescapable nature of power which is obtained and maintained through the circulation of knowledge through language, be it written or oral, or what

can be referred to as discourse. As a direct result of this idea, the relationship between discourse and history can also be considered as reciprocal based on the fact that what is thought of and taught as 'History' is merely another form of discourse that, additionally, is circulated and approved by a government. This assumption will allow me to see both the knowledge circulated at the time of the production and performance of the musical as well as Miranda's historical context as equally important in the analysis of his characterization of the women in *Hamilton*.

Another key assumption believed by New Historicist to be true is what Louis Montrose refers to as ,"the Historicity of Texts and the Textuality of History" (Montrose 1989, 23). In his now famous chiastic statement, Montrose points out the mutual relation between history and literature. From this method's perspective, while the traditional historical conviction that discourse –or in the case of this article, the musical– is shaped by history is factual and rightful, for new historicists, this relationship is not unilateral and thus, history is also influenced by the literary and cultural productions of the era. The aim behind such an assumption is to highlight how literature is not, and cannot be, detached from its socio-political, cultural, and economic context.

Talking about the referentiality of history and literature raises several questions linked to the third concept and assumption I would like to discuss, which is subjectivity. Because new historicist criticism is based on the idea that a text, be it historical or literary, is deeply rooted in its context and that it is therefore the product of, "a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society" (Greenblatt 1989, 12), subjectivity inevitably appears to be part of the discussion as both history and literature are considered to be products of an individual's work. For new historicists, human beings carry the weight of their culture, of their background, and of their ideological beliefs on their shoulders which makes the traditional academic, and in a way historicist quest for the complete objective analysis of an event or text idealistic and therefore unattainable. In Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, he does not shy away from confronting this issue as he declares the following:

> If cultural poetics is conscious of its status as interpretation, this consciousness must extend to an acceptance of the impossibility of fully reconstructing and reentering the culture of the sixteenth century, of leaving behind one's own situation: it is everywhere evident in this book the questions I ask of my material and indeed the very nature of this material are shaped by the questions I ask myself (Greenblatt 1989, 1).

Indeed, one's choice of topic, the perspective taken in the study of an issue as well as the interpretation of the latter often speak of the person behind the quill. This statement not only emphasizes the subjective nature of new historicist criticism based on an author's baggage and the biases they carry but it also acknowledges the subjectivity that accompanies the critics and scholars throughout their study of both History and Literature alike. Based on that, in this article, I will embrace subjectivity as part of the

creative process and treat the content analyzed as a direct expression of Miranda's subjective experiences and views.

While some schools of thought, such as New Criticism, argue that the artist should be separated from the art –Wimsatt and Monroe's Intentional Fallacy being a direct example of such practices in American new criticism (Wimsatt and Monroe 1946)– new historicism therefore embraces the subjectivity that comes with the fact that a work of art, be it literature, painting, or music, is a direct result of a person's whims, environment, interests, and culture. The selection of these three new historicist assumptions, the referential relation between History and Literature, their subjective nature as well as the omnipresence of an era's Discourse within literary and historical texts, was made to allow for a better understanding of *Hamilton: An American Musical* as a product of the twenty-first century, and simultaneously, as a product of Lin-Manuel Miranda's environment, beliefs, and vision of Alexander Hamilton and the historical figures mentioned in the musical.

Taking into consideration the information provided in this section and using new historicism as a main theoretical framework for the analysis of the musical, the analytical section that follows will be divided into three sub-sections. In the first sub-section, I will examine Angelica Schuyler's openly feminist characterization. As for the second sub-section, it will argue that Miranda's depiction of one of America's most discrete and forgotten Founding Mothers, Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, can be read as a reappropriation of the Hamilton narrative by the woman who worked in the shadows to allow for the preservation of the 'Hamilton legacy', and therefore for the writing of this musical. Finally, the third and last sub-section will focus on the writer's portrayal of Maria Reynolds as the stereotypical image of the woman as a sexually appealing, irresistible temptress who manipulates the main protagonist despite his well established feminist stances and beliefs.

