

Hamilton (Original Broadway Cast Recording) Study Guide

Hamilton (Original Broadway Cast Recording) by Various Artists

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Plot Summary

Hamilton: An American Musical Book, Music, and Lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Original Broadway Cast Soundtrack Recording. 2016. Atlantic Recording Corporation. The recording is a two-disc CD recording with most of the scenes/songs from the show, and includes a booklet with a transcription of its lyrics. The piece is written in a primarily rap/hip-hop style, with elements of rhythm-and-blues and the traditional Broadway musical.

Hamilton: An American Musical is the history-inspired story of the life and political career of Alexander Hamilton, one of the key players in the American Revolutionary War and in the shaping the government, policies, and Constitution of the newly born United States of America. The recording (show) begins with narration from Aaron Burr, who was one of Hamilton's contemporaries – a sometime friend, a frequent critic, and an occasional legal partner. There are references in Burr's opening narration to the trajectory of Hamilton's life, including a reference to how Burr shot him. This initial narration also the show's narrative style and vocabulary, most particularly its emphasis on a storytelling language based primarily on the rhythms and melodies of rap.

The narrative of Act One (the first of the two-disc set) is anchored by a portrayal of the political and military actions before, during, and after the American Revolution. Hamilton, along with a trio of allies and friends and supported by the admiring mentorship of future President George Washington, plays a key role in both sides of those actions, his outspoken and impulsive intelligence sometimes getting him into difficulty with the more thoughtful Burr and others, including Washington. They also draw him closer to two women, Angelica and Eliza Schuyler, who play defining roles in his personal life. The personal aspect of Hamilton's story becomes something of a subplot in both the first and second acts of the show, counterpointing the more idea-driven main story with moments that explore Hamilton's inner life – his emotions, his memories, his longings.

By the end of Act 1, the American Revolution has been won by the rebels; Hamilton's relationship with Washington is as secure as his relationship with Burr is uneasy; and, in his personal life, he has married Eliza, who has given birth to their son, Philip. As Act 2 begins, Hamilton faces increased opposition to his ideas, and to his influence with Washington, from Thomas Jefferson, newly returned from France and who has allies in the government. Jefferson's attempts to remove Hamilton from his position are supported by Burr, who is both resentful of Hamilton and angry that he (Burr) has not been as much a part of the formation of the new American government as he believes he should have been. Tension between Burr and Hamilton intensifies as Hamilton's personal and political lives are both shaken to their core by revelations of a sexual affair, in the aftermath of which Hamilton's son loses his life defending his father's honor. Eventually, the conflict between Hamilton and Burr reaches a point of ultimate confrontation: a duel between the two men that results in Hamilton's death.



In the musical's final scene, an epilogue of sorts, Eliza and the rest of the company sing of how Hamilton's history was shaped, over time, by people determined to see his reputation ruined. There are also references to what Eliza, and others, did to improve Hamilton's reputation, raising one of the show's central thematic questions as they sing "Who lives? Who dies? Who tells your story?"



Act 1, Part 1

Summary

“Alexander Hamilton”: Narrator Aaron Burr leads other characters (including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison) in a narration of the early part of Hamilton’s life – specifically, the many difficulties he overcame in childhood, his determination to create a new life for himself in America, and his doing so by writing an essay that inspired his community to put together a fund to get him to New York. At one point, the Chorus repeats the refrain “In New York you can be a new man,” (Act 1, Scene 1) referring to him as “another immigrant comin’ up from the bottom” (Act 1, Scene 1). The Chorus comments on how impatient and determined Hamilton was, with Hamilton announcing his name determinedly and Burr commenting on how he was the “damn fool that shot him” (Act 1, Scene 1). The music for “Alexander Hamilton” begins with a basic, relatively slow rap beat and spoken lyrics, then develops melody in the singing with orchestral backing.

“Aaron Burr, Sir”: Hamilton introduces himself to Burr, whom he knows by reputation. The phrase “Aaron Burr, Sir” is a repeated motif: whenever Hamilton and Burr meet in the show, the greeting is repeated, with variations. Here, when Hamilton learns that he and Burr are both orphans, he wishes there was a war so that they could both prove themselves to be more than what people believe them to be. Burr takes him into a tavern, where he urges Hamilton to be a little less enthusiastic in expressing his beliefs, values, and goals, saying that “fools who run their mouths of wind up dead” (Act 1, Scene 2). As an example, Burr points to the appearance of three rowdy revolutionaries (Laurens, Lafayette, and Mulligan) who, when Hamilton challenges Burr to reveal what he believes in, confront Hamilton. In terms of music, “Aaron Burr” is mostly rapped: there are moments of melody from Burr. The introduction of the three revolutionaries is entirely rapped: some of Lafayette’s lines are in French.

“My Shot”: Hamilton proclaims his ambitions for himself and for his country. Laurens, Lafayette, and Mulligan join him, and as Burr urges them to stay calm, Hamilton continues to lead the others in the repeated refrain: “I am not throwing away my shot” (Act 1, Scene 3), talking about how he never had friends and will not let them down. The chorus supports him as he speaks of the relationship between his troubled past and his desire for a better future for both himself and America. “For the first time,” he says, “I’m thinkin’ past tomorrow” (Act 1, Scene 3). Burr tries to calm him and the other revolutionaries, but Hamilton and the others are too excited about the possibility of fighting, about finally “rising up” (Act 1, Scene 3). Musically, “My Shot” is almost entirely rapped, while Burr, the other revolutionaries, and the chorus sing more melodically.

“The Story of Tonight”: Hamilton and his three new friends, along with the chorus, celebrate their collaboration and their hopes for the change they are all determined to fight for. The music of “The Story of Tonight” is light, melodic, and wistful, with very little rap in terms of style and/or rhythm.



Analysis

This first section introduces several key narrative and thematic elements that continue throughout the show. The first, and arguably most important, is the relationship between protagonist Hamilton and antagonist Burr, characters whose similarities (i.e. that they're both ambitious, intelligent orphans) and differences (primarily in how they act upon their intentions and goals) trigger the show's primary conflicts from beginning to end. Burr's reference to being the man who shot Hamilton, in fact, foreshadows the final moment of conflict between the two characters that takes place in the show's second last scene. A second, and related, element of significance is the development of the relationship between Hamilton and his three fellow revolutionaries, a relationship founded in commonalities of passionate belief and shared respect that has both similarities to, and differences with, Hamilton's relationship with Burr.

Meanwhile, several language-based elements that become repeated images, or motifs, throughout the show are also introduced here. One of the most significant is Hamilton's reference to not giving away his "shot," particularly notable because of the multiple meanings of the word "shot": in colloquial terms, it means a chance, or opportunity; in literal terms, it means an opportunity to fire a weapon; and in technical terms of the time, it refers to whatever is loaded into a weapon (i.e. bullets, gunpowder, or some other kind of projectile). Here, as elsewhere in the show, one or more of these meanings to the word is in play. Other important language-based motifs originating in this section include the rhythmic and melodic patterns associated with both "Aaron Burr, sir" and "Alexander Hamilton" which recur, albeit with variations, each time the name is referenced. In this way, the character is immediately identifiable through the use of music, and vice versa.

Themes developed in this section include that relating to trust and betrayal; the idea of sacrifice and martyrdom (present in the references of Hamilton and the other revolutionaries to being willing to die for their cause); and the influence of ambition. This last manifests in the expressions of personal ambition in Hamilton and Burr, and in the political and social ambitions of all four of the major characters appearing here.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways is the theme of trust and betrayal developed in Act 1, Part 1?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the contrast between Hamilton's relationship with Burr and his relationship with his three fellow revolutionaries. What do the relationships have in common? How are they different? How do they each opportunities for Hamilton's character to be revealed?



Discussion Question 3

How do the three layers of meaning to the word “shot” manifest, or play out, in Act 1, Part 1?

Vocabulary

providence, impoverished, squalor, slaughter, devastation, refrain, destitute, restitution, accelerate, intercourse, prodigy, scrappy, astonish, impeachable, brandish, descendant, monarchy, anarchy, apprentice, battalion, abolitionist, vengeance

Act 1, Part 2

Summary

“The Schuyler Sisters”: Burr narrates the journey taken into New York by the three daughters of the wealthy Philip Schuyler: Angelica, Peggy, and Eliza. As they explore the city, urging each other to “look around” (Act 1, Scene 5), they interact with both Burr and the men they encounter, responding with fierce intelligence and, on Angelica’s part, an equally fierce determination to be as much a part of the revolution as the men. As the number concludes, the sisters and the chorus celebrate work and their good fortune at being “in the greatest city in the world” (Act 1, Scene 5). The music of “The Schuyler Sisters” is primarily rapped, frequently counterpointed with intense, excited melody.

“Farmer Refuted” starts with a traditional, classical feel (i.e. utilization of harpsichord music and poetic story) in the voice of British traditionalist Samuel Seabury, who urges that America remain under British rule and control. This becomes counterpointed with rap-style music and the narrative giving Hamilton’s counter-argument in favor of rebellion. The piece ends with the introduction of King George.

“You’ll Be Back”: The music is light, melodic, playful, and bouncy, phrased textually like a love song in the aftermath of a relationship breakup. King George sings of his absolute certainty that the rebellious American colonies will come back to him eventually, promising to kill people to remind America how much he loves them. The song ends with the visual of an American rebel being killed by British soldiers.

“Right Hand Man”: Moments of musical lyricism that highlight the dominating, surrounding presence of the British army alternate with rap sections in which Hamilton proclaims his determination to “rise up” ((Act 1, Scene 8). This section also introduce George Washington, who presents himself as accomplished, respected, and determined to fight the British. He describes the increasingly difficult situation faced by the rebels, narrates the conflict (with the Chorus emulating the “boom” of the cannons), and realizes his need for a “right hand man” (Act 1, Scene 8). The song shows how Hamilton, after successfully leading facets of the rebellion, becomes that man instead of Aaron Burr, who more smoothly presents himself as more qualified. Washington convinces Hamilton to join him, recognizing that Hamilton wants to die for his cause but adding that “dying is easy, living is harder” (Act 1, Scene 8). As the song / scene concludes, Hamilton and his trio of allies repeat the refrain “I am not throwing away my shot!” ((Act 1, Scene 8) as the Schuyler Sisters repeat the refrain “Rise up!” (Act 1, Scene 8) Hamilton makes plans, Washington gives him the position, and the song ends with another “Boom!” from the Chorus.



Analysis

This section introduces several key characters as it develops the primary narrative line associated with the developing and intensifying revolution – in other words, the political narrative. These include George Washington, who becomes one of Hamilton’s most important mentors and allies, and King George of England, who becomes both comic relief and a foreshadower of conflict in the revolution’s aftermath. Other characters introduced in this section have an effect on the political plot, but more indirectly: their influence is felt primarily in the sub-plot that explores and narrates Hamilton’s personal life. Here, the most important characters are two of the three Schuyler sisters. These intelligent, high-spirited women (Eliza and Angelica) play particularly important roles in Hamilton’s life and story, the former as his wife and the latter as a friend and confidante. The third sister, Peggy, is much less narratively significant: the primary function of her presence here, arguably, is to give voice to concerns about being in New York not felt by the more secure older sisters, and to fill out the trio of female voices that takes narrative and musical focus throughout the number that bears their name. This particular musical number also dramatizes, visually and musically, the impact of the play’s primary setting, New York City, on both the characters and the situation in which they find themselves.

Other important elements in this section include the repeated refrain of “look around,” utilized by Eliza throughout the narrative in her attempts to get Hamilton to live his life in other ways, and the repeated refrain of “rise up.” This, like the references in Part 1 to “my shot” and the names of the two central characters, becomes a musical and textual motif for various characters (but primarily Hamilton) throughout the story. Here it is primarily associated with rebellion, but later, it also becomes associated with the drive to realizations of personal identity and goals. Also in this section, there is significant development of the show’s thematic interest in the tension between sacrifice and martyrdom. This is developed in the conversation between Washington and Hamilton in Scene 8. The sense here is that Washington has an insight that Hamilton’s passion is more oriented towards being a martyr (i.e. someone dying for a cause) than being a leader, and works towards convincing him that being a leader has more value. Eventually, over the course of the show, Hamilton comes to accept this perspective, but right up until the end, he remains haunted (driven?) by a martyr’s longing for, and curiosity about, death.

