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Bringing Dance Back to the Center in *Hamilton*

In August 2015 *Hamilton*, a hip hop musical about the life of US treasury secretary Alexander Hamilton, exploded onto the Broadway scene and immediately began to spark hundreds of reviews, think-pieces, and news segments. Whether this ongoing commentary comes in the form of a *New Yorker* article or an internet listicle, it frequently fixates on the fact that the musical is sung through.¹ A far more astonishing corollary, however, is often overlooked: *Hamilton* is quite nearly danced through as well.² Approximately forty-eight seconds into the show, the first overt dance gesture arrives. As Hamilton's friends and foes describe the hurricane that devastated the young man's childhood home, three actors step backward with their hands in the air, bent over at the waist as though blown by a strong wind. From this moment on, the movement rarely stops. Throughout the show, the ensemble spins and struts, taps and b-boys. In choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler's admittedly biased estimation, *Hamilton* has almost five times the amount of dance for a typical Broadway show.³ Original cast member and dancer Sasha Hutchings remarked in an interview with Broadway.com that "[*Hamilton* is] everything that you want when you say you want to . . . dance on Broadway. It feels like a lot of times they don't always know what to do with the ensemble, so you end up being like this background noise, and here we really feel like the foundation of the show."⁴

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Yet despite its centrality to *Hamilton*, the dance has played a relatively small role in the musical's reception. The PBS documentary *Hamilton's America*, which lasts well over an hour, spends only thirty seconds on Blankenbuehler and movement.⁵ In the thousands of articles and videos about *Hamilton*, I have found only five items specifically about dance.⁶ Partly, this dearth of coverage can be attributed to the expense of the tickets and relative inaccessibility of the dance. Fans primarily know the musical from the cast album, gaining exposure to the choreography only through a few minutes of video clips circulated on the internet.⁷ Moreover, as a somewhat ephemeral medium, dance is often given short shrift in writing on stage musicals. A large part of the imbalance, however, is caused by coverage that fixates on Lin-Manuel Miranda, the show's creator, composer, lyricist, and star. Many pieces about Miranda celebrate *Hamilton* as a solo work of genius, a fully integrated, sung-through *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁸

But *Hamilton* is not the fully integrated work of a single artistic creator. Instead, it is a blend of many different artistic voices, which overlap, mix, and contrast with one another. The musical's choreography plays an important role in this multimedia network. It develops continually over the performance and carries the same narrative weight as the words and music. Take away the show's lyrics, and you would still have a two-and-a-half-hour dance piece about Alexander Hamilton. Miranda himself has called Blankenbuehler's choreography "a parallel physical score to the words."⁹ The phrasing here is apt. While the dance does travel along a similar narrative trajectory to the lyrics, the two are not always unified. Sometimes the dance helps clarify words that are flying past at an unprecedented speed for Broadway. At other points the dance diverges from the music and lyrics.

In order to carry such large-scale interpretive weight, the musical's dance must operate with its own structures of meaning. Blankenbuehler creates these by applying his own interpretation of hip hop aesthetics. In the score and lyrics, Miranda employs hip hop's combination of word and rhythm and its *recontextualization of found material*. Similarly, Blankenbuehler creates meaning in the choreography through rhythm, gestures that evoke textual meanings, and *a dense network of quotation*.¹⁰

In addition to enriching our understanding of the musical, bringing choreography back to the center of *Hamilton* complicates the narrative of racial justice that has surrounded the musical. Commentary often celebrates the fact that Miranda is Latino and thus that the musical disrupts the racial hierarchies on Broadway's Great White Way.¹¹ Yet most of Miranda's backstage collaborators, including Blankenbuehler, are white. Blankenbuehler did not grow up as a hip hop dancer; instead, he learned

elements of the style in order to choreograph Miranda's music for the 2007 show *In the Heights* and the 2011 *Bring It On*. Given the centrality of dance to *Hamilton*, the choreography and this collaboration cannot be shrugged off as superfluous to the musical. It must be understood as a beating heart of the show.