2. The Women in Hamilton:

2. 1. Angelica Schuyler: Past the Love Interest

Angelica Schuyler-Church is the eldest daughter of Continental Army General and New York senator Philip Schuyler and socialite Catharine Van Rensselaer Schuyler (New Netherland Institute n.d.). Through her performance and the charisma she displays on stage, Renée Elise Goldsberry, the African American actress who plays this role in *Hamilton: An American Musical* as part of the Original Broadway Cast, captures and enhances the revolutionary spirit and intelligence of the historical figure. While Lin-Manuel Miranda draws a great deal of inspiration for his fictionalized version of the older Schuyler sister from what her eighteenth-century peers and contemporary historians' report on her character –mainly the show's historical consultant, historian Ron Chernow– (Chernow 2004), it is openly known and made apparent that

the writer's personal political views and stances on feminism played a role in his depiction of this particular female character (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NbEbkVrVWY). In this sub-section, I will mainly analyze Angelica Schuyler's portrayal in the musical in contrast to the typical depiction of eighteenth-century women in an effort to find out how this 2015 adaptation of Angelica differs from the historical norm of said era. Based on this analysis, I will investigate whether Miranda's Angelica fits the contemporary feminist discourse and expectations when it comes to women's portrayal in artistic productions.

Miranda's portrayal of Angelica Schuyler-Church is one of a powerful, captivating, and charming woman. In her introductory song, "The Schuyler Sisters", the oldest daughter of Phillip Schuyler announces, "I've been reading *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine / So men say that I'm intense or I'm insane / You want a revolution? I want a revelation" (Goldsberry 2015 "The Schuyler Sisters"). While one can easily dismiss such statements as being benign as anyone living within that timeframe would be expected to have read Paine's pamphlet due to how widespread it was at the time, the education of eighteenth-century women, including that of Angelica's mother, Catherine Van Rensselaer Schuyler, was limited to reading and writing as well as sewing, embroidering, and spinning (Wister and Irwin 1877, 82). It was not expected of women to be interested in the political life of the country which makes Angelica's statement very powerful as it shows not only her interest in politics, but also eighteenth-century men's negative reaction to it. Here, the use of the word "insane" to describe men's reaction to Angelica's reading of Paine's *Common Sense* comes to ironically contrast the title of the latter; this clever use of opposing diction comes to emphasize Angelica's awareness, wit, and intelligence. From the very first song she appears in, Angelica Schuyler is therefore established as an educated, intelligent, independent, and opinionated female figure.

This, for the most part, feminist depiction of the oldest Schuyler sister should be viewed as a direct reflection of Lin-Manuel Miranda's own engagement to include strong, female characters in his works since, had the musical been completely historically accurate, many of the issues raised by Angelica in her main track "Satisfied" such as the role and importance of marrying into one's own social class as well as the use of marriage as a tool to climb the ladders of society would not have been a source of concern for Angelica who, much to her family's dismay, had already eloped with her husband, British businessman John Barker Church, by the time she met Alexander Hamilton (Chernow 2004, 134).

At a panel organized for the premiere of the documentary *Hamilton's America* at the 54th New York Film Festival, Miranda explained his reasoning for making changes to Church's timeline by declaring:

> Angelica was married by the time Hamilton met the Schuylers but that's not interesting! And two, Angelica and Eliza did have brothers but I'm a big fan of Jane Austen, and I'm a big fan of girls with no brothers who have to figure out how to make their way into the world at a time when they were not allowed to do so. And so, taking away the brothers allows me

> to talk about that; allows her to talk about the only roles she is allowed to play as a woman at this time in our history (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIP7CUo46gg&list=PL2VH-9V2I7ZAel8awmu2UuC94SVYOVac_r&index=42).

Even though this statement illustrates Lin-Manuel Miranda's desire to dramatize the sister's story, partly in order to amplify the sexual tension and ambiguity in the relationship that the two characters have, it showcases his wish to write women's struggles and the flawed class-based culture that prevailed at the time into his work, something he could not have talked about without altering history. As such, much like Jane Austen who inspired him greatly, Miranda covers his criticism of the societal expectations put on women with a layer of romance –although, unlike Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, Angelica and Alexander's romance quickly turns into a tragedy.