Discussion Question 1

The actions of which characters manifest the show’s thematic exploration of ambition?

Discussion Question 2

Is there any cause, any belief, or any value that you, like Hamilton and the revolutionaries, feel compelled to fight for, perhaps even die for? What does having a commitment or an ideal that intense feel like?



Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Washington chooses Hamilton over Burr? What qualities in either man / both men do you think lead Washington to make the decision he does?

Vocabulary

gawk, revelation, compel, rabble, eloquent, modulate, divisive, indecisive, estrangement, submissive, millisecond, venerate



Act 1, Part 3

Summary

The brief, transitional “Winter’s Ball” echoes the music and rhythms of “Alexander Hamilton” as Burr narrates his and Hamilton’s arrival at a winter soldier’s ball which the Schuyler sisters are attending.

“Helpless” begins with the arrival of Eliza and her sisters at the ball, Eliza singing about how helpless she feels when she looks into Hamilton’s eyes. For her part, Angelica is attracted to Hamilton’s mind and way of talking, but realizes that Eliza has already fallen for him, and so takes him to meet her. The rhythms and melody line are pop-oriented as a month’s events are compressed into four minutes: love letters, longing, fatherly disapproval, Hamilton’s wedding proposal (in which he confesses his poverty and insecurity, brags about his intelligence, and promises to give her the best life he can), and their wedding. Eliza sings “I look into your eyes and the sky’s the limit” (Act 1, Scene 10).

“Satisfied” begins with Angelica proposing a toast to the bride and groom, to the union and the revolution, and to the hope that both Hamilton and Eliza will be satisfied. Visually and musically, the action rewinds to the beginning of the winter’s ball. Angelica then begins a rapid rap in which she remembers the events of that night, particularly the moment she saw Hamilton (who flirted with her) and fell immediately in love with him, recognizing that neither of them was ever going to be satisfied. Moments of lyricism alternate with moments of fast-paced rap as Angelica realizes that she and Hamilton share similar levels of intelligence and quickness of thought, and also that Eliza has fallen deeply in love. She realizes important truths about herself and her situation, truths that make her further realize that, out of love for her sister, she has to step aside and let Eliza and Hamilton be together. “At least,” Angelica sings, she’ll “keep his eyes in [her] life” (Act 1, Scene 11). The action then returns to the moment when Angelica proposes the toast, the music now more intense and emotionally powerful, reflecting what has been revealed about the truth of Angelica’s feelings. The song concludes with references to Angelica knowing that neither she nor Hamilton will ever be satisfied.

This section is followed by a reprise of “The Story of Tonight,” in which Hamilton’s trio of friends (Mulligan, Lafayette, Laurens) celebrate his wedding and tease him about his wedding night. Their celebrating is interrupted by Burr. Hamilton sends Burr’s rowdy friends off, conversation between him and Burr revealing that Burr is in love with a married woman, and waiting for her to be free. The two, very different men, agree to see each other “on the other side of the war” (Act 1, Scene 12). The music of the Reprise begins with a playful melody, segues into rap as Burr arrives, and again becomes melodic in the conversation between Burr and Hamilton, in which Hamilton urges Burr to go after the woman he loves and which ends in an unresolved musical cadence that leads into the next song.



“Wait For It”: Burr sings about his patient determination to wait for his married lover (Theodosia); about his family background (as the grandson of a preacher); and his awareness of how different he is from the impatient, driven Hamilton. He likens love and life to death, saying that none of them discriminate “between the sinners and the saints” (Act 1, Scene 13) and how they both keep taking from the living who “rise” and “fall” and “break” and keep waiting for understanding. The music begins melodically and up-tempo, intensifying as Burr comments on how he is the one thing in his life he has control over, then becoming quieter and calmer as Burr contemplates the differences between himself and Hamilton, commenting in refrain on how determined and willing he (Burr) is to “wait for it” (Act 1, Scene 13).

Analysis

In terms of story and plot, there are several important points to note in this section, most of which have to do with developments in the show’s main sub-plot: the relationship between Hamilton and Eliza. The main revolutionary storyline, aside from a few glancing references, here takes second place to developments in character and personal history for Hamilton and for important characters with whom he interacts. Within the context of those developments, it’s important to note one of the most intriguing structural elements in the show, the shift between present and past as the narrative explores Angelica’s relationship with both Hamilton and her sister. This is the only point in the show at which the flashback device is used in such a way: there are narrated descriptions of past events later in the story, but this is the only point at which the past is enacted as though it’s happening in the moment. This sequence is also one of the most poignantly intriguing in the show primarily because it so vividly portrays Angelica’s emotional sacrifice, but also because, in its reference to Hamilton never being satisfied, it foreshadows ways in which his story reaches its tragic conclusion as a result of the characteristic that Angelica so clearly identifies here.

Other important points to note about this section include developments in the conflicted relationship between Hamilton and Burr (particularly the shaping and definition of some of the fundamental differences between the two) and Burr’s reference to being involved with a married woman. At the same time as it deepens and intensifies the conflict between Burr and Hamilton, it also foreshadows the development of a similar, narratively significant relationship in Act 2.

Discussion Question 1

How does the theme of personal transformation manifest in Act 1, Part 3?

Discussion Question 2

What does Angelica mean when she says that she’ll be able to keep Hamilton’s eyes in her life?



Discussion Question 3

What does Burr mean when he refers to love and life being similar to death, in that they don't discriminate? How does this relate to the overall action and themes of the show?

Vocabulary

embellish, fleeting, stamina, scrutiny, mutiny, excellency, phenomenon, obnoxious, quill, feral, tolerance, insidious, discriminate, homily, brimstone



Act 1, Part 4

Summary

“Stay Alive” begins with a light, haunting melody sung by Eliza and other women, hoping that Hamilton will “stay alive” (Act 1, Scene 14). Hamilton then muses on how difficult the military side of the revolution has become, and on how he’s taken over much of Washington’s correspondence and administrative work. These thoughts are interrupted by the arrival of Washington, who brings news that the time has come for the tactics of the revolution to change: they have to take charge. Hamilton agrees, supported by his trio of friends as he asks Washington to give him a command, and as Washington repeatedly refuses. His and Washington’s efforts are undermined by the weak-willed General Lee who is eventually replaced by Hamilton and who then trash talks both Hamilton and Washington. One of the trio, Laurens, decides to challenge Lee. Hamilton cautions him to “not throw away [his] shot” (Act 1, Scene 14). The music in this section is primarily rapped.

“Ten Duel Commandments”: The full company of performers describes the establishment of a duel between Laurens and Lee, describing the various rules of dueling as they go. There are references to how most duels end with apologies or withdrawal, and to praying for forgiveness of sins in case of death. The song then reveals that Hamilton and Burr are the seconds (assistants) for Laurens and Lee, respectively. Hamilton and Burr meet to try to resolve the situation, but are not successful. As the song reaches the tenth commandment, Lauren and Lee take the required ten paces apart, turn, and fire.

“Meet Me Inside”: Conversation reveals that in the duel, Laurens shot Lee and that Lee yielded. Washington appears and takes Hamilton away from the scene of the duel, warning him that what has happened puts their cause at risk. He repeatedly calls Hamilton “son,” which irritates Hamilton, who has been protesting that what happened was the right thing and that he needs to be respected. Eventually, though, Hamilton speaks disrespectfully to his commanding officer. Washington sends him home. Musically, the piece is primarily rapped.

“That Would Be Enough”: Hamilton returns home after his confrontation with Washington. Eliza, now pregnant, meets him there; she reminds him how lucky they are to be alive, quoting the lines she sung earlier in the show and telling him that just having him home with her and their child, being a family, would be “enough.” She pleads with him to let her into his inner life, to be “part of the narrative / in the story they will write someday” (Act 1, Scene 17). The music echoes the earlier appearance of Eliza in “The Schuyler Sisters”, slow and melodic.



Analysis

The focus of the narrative returns to the main plot in this section, as Hamilton's political and revolutionary goals begin to propel the story towards the climax of the first act, which takes place in the following section. Key elements here include Hamilton's increasingly assertive demands that he be given a military command, demands that, in turn, challenge and in some ways damage his relationship with mentor George Washington. Here, the story develops the theme of ambition, with Hamilton's determination to improve himself and his life creating significant tensions. There is also the dramatization of the Laurens/Lee duel, which fuels the confrontational fire between Burr and Hamilton that continues to build towards the climax of the piece as a whole, late in the second act.

All of this is not to suggest that the personal aspect of Hamilton's life and story disappears from the narrative completely: the final song/scene in this section, "That Would Be Enough," manifests Eliza's primary intention throughout the piece, which is to remind Hamilton that there is, or at least can be, more to life than his political and military goals. Meanwhile, a key component of this moment is Eliza's reference to wanting to be included in the narrative of Hamilton's life, a reference that foreshadows a moment later in the show when she wants to be taken OUT of that narrative, and an even later moment in which she not only reclaims her place in that narrative, but expresses a resolve to ensure that the full and true nature of that narrative is not forgotten. This, in turn, relates to and manifests one of the show's key overall themes, that which explores the subjective nature of history.

There are several other important foreshadowings in this section, the most significant of which is the entire duel sequence. This foreshadows not one but two important sequences in the second act, both of which feature duels that lead to the deaths of significant characters and one of which, the duel between Hamilton and Burr (already foreshadowed in Burr's reference, in the first scene, to killing Hamilton), is the climax of the show as a whole. At the same time, the repeated refrain of "stay alive" is an ironic piece of foreshadowing of this same event. Other foreshadowings tied to repeated textual motifs include Eliza's reference to home life being "enough," a motif (like "my shot", rise up", and "stay alive"), that recurs, with slight variations on implied meaning, throughout the narrative.

Discussion Question 1

How is the show's thematic interest in the nature and power of ambition dramatized in Act 1, Part 4?

Discussion Question 2

The concept and practice of dueling is defined by an experience of one person feeling like honor or reputation have been slighted by the words and actions of another. While



dueling has been outlawed, what contemporary experiences, attitudes, or practices can be seen as originating from the same sorts of causes?

Discussion Question 3

If you were in a position similar to Hamilton's at the end of Act 1, Part 4 (i.e. being asked to choose between home life and fighting for something you believed in), what would you do, and why?

Vocabulary

despondent, relentless, camaraderie, stalemate, deniability, adrenaline, immature



Act 1, Part 5

Summary

“Guns and Ships”: Burr narrates how the exuberantly rapping Lafayette, who has just returned from a mission to gain supplies and support, convinces Washington to bring Hamilton back into the rebellion. As Washington writes a letter to Hamilton, the music transitions into “History Has Its Eyes On You” in which Washington confesses that his first command ended in failure, commenting that he knew early that history was watching him, and adding that he also knows history is watching Hamilton. This song contains the first reference, in the show, to an idea that is one of the piece’s main themes and which, from this point on, is repeated frequently, particularly at the show’s conclusion: “Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?” (Act 1, Scene 19). Musically, the early part of “Guns and Ships” begins with the same rhythmic, military pounding as the opening song, moves into a very quick rap, and climaxes with melodic, almost bluesy commentary from Washington. This segues into the thoughtful, confessional “History ...”.