A Parallel Physical Score

The effusive praise of *Hamilton* as a sung-through musical with a unified artistic vision reflects a very traditional set of musical theater values. In the middle of the twentieth century, musical theater practitioners, scholars, and critics alike tended to value integration, a state in which "song and dance emerge seamlessly from spoken dialogue."¹² Under such terms as these, praise for *Hamilton*'s single voice, embodied in Miranda, seems to carry a great deal of artistic cachet. More recently, however, a number of drama and music scholars have mounted critiques of integration both as a concept and as a value. The English literary theorist Scott McMillin, for example, argues that the essence of good musical theater is not integration but "difference," the jump between dramatic theater and musical number that creates intellectual interest.¹³ Similarly, many musical theater scholars, including Mary Jo Lodge, have applied Victor Turner's concept of "liminality" to musical theater, praising the genre for foregrounding the transitions between one medium and the next. Lodge argues that these moments can draw the audience more deeply into the performance. As she points out, dance is a particularly rich medium for creating moments of liminality, since its visual nature juxtaposes with the aurality of song and speech.¹⁴

These scholars have tended to criticize shows that concern themselves overly with total integration. McMillin and Geoffrey Block have both offered critiques of modern sung-through musicals such as *Les Misérables* for being overintegrated.¹⁵ The aesthetic values they espouse also echo the postmodern approach taken by many recent critically acclaimed Broadway shows, such as *Spring Awakening*, *Next to Normal*, and *Matilda*. As Lodge points out, such shows have tended to abandon a search for integration entirely, and many include nonrealistic movement to achieve this end.¹⁶

Hamilton does share DNA with the modern megamusical in score and narrative structure but notably not in choreography. Miranda has openly discussed the fact that Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Evita* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* provided a model for the original version of *Hamilton*.¹⁷ I interviewed Blankenbuehler and sat in on rehearsals, and in our discussions, the choreographer agreed that *Hamilton* was similar to megamusicals such as *Les Misérables*. He argued, however, that one of the major differences between the shows lies in their contrasting styles of movement.¹⁸

In most megamusicals, the movement onstage is realistic and diegetic. Any dancing (such as the ballet in *Phantom of the Opera*) is recognized as dancing by the characters.

By contrast, the action in *Hamilton* often operates in the middle of a continuum between realistic and nonrealistic. The ensemble actors in *Hamilton* are constantly engaged in a double process. On the one hand, they are portraying eighteenth-century characters; on the other hand, they move in ways that those characters would not. Sometimes the actors augment realistic movements. For example, as Hamilton steps off a ship in the opening scene, a group of dancers pretend to tie it up, but the sharpness of their movements, the unison performance, and an added turn morph this realistic gesture into something more interpretive. At other times, the ensemble completely abandons realism for a show-stopping dance. Blankenbuehler uses the terms “interpretive” and “stylized” to describe both these types of movements, but in this article I will use the terms “realistic,” “semirealistic,” and “nonrealistic” to acknowledge the continuum between actions taken by the characters within the narrative and actions taken by the dancers to comment on the narrative.¹⁹

As Blankenbuehler recounts, he developed these semi- and nonrealistic types of dance in staging Miranda’s breakout 2007 show, *In the Heights*, a structurally traditional integrated musical about life in Manhattan’s largely Latinx neighborhood Washington Heights. Originally, the creative team for *Heights* planned to use movement totally realistically so that the characters would dance only in realistic styles and only in places, such as the salsa club, in which they were aware of that dancing. As the production of *Heights* developed, however, Blankenbuehler inserted more and more semirealistic movement, particularly during scene transitions. Between two scenes in the second act of *Heights*, for example, a collection of anonymous couples walk across the stage together. Suddenly, one member of each couple falls into a slow-motion lunge as their partner continues walking offstage at full speed; the expanding gulf between the couples reflects the tension of the previous scene, in which one of the musical’s romantic pairs ostensibly parted forever. During the next scene transition, the same exact choreography is done in reverse, so that the anonymous ensemble couples walk backward and come together, which sets up a sentimental duet for the musical’s more successful romantic pair in the next scene.²⁰ In a certain sense, these paired transitions are integrated; they tell a similar story to the one narrated by the book and music. At the same time, the addition of a new medium adds a new level of interpretation to the music, lyrics, and book. The anonymous universality of the dance suggests that the entire community feels the main characters’ emotions; the forward and reverse time effect also hints that the romantic break could potentially be reversed—a promise that bears fruit in the musical’s finale.