Although Angelica's characterization may appear, at first glance, to be, as it is the case for most female characters within the entertainment industry, limited to her love for the main male character of this musical and the moral conflict that comes with it, Church's role transcends her initial attraction to her future brother-in-law. In fact, Angelica's reactive and outspoken nature often comes into play to protect, defend, or support her sister Eliza when the latter is having a difficult time or cannot speak for herself[5]. In that regard, Angelica's love for her younger sister is reminiscent of the feminist concept of sisterhood and women supporting women. Furthermore, she does not hesitate to 'call out' her supposed lover when the happiness of said sister is threatened by his actions. This is demonstrated through Miranda's use of the word 'satisfied' as Angelica's lyrical motif. Outside of the track that bares the same name, the latter notably reappears when Church is angered by Hamilton's lack of consideration for Eliza in "Non-Stop" (Goldsberry 2015 "Non-Stop") as well as when the older sister confronts him on his extramarital affair with Maria Reynolds, and thus for hurting her sister in "The Reynolds Pamphlet" (Goldsberry 2015 "The Reynolds Pamphlet"). While both Alexander and Angelica are, "never satisfied" (Miranda 2015 "Satisfied") creating a parallel and deep connection between the two, Angelica puts aside her own need for satisfaction to preserve Elizabeth's happiness while Alexander puts this same need for satisfaction before his wife's feelings.

As previously stated, Miranda is a vocal promoter of the women's rights movement. This belief in gender equality has clearly materialized through Angelica's lines as, in "The Schuyler Sisters", she goes on to say, ""We hold these truths to be self-evident/ That all men are created equal" / And when I meet Thomas Jefferson, / I'm 'a compel him to include women in the sequel / Work!" (Goldsberry 2015 "The Schuyler Sisters"). This verse not only showcases Angelica's revolutionary and egalitarian

[5] This is particularly evident in the events that follow the release of "The Reynolds Pamphlet" as Angelica returns from London to comfort her sister and continues to tell her story in "It's Quiet Uptown" after Eliza "eras[es] [her]self from the narrative" (Soo 2015 "Burn") until she recovers from the tragic events that unfolded.

mindset but also subtly hints at the future influence that Church will have on her future friend, Thomas Jefferson, whom she will meet in Paris during his service as a U.S. ambassador in France (Cutterham 2016). Angelica Schuyler's life and story may not be as significantly explored as that of Hamilton and Burr within the musical's plot to be considered as a main character, but the importance given to her inner thoughts and conflicts as well as the complexity and emotional awareness she displays, makes this portrayal of the sister a feminist rendering of what could have easily been a musical written by a man, exclusively about men.

To sum up, while Church played a significant role in both Hamilton and Jefferson's lives, two very prominent figures of the century, just like most women of her time, her memory did not make the cut for American history books as a result of the male dominated narrative with which history has been written. This is exceptionally true for the Revolutionary War's historical depiction as the story of America's Founding Mothers remains unknown by most. Lin-Manuel Miranda's characterization of Church can arguably be attributed to his stances on feminism and his views on the inclusion of minorities into the American historical narrative as the glimpse we are given into Angelica's inner reflections' main function is to highlight the pressure put on women to adhere to social norms and conventions and behave in a pleasant manner. Here, the intentional modifications made by the author not only serve the latter's theatrical needs but also help him incorporate twenty-first century ideas and reflections that would not necessarily have been explored had the musical been completely historically accurate. In this regard, *Hamilton* displays a subjective fictionalized interpretation of Angelica Schuyler-Church that is tinted by contemporary feminist ideas of women empowerment, women supporting women, and gender equality.