“Yorktown”: This song and scene portrays a key battle in the revolution. It begins with a reunion between Lafayette and Hamilton, which ends with a repetition of the “My Shot” refrain. As the battle begins, Hamilton reflects on the fact that Eliza is waiting for him at home before leading his men into battle. In narration, the battle ends quickly, with the surrender of the British. Hamilton describes Washington’s happiness, and the defiant song sung by the defeated British. The sequence ends with a reference to the world having been turned “upside down” (Act 1, Scene 20). The song begins with a mid-tempo rap, accelerates through the narrative of Hamilton’s leadership of the battle, and slows back down for the surrender. The rhythm and tempo accelerate into the song’s finale and the refrain of the world turning upside down.

“What Comes Next”: King George bemoans the fact that he’s in conflict with a pair of other European nations, and warns the newly freed colony that they’ll find it challenging to govern, now that they have power. The music clearly echoes “You’ll Be Back” from earlier in the show, and ends with the comment that the rebels are on their own.

“Dear Theodosia”: Burr sings of the birth of his daughter while Hamilton sings of the birth of his son, both referring to how their life has changed, both reflecting on how their fathers were never around, and both making vows to create better worlds for their children. They also both sing of their beliefs that their children will blow them all away. The song has a lighthearted, almost playful bounce that counterpoints the intensity of the feelings and intentions it communicates.

“Non-Stop”:: The finale to Act 1 begins with narration of Burr and Hamilton’s situation as lawyers with adjoining offices, their occasional collaborations, and their arguments over style (Hamilton’s abrasive aggression vs. Burr’s thoughtful discipline). Meanwhile, Hamilton’s ambitions for the country continue to grow, and he prepares to write a series



of pamphlets promoting the Constitution and the country's ideals. He asks Burr to co-write them, but Burr refuses, saying he's waiting to see how the actual process of being a country unfolds. Narration then reveals that Hamilton wrote most of the pamphlets himself, in a flurry of "non-stop" activity that those around him sometimes find disturbing. As Hamilton's energy and ambition intensify, as narration reveals the seemingly incredible number of pamphlets he actually wrote, other characters and excerpts from their previous appearances appear: Angelica comments on how Hamilton will never be satisfied; Eliza urges him to look around and believe what they have is enough; and Washington reminds him that history is watching him. Washington also asks Hamilton to be part of his government. Finally, as the chorus sings with him, Hamilton protests again that he is not throwing away his shot. Musically, the first part of the Finale is mostly rap, with the exception of Burr's comments on Hamilton's behavior, and the questioning of why Hamilton works and writes with such intensity.

Analysis

There are, essentially, two climaxes in this concluding section of the first act. The first is the climax to what has been, up to this point, the main narrative line: the fighting, and winning, of the American Revolution. The victory of Hamilton, Washington, and the other revolutionaries is essentially summarized in "The Battle of Yorktown" which is, arguably, the climax (to this point) of the show's thematic interest in the power of ambition – specifically, Hamilton's. The second climax comes in the sequence titled "Non-Stop," in which Hamilton is portrayed as still being driven towards further achievements, proving Angelica's earlier perceptions of him that he will never be satisfied. What's interesting structurally and narratively about this double climax is that it sets the Revolution, and Hamilton's place in it, squarely within the context of what is now clearly the show's main narrative focus: the life and career of Hamilton. The Revolution, this section suggests, is only one aspect of both - an important and defining one, but still only one. The act ends with indications that as interesting and compelling and complicated as Hamilton's life has been to this point, what will follow in the second act will prove to be even more important.

Other noteworthy elements in this section include the first appearance of the thematically central idea relating to the subjective nature of history – specifically, Washington's references to being aware of history's perspective, and the quote "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?" This question sums up one of the main authorial purposes in telling this particular story in this particular way – that is, to offer a different perspective on Hamilton than is usually offered by the so-called history books. As such, the question as raised here foreshadows a much clearer, more overt statement of this theme and intention in the show's final scene. Meanwhile, other themes are developed in this section: the theme of ambition and transformation, and the theme relating to the importance of writing, as dramatized in the "Federalist Papers" sequence, which specifically evokes the theme in relation to both Hamilton's identity and Burr's growing jealousy.



Finally, foreshadowings in this section include the comments of King George (which accurately foreshadow the difficulties encountered by Washington and Hamilton in Act 2), as well as the writing and publication of the “Federalist Papers” in pamphlet form, which foreshadows the writing and publication of another, even more impactful pamphlet in the second act. Additionally, there are the references, made by both Burr and Hamilton, to the idea that their children will blow them away. This is ironic foreshadowing of how Hamilton’s son Philip refers to himself in the second act, and also of what actually happens to Philip.

Discussion Question 1

How is the theme of personal transformation developed in Act 1, Part 5?

Discussion Question 2

As previously discussed, the word “shot” has multiple layers of meaning. In what way does the inclusion of the word “shot” in Act 1, Part 6 reflect each of those layers? Think both metaphorically and literally.

Discussion Question 3

How do you think the initial professional failure described by Washington affects, or has affected, how he relates to Hamilton? What is the relationship between Washington’s past and his present?

Vocabulary

ragtag, consolidate, resilience, massacre, bayonet, covenant, estrangement, corruption, proclamation, succinct, contradiction



Act 2, Part 1

Summary

“What’d I Miss?”: Narration from Burr sums up how things have changed in the years after the revolution; introduces Thomas Jefferson (who asks “What’d I Miss?”); and sums up first the friendship, then the falling out, of Hamilton and Madison. As Jefferson travels to New York to work with Washington, he meets Madison, who claims that Hamilton’s financial plans are going to ruin the new country. Jefferson is then welcomed by both Washington and Hamilton. The music of “What’d I Miss?” starts with Burr’s rapped narration of Jefferson’s return, which is followed by Jefferson’s own more melodic narration of what brought him back, of his intentions, and his reactions. The music is syncopated, jazzy, and somewhat playful.

“Cabinet Battle #1”: Washington sets the scene in narration: a debate (in the form of a rap battle) between Jefferson and Hamilton over the merits of Hamilton’s economic plans. Jefferson argues that each state should pay its own debts, while Hamilton suggests that the country as a whole should share debt, eventually losing his temper. Washington separates the two men, telling Hamilton to calm down and work towards getting the votes in Congress that approval of his plan requires. Musically, Jefferson’s argument is written with more musical elements, while Hamilton’s arguments are almost entirely rapped. The conversation between Washington and Hamilton is also rapped.

“Take a Break”: begins with two simultaneous happenings: Eliza and Philip (her son with Hamilton) practicing at the piano, and Hamilton writing a letter to Angelica outlining his problems. Eliza convinces him to listen to Philip’s rhymed composition, then urges him to “take a break” and spend the summer with her and Philip. Hamilton tells her that he has to continue working on his debt payment bill. A letter from Angelica arrives in which she advises Hamilton on tactics for dealing with Jefferson, and says that she’s coming for a visit: she too wants him to take a break. Moments later, in speedy theatrical storytelling, Angelica arrives, and is greeted by her family. Both she and Eliza again try to convince Hamilton to take a break, but he again refuses. Musically, the letters and conversation involving Hamilton, Eliza, and Angelica is quick, lyrical, and melodic. Philip’s presentation is simply but cleverly rhymed and rapped, a clear echo of his father’s style. At the end of the song, Eliza once again reminds Hamilton to take a look around and see how lucky they are to be alive.

“Say No to This”: begins with a brief, establishing narration by Burr, but then moves into narration by Hamilton, as he describes the circumstances of meeting, becoming attracted to, and beginning his affair with Maria Reynolds, who is married to the abusive James Reynolds. After the affair has been continuing for a while, Reynolds blackmails Hamilton into giving him money so that he (Reynolds) won’t tell Eliza what’s been happening. Hamilton confronts Maria, who denies that she’s behind the blackmail. The two of them end up having sex again, Hamilton continuing to struggle to say no. Maria, meanwhile, quotes text and music from “Helpless.” As the song concludes, Hamilton



gives Reynolds the money he wants, and says that “nobody needs to know” (Act 2, Scene 4). Musically, Burr’s and Hamilton’s introduction and commentary are rapped, while Maria’s music is melodically phrased like rhythm and blues. As the affair continues, the blend of rap and R&B continues, the rhythm slow and sensual. Reynolds’ letter is rapped. The music reaches a simultaneous vocal and sexual climax between Hamilton and Maria just before Hamilton gives Reynolds the money.

Analysis

The second act begins in much the same way as the first, with narrator Aaron Burr setting the scene for what is about to happen. As his narration continues, however, the story introduces a new pair of characters, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, both of whom play important roles in the development of the narrative for the remainder of the show. More specifically they, along with Burr, are the main instigators of the plot and actions that eventually remove Hamilton from his place of influence in government and, ultimately, lead to his death. It’s important to note, however, that Hamilton is not a passive victim of political manipulations. His own choices and decisions, beginning here with his entering into the affair with Maria Reynolds, play what is arguably an even more defining role in what eventually becomes his ultimate fate.

Another key narrative element that develops in this section is one that has been introduced before (in contrast to the introduction of two new characters). This is Eliza’s increasingly intense requests (that aren’t yet demands, but are close) that Hamilton take more time for his family. Another new character is introduced here, one who, in his own way but for different reasons, becomes similarly important in the unfolding of Hamilton’s story. This is his son Philip, whose character, as defined here, is an intriguing mix of his father’s traits (i.e. ambition, self-praise) and his mother’s (i.e. sensitivity and longing for affection).

In terms of narrative style, the key points to note here are the way the appearance of an important new character (Jefferson) is accompanied by an appearance of a new musical language (i.e. that of jazz); the way echoes of another male/female relationship find their way into the music and language of Hamilton’s relationship with Maria Reynolds and, perhaps most notably, the language and style of “Cabinet Battle 1.” This is one of the most notable examples in the show of how the choice of the creative team to communicate history in the language of today plays out. The emotional and intentional parallels of cabinet debates and rap battles are clear: in both scenarios, participants use carefully chosen words in a form of rhetoric, or argument, in order to win their point and gain status, either perceived or real, over their opponent. This similarity in intention makes the difference in execution of the two forms of argument simultaneously more notable and more accessible to contemporary audiences, particularly young people. That accessibility is, arguably, one of the reasons why the narrative vocabularies of rap and hip-hop, among others, were chosen as the primary narrative vocabularies for the show as a whole.



Discussion Question 1

How is the play's thematic interest in trust and betrayal developed in Act 2, Part 1?

Discussion Question 2

What song / scene from Act 1 is echoed, in terms of intention and idea, by the action of "Take A Break"?

Discussion Question 3

What is ironic about the fact that Maria Reynolds quotes text and melody from Act 1's "Helpless"?

Vocabulary

precedent, enterprising, outrageous, candidacy, diuretic, reticent, reconvene, intransigent, polymath, pastime, endeavor, prosperous, cuckold, apologetic



Act 2, Part 2

Summary

“The Room Where It Happens” begins with a tense conversation between Burr and Hamilton about how a minor war martyr had a street named after him while they were still alive and doing greater work. Their (entirely rapped) conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Madison and Jefferson, who lead Hamilton into a conversation from which Burr is excluded. This leads Burr to sing / narrate about his desire to be involved “in the room where it happens” (Act 2, Scene 5). Narration is intercut with Madison, Jefferson and Hamilton engaging in an emotionally and politically intense argument about where the capital of the union is going to be. Rapped narration reveals that as a result of this meeting, Hamilton got the financial power he wanted, while Jefferson and Madison got permission to establish the nation’s capital in the South. Jefferson takes credit for arranging the meeting, while Madison takes credit for arranging and proposing the compromise. Hamilton explains his reasons for entering into the compromise, including the fact that as a result of the compromise, he got the financial power he desired. The song ends with Burr repeating and reiterating his determination to be involved in the political process.

“Schuyler Defeated”: Conversation between Philip Hamilton and his mother (Eliza) reveals that his namesake grandfather, Philip Schuyler, has been defeated in an election by Aaron Burr. Burr, in turn, is confronted by Hamilton, who considers Burr’s victory (the result of changing political parties) as a personal attack. Burr defends himself, saying that Hamilton is unpopular with politicians and that there needed to be a balancing influence against him in the Senate. Burr again warns Hamilton to not be so proud and so aggressive. The conversation between Eliza and Philip is sung by Eliza and rapped by Philip, while the conversation between Burr and Hamilton is rapped.