In *Hamilton*, Blankenbuehler makes much greater use of this semirealistic mode, employing the dance to comment on the action of the narrative. In the number “My Shot,” for example, Hamilton moves between talking to his friends and speaking in an interior monologue. When Hamilton enters this description of his inner state, the ensemble around him pops and locks. In this style of hip hop dance, the performer moves in jerky bursts of speed; the overall effect makes it look like a piece of film that is being sped up, slowed down, and reversed. In the musical, this creates an impression that Hamilton has moved outside the time experienced by the other characters. Even when the musical moves back into real time, the dance continues to walk a fine line between realistic motion, showing the action of the narrative, and semirealistic motion, depicting interior space. As Hamilton speaks to the crowd in “My Shot,” they slowly lunge forward, as though drawn in by his words (figure 1); they then begin to shift around him in agitated groups. In a rehearsal for this scene, Blankenbuehler told the dancers that they were not literally moving through space but instead moving through the mind.²¹

At other points in the musical, Blankenbuehler uses semi- and non-realistic movement to directly oppose the song, for example, during the climactic duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. When

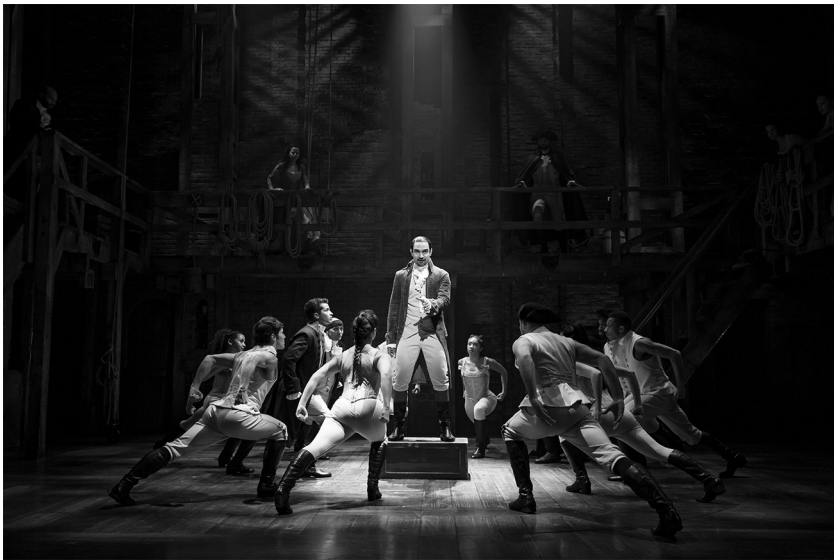


Figure 1. The ensemble members lunge toward Hamilton as though drawn by his words. Javier Muñoz and the cast of *Hamilton*. © Joan Marcus. Used by permission.

Burr shoots Hamilton, time onstage suddenly stops. Hamilton delivers a monologue in which he ponders what kind of legacy he will leave if he dies. While he rotates around the stage, delivering this monologue to the audience, a dancer holding the bullet from Burr's gun slowly inches her way across the stage toward him. As she moves closer and closer, other dancers from the ensemble attempt to intervene in her path by using gestures that have been associated with Hamilton's progress in the show: pugilistic movements from "My Shot," soldiers' steps from "Right Hand Man," and a devastating lift depicting the death of Hamilton's mother from "Hurricane."²² Instead of dance emerging from the words in order to finish the story, dance and words tell two different, overlapping narratives: in his words Hamilton seems to welcome death, while the dancers strive to prevent it.

The dance in *Hamilton* is thus integrated into the framework of the musical while still maintaining a sense of liminality. It is integrated in that it occurs throughout the show and takes up the themes of the words and music. Nevertheless, the dance's semirealistic function, like the scene transitions of *Heights*, creates the sense of frisson between different media that is characteristic of McMillin's definition of difference. In this duality, to use Miranda's word, the dance and the music are "parallel."