2. 2. Eliza Hamilton: Beyond the Supporting Character:

Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, the second oldest daughter of eight siblings, is mainly known to be the wife of America's first Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton. Like most Founding Mothers of the eighteenth-century, an era marked by the American War of Independence, Enlightenment and the founding of the nation, her story is overshadowed by her husband's controversial life and political engagement. While most of Elizabeth's historical traces were erased by the historical figure herself, Ron Chernow's research into Alexander Hamilton's life and the serendipitous findings he made on the Schuyler sister have helped reintroduce the latter not only into the historical narrative but also into the cultural and fictional narrative through Lin-Manuel Miranda's adaptation of the historian's vision of the lesser-known Hamilton. In this section, I will try to show that Elizabeth Schuyler-Hamilton's true role in *Hamilton: An American Musical* goes beyond being another female supporting character. I will also attempt to uncover the importance that the latter has for the development of the show's story, as well as the influence of twenty-first century feminist thought on this her characterization and personal growth.

In the musical, Church's younger sister, Elizabeth Schuyler-Hamilton, is portrayed in a way that differs completely from that of her older, more direct and charismatic sister. While from a surface level reading of the character, one could assume that Lin-Manuel Miranda's portrayal of Eliza as gentle, forgiving, good natured and patient –or in other words, a traditional feminine representative of eighteenth century women– reflects the narrative, social norms, and standards of that time, Elizabeth's character transcends this portrait as she proves to be vital to both the musical's plot and Hamilton's life and legacy.

Elizabeth, in the sisters' introductory song, "The Schuyler Sisters", can be viewed as somewhat of a follower since, especially when contrasted to her older sister's vivid personality, the middle child seems to be erased, to a certain extent, as she stands behind her, to the side. Nevertheless, Elizabeth's attitude towards the revolutionary atmosphere experienced in New York oozes positivity as Phillipa Soo, the Asian American woman portraying Eliza, sings, "People shouting in the square!" (Soo 2015 "The Schuyler Sisters") with glee as a response to Peggy, her younger sister, skeptically stating, "It's bad enough daddy wants to go to war" (Cephas-Jones 2015 "The Schuyler Sisters"). While Goldsberry's character seems to be at the center of the attention in this song, both her younger sisters share her revolutionary ideas as they stand behind her as supportive rather than less significant characters. This is musically emphasized by the fact that, throughout the majority of the song, both sisters, but particularly Eliza, harmonize with Church. The sisters' vocal harmonies can be considered as an auditory allegory for intellectual coordination as the three young women come to see eye-to-eye on the war making them think in a synchronized manner, and thus sing in harmony.

Furthermore, Eliza's personality shines through as her first lyrical motif is presented to the audience in this song. She sings, "Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now!" (Soo 2015 "The Schuyler Sisters"). With this sentence, Elizabeth laces her enthusiasm with gratitude, appreciation, optimism, and sensibility, establishing her character as being asserted and caring, something that will consistently be proven to be right with the songs that follow. Throughout the musical, we can observe a significant amount of character development from Eliza as she starts off as Hamilton's lovesick female interest (Soo 2015 "Helpless") and gradually blossoms into the mature, forgiving, kind, and strong character the audience weeps for at the end of the musical. From instigating confrontations[6] to going as far as burning Alexander's letters[7] in an attempt to disassociate herself from him after the release of the *Reynolds Pamphlet*, therefore ruining any chance he would have had to redeem himself in the eyes of the future historians who will study his writings, Elizabeth is not as

[6] In "Non-Stop", after Hamilton accepts to be Washington's secretary of treasury, Eliza instigates an argument with him by calling his name twice while Hamilton's glee prevents her to get through to him. She asks him "Isn't this enough?" (Soo 2015 "Non-Stop") or even "What would be enough to be satisfied?" (Soo 2015 "Non-Stop") in a reprimanding tone which reflects her frustration with her workaholic husband.

[7] "Burn" shows a heartbroken and angry Eliza burning Hamilton's letters and taking back control over who gets to know about her story (Soo 2015 "Burn").

much of a passive character as one may assume at first glance. In fact, the very act of "erasing [herself] from the narrative" (Soo, Burn 2015) by burning those letters could be interpreted as Eliza taking back her agency as the previous lyric is followed by, "let future historians wonder how Eliza reacted when you broke her heart" (Soo, Burn 2015), which highlights the character's awareness of the consequences of erasing valuable information as well as the role of historians in shaping the 'story' and therefore history. Most importantly, she is aware of their 'helplessness' to (re)write the narrative in the absence of physical traces of the events that unfolded.