“Cabinet Battle #2” is another rap battle between Hamilton and Jefferson, moderated by Washington. This one is about whether the new union should support their allies (the French) in a France-England conflict (about to emerge as a result of the French Revolution). Jefferson argues at length that the Union should support France which, he says, supported the rebellion. He is supported by Madison. In a shorter, terser argument, Hamilton advocates staying neutral, a position supported by Washington. After Washington goes, Jefferson comments that Hamilton is nothing without Washington’s backing and protection. The confrontation is entirely rapped.

“Washington On Your Side”: Jefferson, Madison, and Burr join forces to bring down Hamilton. Jefferson refers to Hamilton’s personal extravagance in the face of the poverty of so many in the union, while Madison and Burr refer repeatedly to how they feel Hamilton can’t, and shouldn’t, be trusted, suggesting that he is corrupt. Throughout the piece, they comment on how nice it must be to have Washington, the president, as an ally. The text repeatedly refers, disparagingly, to Hamilton being an immigrant. Burr’s narration, and the refrain that results, are melodic, floating and lyrical and dangerous.

Jefferson's and Madison's comments, as well as the plotting between the three characters, are mostly rapped.

Analysis

This heavily political section of the show begins with a key point in the evolution and revelation of the character of Aaron Burr. His anger at not being included in the conversation between Hamilton and Washington, as referenced in "The Room ..." is powerfully transformative, propelling him almost inescapably in the direction of anger and resentment towards Hamilton that culminates in their climactic duel later in the show. Meanwhile, the consequences of Burr's anger begin to manifest almost immediately, beginning with "Schuyler Defeated" and continuing through the rest of the scenes in this particular section, which reaches a kind of mini-climax in "Washington on your Side." This song contains one of the most overt statements in the show relating to one of the key reasons Hamilton's opponents went to such extremes to discredit him: his being an immigrant, someone not from the traditional, established, power-secure communities that control government. Hamilton's personal experience of being rejected and/or challenged directly because of his racial and cultural status is a key touchstone and motivation for both the piece's action and its themes.

At this point, it's important and valuable to note an aspect of the show, or more specifically its premiere production, that clearly and vividly relates to its subject matter. This is the casting of non-Caucasian (i.e. African-American, Latino, mixed race) performers in the roles of historically Caucasian characters. The point must be made that nowhere in the script is there an explicit requirement for this sort of casting choice, but in the same way as the show's creators chose contemporary language to explore history, they also chose what might arguably be defined as contemporary casting to portray that history. The metaphorical, multi-leveled value of this interpretive choice is apparent throughout, but nowhere more so than at the end of "Washington On Your Side," in which Jefferson, Madison, and Burr, all historically white men, are all portrayed by African-American actors, all of whom are singing and speaking negatively about an immigrant. There is also significant metaphoric value in the image associated with "The Room Where It Happens," in that the actor playing Aaron Burr, in the original production, is African-American. The ironies of these images, as well as all the other similar images and metaphors evoked by non-Caucasian actors playing the parts of the very Caucasian founding fathers, are multifaceted and thematically significant, in that they add weight to the show's commentary on the subjective nature of history.

Discussion Question 1

How do Burr's actions in Act 2, Part 2 reflect the theme of ambition and transformation?



Discussion Question 2

Burr feels angered, hurt, and disappointed at not being included in important conversations. What experiences have you had of something similar? Do you, or can you, identify with Burr's experience of rejection in these circumstances? How did, or do, you react in similar situations? How might your reactions differ from Burr's?

Discussion Question 3

How do you respond to the idea, as developed in the premiere production of *Hamilton*, of non-Caucasian actors playing Caucasian characters? Is this a positive or negative value? Do you think it adds to, or detracts from, what the story is trying to say?

Vocabulary

legacy, disarray, grapple, upstart, disquieting, accumulate, retraction, vacuous, complicit, dissident



Act 2, Part 3

Summary

“One Last Time” begins with Washington giving the news of Jefferson’s resignation from the cabinet to Hamilton, and then telling Hamilton of Washington’s intention to not run again for President. Washington explains to the upset and unnerved Hamilton that he wants to return home; that he wants Hamilton to write his farewell address; and that the American people will be fine and move on, once he’s gone to retirement in peace. The song continues with Hamilton speaking the address as he writes it while Washington sings it. The piece ends with Washington saying goodbye. The early part of the piece has Washington singing while Hamilton raps; the middle part of the piece settles into a mid-tempo, R&B-style melody as Washington insists that Hamilton do as he asks. The chorus comes in during the song’s final moments, singing about Washington’s going home as Washington comments on how history is watching Hamilton.

In “I Know Him,” the final reprise of King George’s song, the King sings of his doubt that anyone will be able to effectively replace Washington, and then jokes about how those who remain (including John Adams, the new president, whom the King says he knows) will “tear each other to pieces” (Act 2, Scene 10). This variation on the song begins a little more slowly, but then picks up tempo and energy, building into its finale.

“The Adams Administration”: Burr narrates the beginning of a short scene in which Hamilton’s anger at the unseen Adams explodes, a moment followed by conversation between Madison and Jefferson in which they comment on their plans to continue destroying Hamilton. The music here is almost entirely rapped: as the scene concludes, Hamilton is left with no power in government.

“We Know”: Hamilton is confronted by Burr, Jefferson, and Madison with receipts of his payments to James Reynolds. Hamilton realizes that they think the payments were for government money paid to Reynolds to ensure financial success of Hamilton’s debt plan. Hamilton shows them evidence that the receipts were, in fact, for payment to Reynolds to ensure that Hamilton’s affair with Maria could continue, saying that it proves that he used solely his own money, never the government’s. The three scandalized politicians leave, with Burr lingering to hint that his efforts to sabotage Hamilton’s career aren’t over. Musically, the piece begins with a driving, urgent rap beat, with the text being mostly rapped: the exception is the melody sung by the gloating Burr.

“Hurricane”: Hamilton recalls how, in the aftermath of his mother’s death in a hurricane when he was 12, he wrote his way into success, and comes to realize that the only way out of the current situation is to write his way out of it in the same way. As he makes his decision, the voice of Burr urges his comrades to wait for Hamilton’s self-destruction, while the voices of the women in his life (Eliza, Angelica, Maria) urge him to closely consider what he’s doing. The music begins stark and simple. As Hamilton recalls his story, he sings his memories of his mother and of his writing, eventually entering into



rap as his energy, determination, and decisiveness build. Melody and rap alternate as Hamilton draws closer to his decision and the voices of the other characters enter into his consciousness. The song ends with Hamilton insisting that the only way forward is absolute, painful honesty: “the eye of the hurricane” (Act 2, Scene 13).

Analysis

Once again, politics takes primary focus in this section as the manipulations of Jefferson, Burr, and Madison in opposition to Hamilton continue to advance. Politics is also a key consideration in another important moment for Hamilton, the resignation of Washington. There is, however, the clear sense that for Washington the motivation for his actions has less to do with political circumstances and more to do with an experience of personal fatigue. Yes, he is made tired by politics, but his decision is as much about deeper, more personal longings, if not more so. Washington's resignation letter, both actual and portrayed in the show, contains Biblical references to faith, to rest, and to moving on. Meanwhile, the scene in which Washington gets Hamilton to write his letter of resignation is another example of how Hamilton's way with words was highly regarded and, therefore, is another manifestation of the show's thematic interest in the power of writing. There is also a thematically relevant sense of sacrifice and martyrdom to Washington's decision, a sense that also begins to emerge in Hurricane and reaches a point of intensity in the following section, as the line between sacrifice and self-destructiveness becomes blurred.

Aside from containing the final appearance in the show of King George, this section is most notable for Hamilton's reaction to being confronted with the fact that his main rivals know about his affair with Maria Reynolds. Contemporary readers and audience members, accustomed to frequent revelations of sexual misbehavior by politicians and their abject apologies for their lapse in morality, may find it hard to believe that Hamilton, instead of seeing danger in his actions, uses the truth to defend himself from accusations of financial mismanagement. There is the very clear sense here that while Hamilton thinks he is safely defending himself from attack, those who are doing the attacking know exactly what is happening, and that they have just been given the perfect weapon with which to bring down the man they all want to see destroyed. There is also a clear sense of Hamilton's priorities: for better or for worse, his mind is entirely on his political career, not on his wife and family. Meanwhile, this is also the point in the show at which its thematic consideration of the power of writing takes a dark turn. Up to this point, and as recently as two scenes previously (i.e. Washington's resignation), there has been a sense that for Hamilton, his skill with words has been an unquestionable asset. Now, as he makes his decision (in “Hurricane”) to defend himself with words, the narrative begins to shift its commentary on this theme into suggestions that writing, when accompanied and / or triggered by thoughtlessness, can be dangerous and self-destructive.

Ultimately, Washington's resignation (which effectively separates Hamilton from both Washington's protection and his wisdom) is the beginning of a chain of events that,



even at this relatively early stage in the second act, begins to intensify in emotional and narrative momentum as the show builds to its eventual climax.

Discussion Question 1

How does the theme of trust and betrayal manifest in Act 2, Part 3?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that Burr urges his co-conspirators to wait instead of acting immediately to take advantage of Hamilton's weakness? What aspect of Burr's story in Act 1 is echoed here?

Discussion Question 3

What is the metaphoric connection between the story of the death of Hamilton's mother and the situation in which he finds himself at the end of Act 2, Part 3?

Vocabulary

pseudonym, partisan, indulgence, zeal, consign, oblivion, partake, benign, perplex, protean, ardent, creole, speculation, embezzle, sordid, consistency, sully



Act 2, Part 4

Summary

“The Reynolds Pamphlet” dramatizes the process by which Hamilton wrote the defense of his behavior (the Reynolds Pamphlet), got it published, and was swamped by negative reaction. The pamphlet describes in clear detail what happened between Hamilton and Maria, including references to the affair being carried on in the Hamilton home. As Jefferson and the other politicians, along with the chorus, read along with Hamilton’s recitation of events, they repeat the refrain that Hamilton is now never going to be president. Angelica arrives to be with Eliza, saying that she hopes Hamilton is “satisfied.” The company, including King George, erupts with excited hysteria. Musically, the song follows a stark, jagged rap beat with mostly rapped text. Angelica’s appearance quotes music from “Satisfied.” The song ends with a reference to “his poor wife” (Act 2, Scene 14), which leads into the next song / scene.

“Burn”: As the frenzy of “...Pamphlet” dies down, Eliza appears alone, with a lantern and Hamilton’s letters, singing of how those letters first moved her to love him; of how Angelica repeatedly reminded her that Hamilton was both ambitious and self-destructive; and of how she, Eliza, is determined to keep her reactions private and hidden. The music and melody of “Burn” are light and delicate, contrasting the deep, passionate pain being experienced by Eliza.

“Blow Us All Away”: Philip Hamilton reappears and brags (in rap) about his successes at college, saying that people believed he would “blow [them] all away” (Act 2, Scene 16). Philip then makes his way to a theater where a politician named George Eacker, who publicly talked down Philip’s father (Alexander Hamilton), is seeing a show. There, Philip challenges Eacker to a duel, a challenge Eacker accepts. Philip seeks advice from his father, who tells him how to emerge from the duel with honor intact but without firing a shot: by firing into the sky. Philip says he can’t let the insult to his father slide, and follows through on the duel. Eacker fails to follow the rules, fires his gun early, and kills Philip. The music and action segues into a reprise of “Stay Alive,” as Hamilton and Eliza plead with their son not to die. Philip promises his father that he was trying to avoid the conflict, and Eliza tries to keep him alive by reciting with him their first moments together. Nothing works: Philip dies. Musically, “Blow Us Away” begins happily and playfully, with Philip rapping his bragging search for Eacker. The conversation between the two is also rapped, as is Philip’s conversation with Hamilton and the duel. The music for “Stay Alive” is urgent, with the Chorus singing lightly as Hamilton confers with a doctor, sees Philip (who sings his confession to his father), and Eliza arrives, desperate for her son to survive. The music eases into silence as Philip dies.