Specificity of Meaning and Rhythm

Blankenbuehler's dance in *Hamilton* is also "parallel" to the score in that it echoes the structures of Miranda's rap music. In fact, these formal similarities allow the dance to convey meaning to the audience. It is important to note that this does not mean that Blankenbuehler's choreography can be categorized as hip hop dance as that term is generally understood. Though Blankenbuehler quotes from hip hop styles, the choreography in *Hamilton* is relatively far removed in form, audience, and delivery from those same dances.²³ As Thomas DeFrantz has discussed, hip hop movements are often quoted in music videos and reality television competitions to signify "cool" to a generic global audience.²⁴ The quotations in *Hamilton* are more nuanced, with greater attention to the details and effects of different types of hip hop movements, but overall the show's choreography bears a closer similarity to these types of theatrical performance dances than to hip hop dance as practiced by b-boys, krumpers, or other inventors of the original styles.

Blankenbuehler did not learn hip hop dance as a young person the way that Miranda learned hip hop music. The choreographer studied tap, jazz, and ballet before moving to New York at the age of twenty to begin a career as a Broadway performer. It was in working on *Heights* that Blankenbuehler first learned hip hop movement. In preparation for choreographing the musical, Blankenbuehler traveled to Los Angeles three

times to take hip hop classes, each time staying for a week and a half and taking six classes a day. During the same period, he also read books and watched documentaries about hip hop and brainstormed ideas for the show. His research-intensive methodology is remarkably similar to that of Jerome Robbins working on *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Blankenbuehler recounts that during his job interview for *Heights*, when asked about his lack of hip hop knowledge, he countered that Jerome Robbins wasn't Latino, despite his success in choreographing *West Side Story*. During the production of *Heights*, Blankenbuehler would sometimes collaborate with hip hop dancers in the studio, getting feedback from them on how to inflect his more tap-influenced movements with hip hop gestures.²⁵

While it thus does not draw directly from the structures of meaning in hip hop dance, Blankenbuehler's choreography does re-create the rich textual imagery in Miranda's rapping. Frequently, movements in the choreography have direct associations with their accompanying text. During "Yorktown," for instance, as Hamilton raps that "I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory," the ensemble points at their heads (figure 2). In the same song, for "on my feet," they pivot back and forth on the balls of their feet.

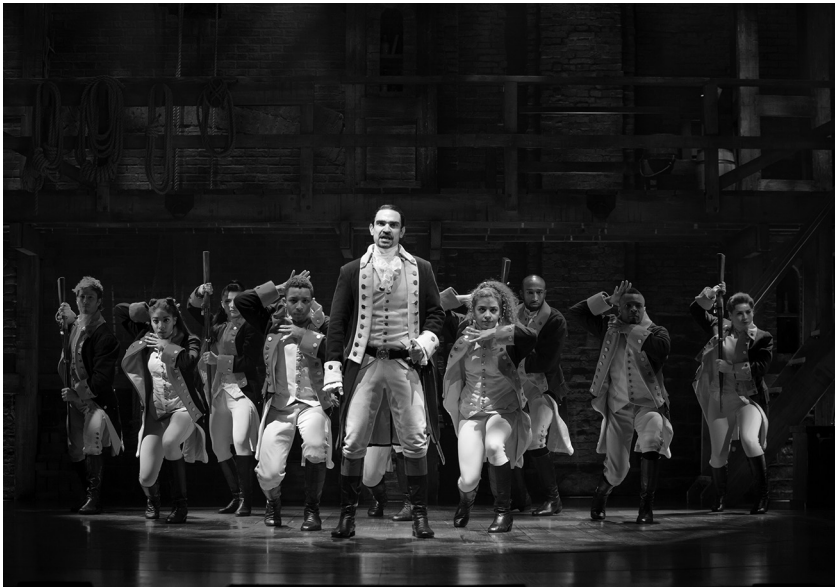


Figure 2. The dancers point to their heads as Hamilton says the word "memory" in the line, "I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory." Javier Muñoz and the cast of *Hamilton*. © Joan Marcus. Used by permission.