Lin-Manuel Miranda's closing number, "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story", strengthens this idea as it showcases the widow's personal accomplishments and paints her as the protector of Hamilton's legacy as well as of many other historical figures'. This role as the guardian of the Hamilton legacy is of the utmost importance as it is one of the musical's central themes and motifs. In fact, Hamilton's character, drive, and ambition all come from a need to build and establish a legacy for himself[8] and protect the latter no matter the cost,[9] making the issue of the preservation of one's memory within the historical narrative one of the central questions dealt with within the musical. In this last song, Burr and the men in the ensemble sing, "But when you're gone, who remembers your name? / Who keeps your flame? / Who tells your story?" (Odom Jr. 2015). It is known by any literature fiend that a work's most significant parts are its introduction and its conclusion; it is for that reason that these questions of legacy and keeping one's memory alive through telling their story were kept for the closing number. As the last question is left hanging in the air by Burr, the women's ensemble responds with a single name, "Eliza." She emerges from the dark to respond to one of her previous lines in "Burn" with, "I put myself back in the narrative" (Soo 2015 "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story") thus displaying an enormous amount of maturity, forgiveness, and clemency.

With this final act of kindness, and for the efforts she made throughout the fifty years that followed her husband's death for the sake of preserving his reputation and legacy despite the pain and humiliation he caused her, Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton proves to be the true heroine of the musical; the character that resolves the final conflict and who makes the writing of this musical possible. Ultimately, *Hamilton: An American Musical* does not solely celebrate Alexander Hamilton's legacy, it also gives a second chance at life to his wife Eliza, the "Best of wives and best of Women" (Hamilton 1804), by telling *her* story[10].

While Eliza's character does not fit the typical feminist representation of women in contemporary media, she shows both strengths and weaknesses, making her a complex

[8] In "Burn" Elizabeth describes Hamilton as, "obsessed with [his] legacy" (Soo 2015 "Burn").

[9] In "Hurricane", Hamilton can be heard saying "This is the only way I can protect my legacy" as a way to justify the necessity of making his affair with Maria Reynolds known to the public (Miranda 2015 "Hurricane").

[10] Lin-Manuel Miranda expressed this idea in an interview for *Hamilton's America*. In it, he says: "I knew that Hamilton was going to change my life, but I didn't anticipate how much we helped Hamilton's legacy in turn. Not just Hamilton, but also Eliza, for whom Hamilton's legacy was so important." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKkj0Hu8Qg8, 1:22:26-1:22:42).

and multi-dimensional character. Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton experiences an array of emotions that range from happiness and love to anger, confusion, and grief, allowing her to surpass the status of a mere love interest. By giving her the role of the person who tells the story, Miranda turns the spotlight from Alexander to point it at the other Hamilton of the musical, Eliza. By doing so, he gives a platform for the unapologetically gentle and vulnerable, yet strong women who are usually left out of contemporary media to shine. Elizabeth's central role in the musical's plot as well as her characterization reflect Lin-Manuel Miranda's feminist approach to character-building, his interest in the portrayal of different facets, and diverse depictions of femininity and shows his fondness for this woman who, in the words of Ron Chernow, was, "depicted as a broken, weeping, neurasthenic creature, clinging to her bible and lacking any identity other than that of Hamilton's widow for the longest time" (Chernow 2004, 728), an image that Miranda will drastically change.

In brief, Miranda's use of characterization sheds light on the lack of representation of women who are not as physically strong as Wonder Woman, as independent as Arya Stark, or as charismatic and outspoken as Angelica Schuyler. The women who, in other words, like Eliza, fall under the other end of the spectrum or somewhere in between the tough girl and the weak damsel in distress. While having strong female role models for younger girls to look up to is essential for the push towards equal representation on screen in our day and age, the erasure and belittling of feminine characteristics within contemporary media foster toxic standards for how women should behave, look like, and aspire to be (Halliwell et al. 2011). Eliza's characterization and central role to the musical's plot and its creation, despite representing a more subtle display of feminine power, can therefore be considered as feminist as it treats this female character as a multi-facetted human being who can simultaneously express emotional vulnerability and achieve great things independently from the main male character.