“It’s Quiet Uptown”: Eliza is silent as Angelica narrates the story of how Hamilton tries to cope with his grief (walking long distances through the city, finding “quiet uptown.”) He reaches out for Eliza, who remains silent as he quotes music and text from “It Would Be Enough.” Finally, as Angelica narrates the moment, Eliza echoes his comment that “it’s



quiet uptown” (Act 2, Scene 17). As Hamilton falls apart, the chorus sings of the process of forgiveness in the face of the unimaginable. The text of the piece is almost entirely sung, with an evocative melody and more strings in the orchestration than almost anywhere else in the score.

Analysis

After the intensely political action of the previous two sections, the narrative takes a turn into the more personal in this section. That said, there are political resonances and meanings to almost everything Hamilton does or experiences, directly or indirectly and even his most personal moments. His relationship with the well-born Eliza, for example, for all that it’s a love match, also gives him a degree of status or credibility with the political establishment, as embodied in her father and his peers. The narrative’s portrayal of the aftermath of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” moves back and forth between the political and the personal, drawing very clear connections between the two.

The duel between Philip Hamilton and George Eacker is the second of three extremely significant duels portrayed in the show. It was foreshadowed by the Laurens/Lee duel in Act 1, with both duels foreshadowing the climactic duel between Hamilton and Burr in Act 2. There is a sense, in all three duels, that none of them were necessary, and that the ultimately destructive outcomes of all three could have been avoided. This idea is most poignantly developed in the aftermath of the duel between Philip and Eacker, the narrative of which is made even more effecting by Philip’s choice to behave with an honor truer, and more humane, than the sense of honor that led him to initiate the duel in the first place. There is, in the moment of Philip’s being shot, a glimpse of a variation on the show’s theme of trust and betrayal: in the raising of his weapon, Philip is expressing trust in his opponent’s honor: Eacker’s action, in firing his gun, is a clear and vivid betrayal of that trust.

The other key point to note about this section is its portrayal of the vulnerability of both Eliza and Hamilton. Eliza, from her very first appearance (in “The Schuyler Sisters” in Act 1) has been one of the most open-hearted and emotional characters in the show. This is not to say that she is weak: on the contrary, her strength is in her wisdom, her courage, and her ability to see clearly. These abilities arise as a result of awareness and acknowledgement of the fact that there is more to Hamilton and his life than what his ambition is driving him to accomplish. She has the courage of her convictions, in much the same way as her husband does, but unlike Hamilton, her vulnerability has not made her reckless. Hamilton, on the other hand, has kept his vulnerability concealed, simultaneously layered beneath and manifesting in an angry, ambitious determination. This last is perhaps the primary reason why he doesn’t realize the possible implications of his actions: why, a reader or audience member might well ask, does he not realize the potential impact of writing what he does? History doesn’t seem to be clear, so what is presented here is a hypothesis. This is the idea that Hamilton is so blinded by the intensity of his ambition to be perceived as a man of political integrity that he loses track of the danger of being perceived as lacking MORAL integrity.



In any case, in the aftermath of the publication of the pamphlet and in the portrayal of Philip's death, the narrative reveals the vulnerability and pain that has, arguably, been part of Hamilton's life ever since his traumatized childhood. There is the sense here that, even as he asks Eliza for her forgiveness, he is striving to find it for, and in, himself.

One final note about Eliza in this scene: her decision to keep herself hidden is an ironic reflection of her determination, expressed in Act 1, to be part of the narrative of Hamilton's life and, at the same time, is an ironic foreshadowing of her choice at the end of the show to return to that narrative.

Discussion Question 1

How does another side of the show's thematic interest in ambition manifest in Act 2, Part 4?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Eliza burn Hamilton's letters?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think is the reason that Eliza is finally able to respond to Hamilton's reaching out to her at the end of "It's Quiet Uptown"?

Vocabulary

torrid, amorous, virtuosity, disparage, negotiate, goner, pleasantry, ricochet, detonate, salvo, inestimable, retribution, patois



Act 2, Part 5

Summary

"The Election of 1800" dramatizes the political situation in the aftermath of John Adams' failure as president, Jefferson's political dilemmas, and Burr's determination to win the election. Madison convinces Jefferson to ask Hamilton for his endorsement. As Burr's campaign continues, Jefferson gets the still-grieving Hamilton on board, with Burr admitting (during a confrontation with Hamilton) that he is doing what Hamilton always suggested that he do: take action to get what he wants. When the election results in a tie, the decision goes to the congress of electoral delegates for a decision, the congress ultimately being swayed by Hamilton's support of Jefferson. Jefferson pointedly tells Burr that as second place finisher, he (Burr) is now going to be vice president, and that he (Burr) should thank Hamilton. The first part of the scene is rapped, with Madison's persuasion of Jefferson becoming more musical. Burr's campaign and the election are sung with a somewhat jaunty melody; Hamilton's endorsement of Jefferson is also sung, concluding with the statement that "Jefferson has beliefs; Burr has none" (Act 2, Scene 20). At the conclusion of the song, Burr is left alone onstage, and there is a transition into the next song, "Your Obedient Servant".

"Your Obedient Servant" begins with a reprise, by Burr, of the questioning narration that started the show, and specifically asks why Hamilton, who despises Jefferson, allied with him to keep Burr out of the presidency. Burr (who vows that he is no longer going to be kept out of "the room where it happens") and Hamilton exchange letters in which each defends his position and accuses the other of inappropriateness. Each signs his letter "your obedient servant" (Act 2, Scene 21), a musical phrase written with a deeply ironic playfulness. The song (in which Burr's letter is sung and Hamilton's letter is rapped) ends with Burr challenging Hamilton to a duel and Hamilton accepting.

Music then segues into "Best of Wives and Best of Women," a very brief moment in which Eliza urges Hamilton, still writing, to come back to bed. Both sing as Hamilton tells her he has an early meeting and needs to prepare. As Eliza goes back to bed, Hamilton calls her "Best of wives and best of women" (Act 2, Scene 22).

"The World Was Wide Enough": The piece begins with a reprise of "Ten Rules of Dueling," in which Burr and Hamilton establish the parameters of what is about to happen, including the fact that the duel is taking place at approximately the same location as Philip's death. The primary narration comes from Burr: Hamilton is mostly silent. Eventually, Burr fires his gun: time stops, and Hamilton has a soliloquy, delivered in silence from the orchestra. He imagines his dead friends and family leading a chorus of welcome into the afterlife, telling Eliza that he'll see her "on the other side" (Act 2, Scene 22). Hamilton raises his pistol to the sky, just as he told Philip to, and then time resumes: Hamilton is shot by Burr who, as somber music returns, narrates the aftermath ... the wailing of crowds, and the fact that Angelica and Eliza were both with Hamilton when he died. There are quotes from "Satisfied" as Burr finally realizes that



the world was big enough for both him and Hamilton. Burr's part of the scene is sung, while Hamilton's is mostly rapped.

“Finale”: Characters including Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Angelica, and Burr comment on how Hamilton changed the country, and ask the question about how stories and legacies get shared. Eliza appears, singing (not rapping) that she made sure she got back into the narrative of Hamilton's life, quoting several songs from earlier in the show as she describes doing her best for 50 years to ensure that Hamilton's story was remembered and told accurately. This counterpoints the singing of the rest of the chorus, singing what is becoming the show's primary thematic refrain. Eliza also describes the other work she did and became proud of, including the establishment of “the first private orphanage in New York City” (Act 2, Scene 23), saying that in the children's eyes, she sees Hamilton. As Hamilton reappears, he and Eliza are reunited as the chorus repeats the refrain “Time,” the show ending with one last repetition of the question: “who lives, who dies, who tells your story?” (Act 2, Scene 23).

Analysis

While narrative momentum towards the show's climactic confrontation between Burr and Hamilton has slowed somewhat in the previous section, its emotional momentum has not: as a result of the events of recent scenes, there is now, in the narrative, an emotional depth and intensity in Hamilton (the character) that was missing before. Both these elements, as connected to his vulnerability as they are, propel him towards the final confrontation with the man who has challenged his identity and choices right from the beginning: Aaron Burr. The heavily political, and quite complicated, description of the political machinations of “The Election of 1800” are all underpinned by this steadily intensifying sense of conflict between the two men, conflict that manifests the themes of ambition and transformation as well as that relating to trust and betrayal.

Here, as the narrative reaches its narrative, thematic, and emotional climaxes (in a duel heavily foreshadowed by the two previous duels in the narrative), it's worth considering the relationship between the two characters as protagonist and antagonist. Ultimately, it's arguable that even though Hamilton is clearly the piece's central character and protagonist, it's Burr who undergoes the most significant journey of transformation over the course of the story. Hamilton essentially remains the same in terms of identity and how he expresses himself: Burr, however, undergoes (and manifests) some fundamental changes in himself and how he relates to the world. This occurs primarily as a result of his relationship with Hamilton, and his absorption of certain aspects of Hamilton's approach into his own way of interacting with the world. This, perhaps, is due to a primary, fundamental difference between the two. Hamilton's tendency is towards a single, almost obsessive vision of himself and of America that blinds him to other ideas and possibilities: Burr, in contrast, has perspective, a wider point of view. Hamilton is blinkered: Burr is not. He becomes so at moments, but as the play reveals, he realizes the dangers of such perspectives – too late to save Hamilton's life, but he does have that realization, and is transformed on a level that Hamilton is not.



Another point to note about this section is its integration of the second significant time shift in the play, the first being the time rewind, or flashback, during Angelica's song "Satisfied" in Act 1. Where the first time shift is arguably a flashback, the second time shift might be called a suspension or freeze in time, as Hamilton's thoughts, in the moment before Burr's shot is fired, are communicated in a depth that exists outside of real time but within the boundaries of the subconscious, or intuitive, experience. In other words, Hamilton's soliloquy goes deeply into an individual, single moment, burrowing through layers of reaction and imagination to react to a core truth that the character, in actual fact, might not consciously understand.

The final point to note about this section, and ultimately about the show as a whole, is the content of its final scene, which functions as something of an epilogue. There are several important elements here, the first being how, like Burr's narration in general, the narration of Eliza and the other characters steps outside linear time and into the realm of storytelling, framing the narrative with context. Another element is the way in which phrases and echoes from earlier in the show are brought back for one last evocation of how moments past and present (and future) influence one another. The most significant element of this final scene, however, is its vivid and explicit evocation of one of the show's key themes, its interest in the subjective nature of history. Eliza's narration describes how determinedly she (like the historical Eliza) worked towards making sure that the way Hamilton was portrayed by history (i.e. by the people who viewed him negatively and ultimately destroyed him) was not the only way in which he was perceived. History, in the view of both Eliza and the show as a whole, is not, as the old saying suggests, written only by the winners. It is best understood through the perspectives, actions, and commentary of those who lived it – or, as is the case with the creators of Hamilton, those who are willing to look past what has been told them, and why it has been told to them in that way, for a deeper, more complex, and more resonant truth.

Discussion Question 1

How do the events of the finale dramatize the play's thematic exploration of the nature, power, and value of personal transformation?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Hamilton refer to Eliza as "best of wives, and best of women"?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think is the meaning or value of the chorus repeating the word "time" as the show comes to a close?

Vocabulary

faction, obfuscate, elitist, delegate (n), arrogant, despise, amoral, equivocate, intemperate, marksman, rigor, obliterate, prosperity



Characters

Alexander Hamilton

Alexander Hamilton is the central character and protagonist of the musical. In the show's opening lines, he is portrayed as an illegitimate orphan, an immigrant, and of mixed race. All of these play into the narrative of the show, defining the internal reasons he makes the choices he does and, perhaps more importantly, how other characters perceive him and react to him – external experiences that also propel him to make the choices he does. Ultimately, the story portrays him as being on the negative side, the receiving end, of a number of prejudices, some of which he internalizes (i.e. makes part of his identity) and all of which he struggles, over the course of the show, to confront and overcome.

Hamilton is also portrayed as being fiercely, almost frantically, intelligent, driven not so much to succeed as to express his ideas, his passions, and his values. In terms of his life, the primary way he does this is through writing: on several occasions, the narrative refers to ways in which he changed his circumstance, and arguably the circumstances of the country he helps to bring into being (America), simply by the power of the arguments he puts onto paper. What's important to note here is that Hamilton's writing changes his life not only for the better: the show portrays how his writing, and more specifically his belief in its power, cost him both politically and personally. Meanwhile, and in terms of how his character and identity are portrayed in the show, his drive to express the various aspects of himself is reflected in the drive of the music with which his character is most identified.

Of all the characters in the show, Hamilton is the one whose music is based most in rap and/or hip-hop. The intensity, speed, and driving pace of those musical genres and styles seem thoroughly, and effectively, suited to his personality and ways of interacting with people, with the world, and with himself. Only occasionally, when the pace of his thoughts slows and the intensity of his emotions deepens, does his music change into something more melodic, slower paced, and more reflective of a quieter inner life. This is perhaps most evident in the sub-plot based scenes with his family – his wife Eliza (his emotional soul mate), his son Philip (arguably his soul-mate in ambition), and Angelica, Eliza's sister and his intellectual soul-mate. In his scenes with these characters, Hamilton becomes a fully fleshed out, vulnerable human being, as opposed to a walking manifestation of ideology and driving ambition, which is how he often seems throughout the rest of the piece.

Aaron Burr

As a character, Aaron Burr functions on a pair of levels. First, he is the show's primary narrative voice, introducing Hamilton, describing the events of his life, and commenting on them throughout the narrative. Other characters (including Hamilton himself) interject



moments of narrative, but it is Burr who is the primary storyteller. On this level, his presence exists outside the timeframe of the narrative, an important point to note because of the second level on which the character functions: as Hamilton's primary antagonist. Burr not only tells the story: he is an important character IN it.

The Burr / Hamilton relationship is a complicated one. In many ways, and as the characters themselves both recognize and comment on, they are very different people, almost entirely opposite in their views of the world and of their place in it. This is not to say there are not similarities: they are both orphans, both self-starters and self-made, and both driven to improve both the world and their places within it. They are both highly intelligent, they both end up practicing law, and they both end up having a profound influence on the formation of America. But where Hamilton is impulsive, Burr is cautious; where Hamilton is a talker, Burr is a watcher; and where Hamilton pushes boundaries of appropriateness, Burr is respectful, tactful, and manipulative. These differences are reflected in their music: while sections of Burr's music are rapped, his primary mode of musical expression is generally more melodic than Hamilton's.

Finally, while Hamilton is the primary narrative embodiment of the show's thematic interest in the power of writing, Burr occupies a similar function in terms of the show's thematic interest in the power of ambition. Burr, more so than Hamilton, is primarily ambitious for himself: he is driven to achieve personal status, while Hamilton is arguably more driven by ambition for the country. This difference is most manifest in one of Burr's key songs, in which he reveals his desperation to be involved in the decision making process giving shape to America ("The Room Where It Happens"). It is this sense of personal ambition that drives his actions and choices, leading him to the obsessive, destructive place he arrives at by the show's conclusion.

Mulligan

Hercules Mulligan is one of three young, excitedly passionate American revolutionaries with whom Hamilton becomes friends early in the story. Mulligan becomes a spy for the Americans, working in the British camp as a tailor and keeping the Americans informed, as best he can, of the British plans and intentions.

Laurens

John Laurens is the second member of the trio of revolutionaries and friends that joins forces with Hamilton early in the story. Laurens is portrayed as having a particular passion for ending slavery, fighting in the revolutionary war in the American south. The original cast recording offers hints of Laurens' fate in battle, but never explicitly explains what happened to him.



Lafayette

The fast-talking, energetic Marquis de Lafayette is Hamilton's third revolutionary friend and ally. Lafayette is French, and works on behalf of the revolutionary army in France, where he secures military and financial support for the revolutionary cause.

King George

George III of England was king at the time of the American Revolution, which took America out from British control. At the time at which the show is set, George is still very much in control of himself and of his empire, although the show's text suggests that he might be in the very early stages of the mental illness that eventually debilitated him and his reign. He is also portrayed as playful, capricious, and just a little sadistic in his expressions of affection for America and Americans.

George Washington

The first President of the United States of America is portrayed in the show as wise and responsible, insightful about Hamilton and prudent in how he (Washington) makes use of Hamilton's passions and talents. Washington's fatigued departure from politics sets up the political and personal confrontations that drive much of the action of the second half of the show.

General Lee

Lee is the military officer chosen by Washington, early in the revolution, to lead aspects of the military side of the conflict. He is chosen over both Hamilton and Burr, both of whom resent Washington's choice. Lee is a failure, but blames Washington for that failure. Laurens challenges Lee to a duel and wounds him.

Angelica Schuyler

Angelica Schuyler is the eldest of the three Schuyler sisters who make their initial appearance in a powerful, evocative song in the show's first act. Angelica is portrayed as having a powerful, quick intellect, an aspect of her identity which draws her into an intense relationship with Hamilton who has a mind that, as the show suggests, can keep up with hers. Their friendship continues throughout Hamilton's marriage to Angelica's younger sister Eliza, a marriage that comes about because Angelica recognizes the attraction and affection between Eliza and Hamilton, and decides to sacrifice her own potential happiness for that of her beloved younger sister. Throughout the rest of the show, she is a friend and confidante to both Hamilton and Eliza.



Eliza Schuyler (Hamilton)

Eliza is the second of the three Schuyler sisters, younger sister to Angelica and older sister to Peggy. Eliza is portrayed as sensitive, thoughtful, and compassionate, less strikingly intelligent than Angelica but wise and intuitive. She falls in love with Hamilton almost at first sight, and he has a similar experience. Their marriage takes place almost immediately, and she gives birth to their son, Philip Hamilton. Eliza's narrative function throughout the show is two-fold. First, she consistently and repeatedly urges Hamilton to look for more in life than his revolutionary and personal goals; and second, after Hamilton is killed, she narrates, in an epilogue, her history and practice of passing on as much truth about him as she can.

Peggy Schuyler

Peggy is the third and youngest of the Schuyler sisters, and is the least developed character of the three. In the number in which she appears, "The Schuyler Sisters," she is portrayed as somewhat nervous about being in New York with her older, more mature sisters.

Thomas Jefferson

Jefferson appears at the beginning of the show's second act, and is portrayed as returning to America after spending much of the actual revolution in France. He is portrayed as resistant to Hamilton's personality and politics, becoming one of a trio of political leaders determined to limit Hamilton's power and influence. He is portrayed by the same actor who portrayed Lafayette.

James Madison

Madison, like Jefferson, makes his first appearance in the show's second act. Also like Jefferson, Madison places himself and his influence in opposition to Hamilton and his policies. Madison is portrayed as a smoother, more calculating politician than Jefferson, at one point convincing the latter that, in spite of their mutual dislike for Hamilton, it's better to have him as a political ally than an enemy. Madison is portrayed by the same actor who played Hercules Mulligan.

Maria Reynolds

Maria Reynolds is a struggling woman in an abusive marriage who seeks Hamilton's financial and emotional support. Their relationship turns into a long-standing affair that her husband permits, but not without conditions. The revelation of the Reynolds-Hamilton affair triggers choices by Hamilton that ultimately result in his political downfall.



James Reynolds

James Reynolds is the opportunistic, abusive husband of Maria Reynolds. He blackmails Hamilton by threatening to tell Eliza about the affair unless Hamilton gives him money, which Hamilton does. As the affair continues, the arrangement eventually comes to light, triggering a series of events that results in Hamilton's political career eventually coming to an end.

Philip Hamilton

Philip is Eliza and Hamilton's son. He is portrayed as being as impulsive and driven as his father while, at the same time, being as sensitive as his mother. His death in the middle of the second act precipitates a reunion, of sorts, between his father and mother in the aftermath of Hamilton's affair and political downfall.

George Eacker

Politician George Eacker is a relatively minor character. His attacks on Hamilton in the aftermath of the Reynolds affair lead him to being challenged to a duel by Philip Hamilton. Eacker breaks the agreed-upon rules of dueling and kills Philip.

Symbols and Symbolism

Revolution

The primary narrative line of the play is anchored in events before, during, and after the American Revolution, in which what became the United States of America fought to be free of the rule and control of the British Empire. On another level, the action of the show is simultaneously motivated by personal revolution - specifically, the revolution fought by Alexander Hamilton (and to some extent Aaron Burr) against the rule and control of the prejudices that, as they see the situation, are designed to keep them from realizing their full potential. Revolution, in short, is portrayed throughout the narrative as a necessary, driven act designed to achieve freedom, whether as individuals or as a community.

Politics

While the main narrative line of the show is driven by the events and circumstances of the American Revolution, a secondary narrative line, closely entwined with the first, has to do with an exploration of the politics behind and beneath those events and circumstances. Who knows what; who convinces who to do what; who chooses what - all are questions that play into the show's overall exploration of the nature, causes, and results of political manipulation, on both the personal and the national, revolutionary level.

Chess

Throughout the narrative, references are made to the game of Chess, which historically has its roots in aspects of military strategy and conflict. It is a game of thought and planning, of surprise moves co-existing with careful calculation. Metaphorically, the implications and values and rules of the game are drawn upon to represent tactics and actions in both the large scale revolution and smaller scale individual conflicts, such as that between Hamilton and Burr.

The United States Constitution

One of the documents written to give shape and order to the governance of the newly formed United States of America, the Constitution is the focus of several actions in the show that give shape or meaning to the conflict between the characters. A specific example: Hamilton's writing of The Federalist Papers, a series of documents defending the Constitution, an action that triggers a deepening of Burr's resentment. In other words, the presence of the Constitution in the lives of the characters is a catalyst for significant developments in the conflict between them.



Hamilton's Financial Plan

Like the Constitution, Hamilton's plan for the management of the new country's money and finances is a catalyst for intense personal and political conflict. His plan is one of the key reasons that Jefferson, as one example, becomes determined to end Hamilton's career and reputation. It symbolizes the power of Hamilton's mind, and is a trigger for the political and personal jealousy that ultimately brings about Hamilton's political and personal downfall.

Writing

The power and influence of writing is one of the show's central thematic explorations. There are several representations of writing throughout the piece, but the most significant has to do with Hamilton's reliance on writing as a tool to both express himself and realize his personal and political goals.

Letters

The creation of letters is one of the specific ways in which the power of writing is portrayed in the show. Perhaps the most significant manifestation of their importance occurs in the second act, ironically enough in an act of destruction: specifically, in Eliza's destruction of Hamilton's letters after she learns of his affair with Maria Reynolds. This act of destruction can be seen on one level as representing how Eliza's faith in her husband has been destroyed and, on another level, as representing how Hamilton's power with words is likewise being destroyed.

Music

Rap and hip-hop are the means of the story's telling, its primary narrative vocabulary. While there are also moments of more traditional Broadway melody, rhythm and blues, and jazz, rap and hip-hop are representative of character, story, theme, and creative intent. As the result of the creator's narrative choices around the type and use of music, the piece becomes a story of the past told in a language of today, offering audiences new and different insights not only into history, but into the way history is communicated.

The Federalist Papers

The Federalist Papers is a series of published pamphlets, primarily written by Hamilton, in which the strengths and power of the new America, and specifically its new Constitution, are presented to the public. The Papers are another major manifestation of the power of writing in the show and, in the reference to the sheer amount written by Hamilton, also a reference to how powerful, driven, and intense his personal and political ambitions are.