2. 3. Maria Reynolds: "Back to Reality":

Maria Reynolds is a very polarizing historical figure as she is mainly known for being the woman behind the downfall of Hamilton, and, consequently, the woman around whom one of the first sex scandals in the history of the United States revolved. While I have previously demonstrated, through the first two sub-sections, that Lin-Manuel Miranda's portrayal of women in *Hamilton: An American Musical* is heavily influenced by feminist thought and the belief in equal rights for men and women, the Hip-Hop musical's depiction of Maria Reynolds does not sway from what one would expect to see when it comes to how the twenty three year old woman (Public Broadcasting Service editors) would be depicted within a traditional historical medium. This section will focus on Miranda's portrayal of the third most influential woman in Hamilton's life, Maria Reynolds, as a stereotypical female representation constructed to satisfy the male gaze.

In the musical, Maria Reynolds is played by mixed-raced R&B singer Jasmine Cephas Jones and portrayed as a frivolous, sexually appealing and provocative woman.

This is visually accentuated by the fact that Cephas-Jones, who also plays Peggy in *Hamilton*, can be seen wearing a bright red dress accompanied by an equally brightly colored red lipstick when portraying Reynolds. While some may dismiss this choice of outfit and makeup as just an aesthetic choice made by the musical's costume designers, it is important to point out and keep in mind the fact that red, as a color, has historically been associated with passion, love, and sexuality when worn by women (Elliot and Pazda 2012). Furthermore, the entire cast's costume designs were strategically conceived to capture or accentuate the personality of the characters and were approved by Miranda (Miranda and McCarter 2016).

Miranda claims *Hamilton* to be the story of "America then, told by America now" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wboCdgzLHg, 5:16-5:22), meaning that when the latter strays away from the historical canon, it does so in an effort to modernize and adapt the historical narrative to the standards and needs of the twenty-first century. Keeping that in mind, it should be pointed out that, up until the twentieth century, with the Suffragettes' popularization of red lipstick as a symbol of power and social defiance, wearing the latter would have been considered as unattractive, impolite, and sexually alluring (Marsh 2014). Based on the fact that there is no previous record of Reynolds being involved in any type of sexual "misconduct" before the affair with Hamilton, it is safe to assume Cephas' wearing of a red lipstick to have been historically inaccurate for a regular woman living in eighteenth century America. Based on the historical inadequacy of Reynolds' visual signature color, one ought to then question what would be the contemporary motive behind choosing to put the character in such color when all other women in the show (Eliza, Angelica and Peggy) wear relatively muted, soft, and 'natural' colors (sky to light blue for Eliza, muted earthy orange for Angelica and pastel yellow for Peggy). It is also important to bear in mind that, in 2015, when the musical came out on Broadway, red dresses and lipstick, while fairly normalized, were still, although no longer associated with promiscuity and prostitution, somewhat synonymous with the femme fatale's seductive nature. Consequently, Maria is visually reduced to the embodiment of male needs, desires, and fantasies.

This negative visual depiction is accentuated by the fact that, in the context of the show as well as in history[11], due to the fact that the affair is told from the point of view of Alexander Hamilton, all of the blame is put on the young woman. Indeed, in "Say No To This", Hamilton narrates how Reynolds came to his home and begged him to help her due to the fact that her abusive husband had left her to fend for herself (Miranda 2015, "Say No To This"). In the song as well as in the original document we now refer to as *The Reynolds Pamphlet,* he paints himself as the victim of a scheme designed to extort money from him. Maria, who according to Miranda's retelling of their encounter in *Hamilton,* "…turned red … led [him] to her bed, let her legs spread and said/ Maria:

[11] The only recorded version of what had transpired between the two can be found in The Reynolds Pamphlet which was written by Hamilton from his own perspective and for the motive of clearing his name from any embezzlement rumors. This makes the document charged in biases and agendas.