The Reynolds Pamphlet

Unlike The Federalist Papers, which are portrayed as a positive example of both the power of writing and of Hamilton's drive and ambition, the Reynolds Pamphlet is an example of how writing can be a double-edged sword, capable of turning on the person who wields it. The Pamphlet is written and published by Hamilton in the aftermath of his affair with Maria Reynolds becoming political and public knowledge. He writes it to defend himself from accusations of financial mismanagement, but ends up revealing aspects of his personal morality and private life that destroy his reputation with the American voting public and with his fellow politicians.

Duels

There are three duels fought within the show: between Laurens and Lee; between Philip Hamilton and George Eacker; and between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. Each comes into being as a result of one person feeling slandered, or insulted, by another and challenging the slanderer to a violent, if gentlemanly, confrontation. Each of these confrontations is arguably a miniature version of the Revolution, fought for smaller, more personal versions of the same big-picture desire for integrity and honor.



Settings

America

The United States of America is the primary, broad-strokes setting for the show. The important point to note here is that the country, over the course of the narrative, is in the process of being formed: Act One takes place within the military context of the American Revolution against British power and control, while Act Two takes place within the political context of conflict over how the new government is going to function. It's also important to note that the ideals (i.e. freedom, value of the individual) of the so-called American Dream, which continue to the present day, play active roles in defining the characters and action within both contexts.

New York City

New York, which is referred to several times in the text of the show as "the greatest city in the world," is the primary setting for much of the narrative's action. Its energy, its drive, its essentially welcoming nature is another aspect of the emotional and ideological context within which the play's story unfolds.

The Late 1700's / Early 1800's

The show's setting in time encompasses several decades: the years before, during, and after the formation of the United States of America (around 1776) and beyond (into the early 1800's). The time frame is telescoped quite significantly, with the narrative skipping over several years as it moves from primary event to primary event in the life and career of Alexander Hamilton.

England

Three of the play's shorter scenes take place in England: specifically, the scenes focusing on King George III, England's king at the time of the American Revolution. There is virtually no time spent on exploring or defining this setting: England's values and perspectives are implied in the brief commentary offered by the King on the actions in America.

Contemporary Society

While the action and events of the story take place in the past, its narrative language is very much of the present. In other words, the show's story is of yesterday, but the way in which it's told is of today. This means that its setting in style is something very different

from its setting in time or in place, both of which are more historically appropriate to its subject matter.



Themes and Motifs

Ambition and Transformation

The show's two central characters, protagonist Alexander Hamilton and antagonist Aaron Burr, are each driven by ambition; take action, over the course of the narrative, to realize their respective ambitions; and, by the end of the play, are transformed as a result of both their actions and the ambition that drove them. As the main story begins, Hamilton and Burr are both what might be described, in contemporary language, as disadvantaged: they are both orphans, and they are both poor. At the same time, they are desperately driven to improve both their own circumstances and those of the country in which they live. In short, they want more than what they have, which is arguably a textbook definition of ambition. Over the course of the play, as they each become engaged in the military, intellectual, and political battles that drive the American Revolution, they get what they have been fighting for: more for themselves, more for their country.

As is often the case when an initial ambition is realized, however, achieving more leads to wanting more. Both Burr and Hamilton, over the course of the narrative, use what they have accomplished, both personally and politically, as springboards for both greater desire and greater achievements. After a while, Hamilton's success outpaces Burr's, with the result that the latter's ambition becomes tainted with jealousy, both professional and personal. This, in turn, leads Burr to become even more desperate in his striving to realize his ambitions, and it is at this point that the narrative takes a turn in its exploration of the connection between ambition and transformation. Up to now, the transformation resulting from acting on ambition has been primarily in external terms: America is a free country, Burr and Hamilton are both more prosperous and have more political status. But when Burr's ambition becomes affected by jealousy, the process of transformation takes place on another level: his values and perspectives change, to the point where his actions arguably become somewhat amoral, in a way that the man Burr was at the beginning of the show would have rejected.

As the show concludes, that transformation is reversed. In the aftermath of Hamilton's death, which is arguably the result of misguided ambition on the part of both Burr and Hamilton, Burr realizes how dark both his ambition and the transformation resulting from that ambition have become. He resolves to transform that darkness into something more compassionate in spirit.

This is the main example of how the show explores this particular theme. Other characters have other ambitions; other characters make similar choices, while still other characters make different ones. Ultimately, explorations of this theme lead to, and are connected to, another of the show's main themes: its exploration of sacrifice and martyrdom.



Sacrifice and Martyrdom

If it becomes a given that martyrdom is defined as an individual being willing to die in the name of fighting for, or defending, a particular cause, then it becomes arguable that the action of the show is driven by characters who are obsessed, to the point of martyrdom, with achieving their goals. The primary example of this is the show's protagonist, Alexander Hamilton. His desperate determination to realize change in both his personal circumstances and the political circumstances of America is, throughout the piece, expressed in terms that are defined by his desire to die for what he believes in. This desire is echoed in, and therefore supported by, the words and proclamations of the three revolutionaries who become Hamilton's first friends and allies (Laurens, Lafayette, and Mulligan). They are all prepared to give up their lives in pursuit of what they believe to be the higher good: freedom for America. Here it's important to note that the drive of these characters towards martyrdom is clearly contrasted, and challenged, by the words and actions of George Washington, who suggests that while the spirit of sacrifice and martyrdom is noble and passionate, and perhaps even justified, it is also limited. Dying is easy, he says: leadership is hard. The implication here is that martyrdom is, on some level, a kind of irresponsibility, setting something in motion without having what it takes to follow through.

Here it's important to note that the idea of martyrdom does not necessary involve physical death. There are other kinds of sacrifice that lead to other kinds of death – specifically, the sacrifice of a desire or inclination that leads to the death of a cherished dream. Here the primary example manifests in the character and choices of Angelica. In the first act, she chooses to sacrifice (martyr) her own attraction to, and desire for, Hamilton because she cares so deeply and so compassionately for her sister Eliza, who has clearly and immediately engaged in a mutual connection with Hamilton. Angelica martyrs her hope for a future with a man who is her intellectual equal, sacrificing it in order to enable a higher good: what she sees as the true, and mutually nurturing, love of her sister for a man who, Angelica knows, will probably hurt her. This, in turn, draws in the third of the show's key themes: its exploration of trust and betrayal.

Trust and Betrayal

Without the interplay of trust and betrayal between the various characters, Hamilton would have no story. Hamilton's personal and political ambitions are driven by several factors, including a need for recognition and respect. He also needs to be trusted. He is, as he states, an immigrant, an orphan, and poor, all reasons that the political and military establishment seem to not trust him, and seem inclined to never trust him. He strives to prove that he can be trusted, which is part of why he works so hard and so intensely, and part of why he repeatedly asks George Washington to give him a military command. Likewise, protagonist Aaron Burr is also motivated by a desire to be trusted, perhaps even more so than Hamilton. His ambition is similarly geared towards, and defined by, the perception that status is conferred by trust. Conversely, the tension between Burr and Hamilton seems to be fueled by a perennial, constantly intensifying



lack of trust between them. Neither believes nor values the other; neither respects the other; and, as the narrative of the show advances, their mistrust of each other deepens to the point where each sees the actions of the other as a betrayal of something that arguably never really existed in the first place.

This theme also plays out on a more personal and intimate level – specifically, Hamilton’s betrayal of Eliza’s trust. When Hamilton has his long-standing affair with Maria Reynolds, he knows he is betraying Eliza’s trust. When Eliza learns of the affair, her experience of being betrayed leads her to burn all of Hamilton’s letters to her. Hamilton eventually wins her trust back in the aftermath of their son’s death, a vivid contrast to Hamilton’s and Burr’s mutual inability to trust one another.

Perhaps the most intriguingly significant manifestations of this theme have to do with issues of self-trust. Hamilton’s blind trust of his intellect and writing skills, in the development of his response to the public revelation of the Reynolds affair, leads to him betraying himself to the judgment and manipulation of others. At the same time, Burr’s trust in his own worth becomes curdled, as he betrays himself and his morals to the service of his ambition.

The Power of Writing

Without his skill with words, Hamilton would have been nothing. The show portrays himself as literally writing himself out of poverty and into a new life in America; out of political and military obscurity and into positions of influence; and out of his depth in his relationships with women, but into the depths of their hearts and minds, all through the power of his ideas, given form in words. Writing gives both shape and action to Hamilton’s personal and professional ambitions. It also reveals the depths of personal sacrifice to which he is willing to go in order to realize those ambitions, and perhaps most significantly, gives reason for the people to whom he writes and about whom he writes (i.e. Washington, Eliza, Angelica) that he can be trusted – or, in the case of Burr, Madison, and Jefferson, that he can’t or shouldn’t be. For Hamilton, writing is the ultimate expression of power, of self, and of strength. Writing is, for him, more than a means to an end: it is, ultimately, the truest and deepest expression of who he is. It is his greatest weapon in his fight to realize, and make known, his truth.

There is also, however, a clear suggestion in the narrative that for Hamilton, that weapon is double-edged. In his attempt to protect himself and his reputation as a politician by writing and publishing the truth about his affair with Maria Reynolds, he ends up virtually destroying the latter and doing serious damage to the former. Words and writing, at this point in both Hamilton’s life and the show that dramatizes that life, turn on him and, as such, become one of the show’s starkest examples of how what was once trusted can become a betrayal. In other words, writing here is revealed as having a dark and dangerous power, as well as the positive, affirming power that it was shown earlier to have.

The show's final exploration of the power of writing comes in its final scene, when a particular type of writing (that which communicates and explores history) is examined, commented upon, and reconsidered.

The Subjective Nature of History

As the play's final scene suggests, Alexander Hamilton's story has more to it than what he did to get his face on the American ten dollar bill. The show argues in general, and in its closing epilogue in particular, that Hamilton's identity, not to mention his relevance to American history and culture, were much more significant and multifaceted than what history has chosen to reveal. Therein lies the key point. As the text of that final scene explicitly suggests, in the aftermath of Hamilton's death, those that remained – politicians, friends, allies, enemies – made clear and specific choices about how they thought Hamilton and his contributions should be portrayed. This is a direct manifestation of the old saying: history is written by the victors. As the show draws to its conclusion, however, it sums up the central thematic perspective of the story that has led to both its narrative and thematic conclusion, the idea that history is defined by lives, not only those who wrote about those lives. Those lives, in turn, are defined by context, identity, and choice, not by the perspectives of those who perceived all those elements in a limited way, and from a limited agenda.

The show also makes the point that this principle is true not only of History with a capital "H" – that is, the stories of countries, leaders, and heroes (or villains). In its exploration of the relationship history of Hamilton and Eliza, or of Hamilton and Burr, the show suggests that the history of a relationship is not defined only by what happened, or by what certain people perceived as why. History, the show suggests in the exploration of these two relationships, is different for every person who was there in the moment. Nowhere is this made clearer in action than in the first act, when the history of a moment, the history of a relationship, is dramatized from two perspectives. This refers specifically to the moment of Hamilton and Eliza meeting, dramatized first from Eliza's perspective and then from Angelica's. The same event: two different personal perspectives. Both are true: neither are absolutely so. The show makes a similar point in relation to the personal and political history of Alexander Hamilton: both what has been customarily believed and what was actually lived are true, albeit to varying degrees. Neither is absolutely true: both, the show argues, are necessary components of the complete picture.