Stay?" (Cephas-Jones 2015 "Say No To This"), lures him into committing adultery and is consequently painted as the villain while Hamilton's character desperately tries to resist temptation. Associate Professor Hannah Robbins confirms this issue with representing the pair's affair in such a way by pointing out the fact that:

> The relationship between Hamilton and his mistress is … problematic. Issues of consent in their affair are apparent. […] [The story] is framed by Hamilton saying she looks helpless and the potential for sex is irresistible (Robbins 2020).

This is strengthened by the fact that Maria's character is not given as much depth as other female characters and could be seen as a mere sexual object designed to pull Hamilton down.

Sadly for Mrs. Reynolds, this pattern of her character being reduced to a disposable object is carried into the marketing of the screen version of the musical. Robbins points out that:

> New posters for the Disney+ release represent Angelica, Eliza "and Peggy" in balletic, doll-like poses while the male characters are presented punching, leaping, and dancing. Meanwhile, Maria is not represented (Robbins 2020).

Here, it is worth mentioning that Peggy's role in Hamilton is minimal compared to that of Reynolds. Nevertheless, her character gets a poster for being part of the show's feminist anthem, "The Schuyler Sisters," while Maria is excluded and left out of the narrative.

Furthermore, the Reynolds scandal has been, since the very publication of the pamphlet, questioned, based on the fact that Hamilton was suspected of having tried to cover up a bigger scandal by publicly admitting to adultery. Julian Parks Boyd, professor of history at Princeton and editor of the multivolume edition of the papers of Thomas Jefferson, along with many historians such as writer of Eliza's biography Mazzeo Tilar, question the veracity of Hamilton's claims of the affair ever happening as, despite Reynolds being alive and willing to provide writing samples, Hamilton failed to provide the press with the original letters he was referring to in his pamphlet[12]. Boyd goes as far as labelling the allegedly forged letters as, "what a well-educated man might imagine to be the misspellings of a woman's love letter" (Boyd as cited in Mazzeo 2018). This is based on the inconsistencies found within the spelling of Reynolds[13] as well as the latter supposedly telling Peter Grotjan that she was going to publish her own pamphlet telling what truly

[12] Hamilton would have allegedly left the original letters with a friend in Philadelphia but the latter has later on declared that he was never in procession of those letters (Mazzeo 2018).

[13] Based on the excerpts founds within the pamphlet published by Hamilton, Maria Reynolds would have been able to spell complex words perfectly while failing to spell basic words like 'such' (Mazzeo 2018).

transpired between the two (Safire 2001). Unfortunately, records of such pamphlet were never found, and therefore, the mystery around the Reynolds affair remains unsolved for doubters of Hamilton. Nonetheless, the fact that *Hamilton* presented the affairs as facts, despite the historical debate on the issue, points to the fact that Miranda was not as invested in his research on Maria's case as he was for his other characters.

In summary, while some may argue that Miranda's approval of the character's visually 'sexual appeal' as well as her one dimensional portrayal and the fact that the blame is completely put on her shoulders despite Hamilton's equal, if not bigger, responsibility in this affair is just a reflection of the sentiments and negative attitude expressed by Alexander Hamilton in what will be known as "The Reynolds Pamphlet" (https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0138-0002#ARHN-01-21-02-0138-0002-fn-0009), when it comes to the analysis of Mrs. Reynolds' depiction within the musical, one should keep in mind that *Hamilton: An American Musical* has never pretended or even aimed to be historically accurate. In fact, the entire musical is allegedly constructed in order to challenge our pre-conceived ideas on the history of the United States and of the Founding Era. Additionally, despite the fact that Maria appears to be the villain in *Hamilton*'s story, therefore gaining influence over the development of the plot fulfilling an important dramaturgical function, it is made clear by her disappearance following their one-song-long affair, "Say No To This", that she is considered by Miranda as a plot device solely used to make the plot move forward. Reynolds is briefly seen in the audiovisual representation of the musical but is never given the voice, and consequently the agency, to express herself about the scandal. In contrast, Hamilton gets to express his inner turmoil in monologue-like "Hurricane" and "The Reynolds Pamphlet" in which parts of the original historical document (ibid) are read by the cast. The question remains why would a self-proclaimed feminist not give one of the rare women in the show, the same chance at redemption that all other antagonistic characters, such as Burr or even Hamilton himself, are granted in the musical. While Miranda chose to title the complementary book to the musical that he wrote along with Jeremy McCarter as *Hamilton: The Revolution* (Miranda and McCarter 2016) it seems as though he did not include Maria Reynolds in this so-called "revolutionary" retelling and rewriting of history.

3. Conclusion:

On the one hand, it is safe to say that Lin-Manuel Miranda's personal beliefs in feminism and his support of the women's rights movement bleed into his writing as he gives Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton and Angelica Schuyler Church powerful personalities and vital roles that push the musical's plot forward. Not only is Miranda's representation of those extraordinary women complex and multi-dimensional, his narrative and artistic choices also help both Schuyler sisters reenter American cultural consciousness and redefine Eliza's legacy as one of a "woman of towering strength and integrity" (Chernow 2004, 728).

On the other hand, his portrayal of Maria Reynolds as a femme fatale with no purpose outside of being the catalyst for the affair which will ruin Hamilton's career would point to the opposite. Miranda's lack of interest in telling Reynolds' story in a more nuanced way is apparent and could be attributed to many things. One plausible explanation could be the fact that writing and performing musicals come with a time limit. While the use of Rap for most of the musical's numbers allows Lin-Manuel Miranda to explore a lot of historical events in two hours and twenty-three minutes while being able to include a lot of carefully selected details by taking advantage of the lyrical density offered by this medium, it does not allow for the coverage of everything which transpired across the several decades in which Hamilton was alive.

In a conversation with Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman, award winning writers of many of Broadways' most well-known Political musicals, he recalls Weidman's advice to him:

> Well that leads me to a really good bit of advice you gave me early when I was writing Hamilton. I was drowning in research and what you told me was "Just write the parts you think are a musical" and that forms its own spine (Miranda 2020).

As the writing of the second part of the musical came much later down the line –or, in this context, years– and took less time than the first part with all the other female characters are introduced, it is likely that the fact that the speculative debate over the authenticity of the Reynolds Pamphlet cannot be fit in the timeframe left to explore the dense events which follow its publication. At this point in the musical, we are already more than an hour and a half into the performance, potentially affected how much questioning of Hamilton's version of how the events unfolded could be done and how important it could be to the rest of the plot .

Whether one should label Miranda's entire work or the man himself as sexist or misogynic (Drajpuch 2021, Williams 2020) as a result of his reductive, yet impactful portrayal of Maria Reynolds is debatable. While the musical's representation of women is not completely feminist and is flawed in many ways, it is still very progressive in the sense that it explores different versions of womanhood which is not common practice in musicals since the medium is known for using opposing extremes for the sake of creating drama (Kowalke 2013, 169-170). However, what these representations of the three women definitely and successfully prove is that works of art are not independent from their social and historical context and that, not only can literature be a vessel for telling history, but it can also reshape and mold the latter, past, and future history alike, based on the author's individual reading of what is traditionally considered to be facts. After all, what *Hamilton* highlights is that we, as an audience, cannot separate the author and the context or the historical events being represented within the work from it. Furthermore, it exemplifies how much historical adaptations in the media can be limited to the kind of data the author has access to, chooses to include and, most importantly, what kind of story they want to produce as well as how entertaining it

would be for the audience to see or hear. After all, whether historically accurate or not, the musical was ultimately made to entertain and, thus, aims to be financially profitable. Reinterpreting Hamilton's story, and consequently American's Founding Era and history, enables Miranda to shift the discourse around the historical era to include female figures who, based on gendered biases, would otherwise rarely been included in the narrative.

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