Styles

Point of View

In terms of point of view, there are several points to note about this piece. The first is that overall, the show has a shifting narrative perspective: there is a primary narrator (Aaron Burr), who gives an overall perspective to the show and adds commentary even as he plays a key, defining role in the action. However, there are also moments in which other characters step out of the story and narrate key events: Hamilton throughout, Angelica in key sections, and Eliza at the show's conclusion are the primary examples of how the characters not only portray moments in the story but also describe them, commenting on their meaning. Meanwhile, in terms of point of view defined as focus, the important point to note is that while the focus of the show as a whole is on protagonist Hamilton, there are also moments in which the narrative point of view shifts onto other characters. The primary example of this is Aaron Burr, but there are a number of other shifts as well. Here it's also important to note that even during these shifts in narrative point of view, the events considered and/or dramatized during this shifts all affect Hamilton. The characters taking focus in these moments are having experiences that, in turn, affect and define their relationships with him. In other words, ultimately it's all about Hamilton.

A third aspect of point of view worth considering is the show's primary thematic point of view, which is summed up in the show's final scene. As Eliza leads the chorus and other characters in commentary about how history is defined by the perspective of the person telling the story, she and the show as a whole reveal its core thematic point of view ... that history, in contradiction to the old saying, is NOT just written by "the winner," but can be written, or told, by anyone who was there, or who had a part in it.

Language and Meaning

The show's use of language is arguably one of its most intriguing, most engaging, and most culturally significant elements. Its primary style is that of hip-hop and rap, musical styles distinguished by a sense of speed, a sense of drive and energy, and of skillful, intricate word usage. Here it's important to note that while the rap-styled language of Hamilton as a whole falls squarely within all these stylistic boundaries, its unique approach to the word usage is the most significant. For better or for worse, rap has a reputation as a language of the streets – frequently profane and / or misogynistic, often grammatically imperfect, and often limited in vocabulary. The language of Hamilton takes the language of rap to a different level. The profanity is limited, there is virtually no misogyny in its views of women (the references to Maria Reynolds being a singular, significant exception), and the grammar is generally crisp and correct. Perhaps most notably, the vocabulary is extensive. There are moments during which slang and colloquialism are used to significant and engaging effect, but for the most part, the



words deployed by the characters reflect their intelligence, their being very well educated, and their skills at rhetoric and argument.

This aspect of the piece's language, in turn, shapes and defines meaning, in that word usage is defined as much by character and identity as it is by style and story. All four elements, in fact, are wound together tightly and vividly into a tapestry of words, ideas, and images that strike a powerful, effective balance between entertainment, information, and innovation. It is a language and style of the streets taken to the next level by an infusion of, and an integration with, the power and intentions of poetry. Poetry depends on a distillation and intensification of words and images in order to communicate meaning. The words and images in *Hamilton* are similarly distilled and shaped with great care and purpose, defined and individualized by the purpose of the scene. The rap battles are intellectual arguments; the tenderly emotional family scenes are revelations of vulnerability; the soliloquies are stream-of-consciousness revelations of rapidly shifting inner perspective. There is edge, there is softness, there is danger, there is freedom – all aspects of story reflected and manifested in aspects of language.

Structure

The show's narrative framework is, in some ways, a conventional one in any form of narrative. A storyteller (Burr), speaking from a time and place distant from the primary events of the story, narrates a series of events focusing on a particular character or situation. Those events are then dramatized, or played out, in what amounts to a series of flashbacks that ultimately lead to, or build up to, the climax of the series of events framed by the narrator. In this framework, there is an interplay between past and present, with the primary narrative line taking place in the past, but commented on and examined from the perspective of the present – or, at least, a time removed from the events in question. Such is the case with *Hamilton*.

Furthermore, within this overall framework, the main timeline (i.e. the story of the past) often unfolds chronologically. This is true both generally and in the particular case of *Hamilton*: events progress in a cause-and-effect, action-reaction relationship from a point of initiation (in this case, Hamilton's first meeting with Burr) through to a point of conclusion (in this case, the duel between Hamilton and Burr). That said, there are points at which the narrative timeline changes, and there are, for example, flashbacks within the main flashbacks. A particularly effective example of this comes in Act 1 when, after the show dramatizes the first meeting between Eliza and Hamilton, the scene immediately following flashes back to those same events but portrays them from the point of view of Eliza's sister Angelica. What's particularly interesting to note about *Hamilton* is that there are also occasions when flashbacks are dramatized visually while a character narrates a particular event in the past. The key example of this is in Act 2, when Hamilton narrates the events of his childhood while members of the chorus visually enact and/or dramatize them.

In short, the key take-away from a consideration of *Hamilton*'s structure is that the narrative unfolds in layers of time and narrative perspective, shifting back and forth,

forward and back, in order to create a multifaceted picture puzzle that ultimately all comes together in a revelation of a different perspective on the central character, and on the formation of the country he helped bring into being.



Quotes

How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a / Scotsman, dropped in the middle
of a forgotten / spot in the Caribbean by providence / impoverished, in squalor / grow up
to be a hero and a scholar?

-- Aaron Burr (Act 1)

Importance: These opening lines of the show, and of Burr's narration, define Hamilton's fundamental identity; establish the basis of Burr's antagonism towards him; and define the main issues faced by Hamilton as he struggles to achieve status and respect.

Hey yo, I'm just like my country / I'm young, scrappy and hungry / And I'm not throwing
away my shot."

-- Hamilton, Revolutionaries (Act 1)

Importance: The language of this quote is typical of much of the rap-based language and style of the show as a whole. It also contains one of the first examples of a key motif in the piece, one that portrays and defines Hamilton's determination.

Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now / History is
happening in Manhattan and we just happen to be / In the greatest city in the world!

-- The Schuyler Sisters (Act 1)

Importance: This quote is notable for several reasons. First, it introduces the "look around" motif, a repeated phrase that shows up several times in the story as characters urge each other to look beyond their perceptions and immediate goals. Second, it's part of a song that introduces The Schuyler Sisters, two of whom play deeply significant roles in Hamilton's personal life. Third, it draws a clear connection between the story and the city that is its primary setting, New York.

And no don't change the subject / cuz you're my favorite subject / my sweet submissive
subject / my loyal, royal subject.

-- King George (Act 1)

Importance: This piece of text, taken from one of the few but potent appearances in the show by its only non-American character, is an example of the clever, multi-meaning wordplay that is a hallmark of much of the lyric writing in the show. It also manifests, quite succinctly the perspective of Britain's King George, who is the monarch of the country against which the Revolution was fought, towards America.

We are outgunned / outmanned / outnumbered / outplanned / We gotta make an all out
stand. Ayo I'm gonna need a right hand man.

-- George Washington (Act 1)

Importance: This piece of text, another example of the wordplay in the piece, sums up



Washington's perspective on the Revolution as a whole and the stage the Revolution has reached by this point in the story.

But Alexander, I'll never forget the first / Time I saw your face / I have never been the same / Intelligent eyes in a hunger-pang frame / And when you said hi I forgot my dang name / Set my heart aflame, ev'ry part aflame.

-- Angelica (Act 1)

Importance: This quote is from Angelica's flashback reflection on her feelings for Hamilton, revealing the intensity of her almost instantaneous attraction to him.

(Love) (Death) (Life) doesn't discriminate / between the sinners / and the saints / It takes and it takes and it takes / and we keep loving anyway / we laugh and we cry / and we break / and we make our mistakes."

-- Aaron Burr (Act 1)

Importance: This quote is the refrain from a song in which Aaron Burr reveals important aspects of his character and belief system. Love, Death, and Life are sung at different points in the song, but occupy the same place in the chorus. This gives the lyric of the piece a number of different layers of meaning.

I don't pretend to know / the challenges you're facing / the worlds you keep erasing and creating in your mind / but I'm not afraid / I know who I married / so as long as you come home at the end of the day / that would be enough / We don't need a legacy / we don't need money / if I could grant you peace of mind ... that would be enough.

-- Eliza (Act 1)

Importance: This song sums up Eliza's feelings towards her husband (Alexander Hamilton), his career and work, and their life together. The phrase "that would be enough" becomes a repeated motif, utilized throughout the show in a variety of similarly poignant circumstances.

I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory / This is where it gets me / on my feet / the enemy ahead of me / if this is the end of me at least I have a friend with me / weapon in my hand, a command/ and my men with me.

-- Hamilton (Act 1)

Importance: The reference to death feeling like a memory is repeated later in the show: specifically, when Hamilton once again faces death. It is evocative of his tendency towards wanting to be a martyr.

You will come of age with our young nation / We'll bleed and fight for you, we'll make it right for you / If we lay a strong enough foundation / We'll pass it on to you, we'll give the world to you and you'll blow us all away / someday, someday.

-- Burr / Hamilton (Act 1)

Importance: With this lyric, new fathers Burr and Hamilton sum up what is arguably the



main reason they share the common goal of a successful revolution: they both want better lives for their children, and their descendants.

My name is Philip / I am a poet / I wrote this poem just / to show it / And I just turned nine / You can write rhymes / but you can't write mine.

-- Philip Hamilton (Act 2 paragraph Scene 3)

Importance: In this quote, Hamilton's young son reveals just how much like his father he is, not only in terms of his skill with rhyme but of his determination to be an individual with his own identity.

[Hamilton] knows nothing of loyalty. / Smells like new money, dresses like fake royalty. / Desperate to rise above his station, / Everything he does betrays the ideals of his nation."

-- Jefferson (Act 2)

Importance: This quote again sums up the feelings of Jefferson and other members of the political governing classes towards Hamilton.

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 / I wanna sit under my own vine and fig tree / A moment alone in the shade / At home in this nation we've made / one last time.

-- Washington (Act Two)

Importance: This quote, which contains excerpts from Washington's actual speech of resignation, actually written by Alexander Hamilton, reveals a spiritual, fatigued, human, and vulnerable side to the first President of the United States.

I wrote my way out of hell / I wrote my way to revolution / I was louder than the crack in the bell / 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 / And when my prayers to God were met with indifference / I picked up a pen, I wrote my own deliverance.

-- Hamilton (Act Two)

Importance: Here, as Hamilton makes up his mind about how to address the issues of corruption that have been brought against him, he sums up his beliefs and experiences with writing saving him. This quote is representative of the show's thematic interest in the power of writing.

I'm erasing myself from the narrative / Let future historians wonder / How Eliza reacted when you broke her heart / You have torn it all apart / I am 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 / I'm burning the memories / Burning the letters that might have redeemed you.



-- Eliza (Act Two)

Importance: This quote sums up the intensity of Eliza's feelings (anger, resentment, betrayal) in the aftermath of learning that Hamilton has been having a long term affair with another woman. It is an ironic echo of her request, earlier in the show, to be allowed into the narrative of Hamilton's life, and is also foreshadowing of her decision, at the end of the show, to put herself firmly in charge of making sure the true narrative of Hamilton's life and memory is perpetuated.

There are moments that the words don't reach / There is suffering too terrible to name / You hold your child as tight as you can / and push away the unimaginable ... There are moments that the words don't reach / There is a grace too powerful to name / We push away what we can never understand / we push away the unimaginable."

-- Angelica (Act Two)

Importance: This is Angelica's narration as Hamilton and Eliza struggle to come to terms with the death of their son and with each other.

Burr, my first friend, my enemy / maybe the last face I ever see / if I throw away my shot is this how you remember me? What if this bullet is my legacy? / 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 / You let me make a difference / A place where even orphan immigrants / Can leave their fingerprints and rise up.

-- Hamilton (Act 2 paragraph Scene 22)

Importance: This quote is taken from Hamilton's final soliloquy, his moment of contemplation in the aftermath of a shot being fired from Burr's gun during their duel. It includes a reference to his long and complicated relationship with Burr, the idea that everything he (Hamilton) did was to secure a better future, and the last recurrence of the thematically central "rise up" motif.

Who lives / Who dies / who tells your story? / Every other founding father story gets told / Every other founding father gets to grow old / And when you're gone, who remembers / your name / Who keeps your flame? / Who tells your story? / Eliza.

-- The Company (Act 2)

Importance: In one of the final moments of the show, these words, sung by the whole company, encapsulate what the creators of the show have said was its main reason they chose to work on it, and also the show's main theme: the idea that history is almost always written from only one perspective, and no matter what that perspective, there are always questions about other possibilities for meaning, for events, and for interpretation of both.