Even when the movement does not relate to a particular word, the steps tend to embody very specific meanings. In rehearsal, Blankenbuehler, associate choreographer Stephanie Klemons, and Chicago resident choreographer Michael Balderrama frequently explained the metaphorical meanings behind individual movements to the dancers. When rehearsing the ending of “Non-Stop,” for example, Klemons instructed the dancers that they should move their hands sharply out from the sides of their heads, as if to say, “Blow your mind.” When I asked Klemons about the specificity of her metaphors, she reiterated the importance of the detail. The “blow your mind” gesture, for example, is similar to other movements in the show in which dancers wiggle their fingers next to their heads. This other movement, however, is meant to indicate thoughts brewing. Klemons compared Blankenbuehler’s system of dancing to a sign language in which tiny differences in gesture could have major implications in meaning. Moreover, she argued, it can be easy for the movements to morph over time. By going over the meaning behind the choreography, the dancers are less likely to change it later.²⁶

Blankenbuehler’s choreography also overlaps considerably in formal terms with rap music. As the music theorist Kyle Adams has shown, a cornerstone in the aesthetics of rap music is the way in which the voice interacts with an underlying beat. Indeed, as Adams argues, rap artists often begin a song by crafting a beat that will loop throughout the track. Lyrics are usually written to fit into this preexisting loop rather than the other way around, and thus in many cases the rhythms of the lyrics highlight prominent rhythms in the beat.²⁷ Miranda and Blankenbuehler work in a similar way. Unlike most other Broadway composers, Miranda writes without a piano, instead beginning from a looped computerized beat.²⁸ Miranda records demos of the songs, which are then transcribed and orchestrated by music director Alex Lacamoire. Blankenbuehler works out his choreography to these recordings. This means that when Blankenbuehler is starting out, there is already a strong sense of complex musical rhythm with which the dance can interact. Blankenbuehler identifies the similarity between the rhythms of the dance and the rhythms of the music as the reason that he and Miranda collaborate so well together. Usually choreographers for musical theater shows start their work using a piano-vocal score, which Blankenbuehler finds less satisfying, because they provide fewer interesting rhythms.²⁹

Like Miranda’s music, Blankenbuehler’s dance is full of sharply defined rhythms that emphasize the contours of the underlying beat. Accented gestures in the show often hit the same parts of the beat as the drums, bass, or guitar and work with the flow of the rapping. For example, in “Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down),” the music is consistently subdivided into sixteenth notes, with a strong emphasis in the bass guitar on the fourth sixteenth note within the first beat of

every measure. This rhythm is particularly highlighted in a passage of the song in which Hamilton raps about his pregnant wife at home, saying, "Then I remember my Eliza's expecting me / Not only that my Eliza's expecting." Leading into this section, Hamilton's flow has been rapid and regular, emphasizing almost every sixteenth-note subdivision with military-like precision. As he discusses his wife, the orchestration thins out considerably, leaving just the bass guitar and some high piano chords, which continue pulsating on the fourth sixteenth-note subdivision of the first beat in the measure (example 1). Hamilton's flow becomes less regular. He rests on the downbeats of the measures and includes some almost-triplets on the pun "Eliza's expecting me" and "Eliza's expecting."

The choreography for this section mediates between the orchestra's rhythms and Hamilton's indecisive thought process. The dancers' movements for these measures are long and fluid, matching the thinned orchestration and Hamilton's hesitant flow, but they pulsate on the same sixteenth-note subdivision as the bass and piano. In a video interview for the *Wall Street Journal*, Blankenbuehler remarked that he heard this section as a "heartbeat."³⁰ As Hamilton's thoughts speed back up and he begins to make decisions, the musical parts fill back in. His flow returns to its snappy martial rhythms, with accents on beats 2 and 4 of every measure. The dance, correspondingly, becomes more regular and accented. As this series of movements builds to a climax, the dancers step on the floor in a syncopated pattern in which they hit the second and fourth sixteenth-note subdivisions of the first beat in the measure, exactly mimicking the rhythm of the electric guitar.

It is not simply in rhythm or textual specificity that the choreography for *Hamilton* mimics the structures of hip hop music; instead, it is in the combination of those two elements. Rhythm often draws attention to important gestures in the choreography. For example, as Hamilton launches into the chorus of "My Shot" with the lyric "I am not throwing away my shot," the choreographic phrase has multiple allusions to punching that illustrate Hamilton's combative nature. The movement culminates in the dancers flicking their arms diagonally across their bodies as Hamilton raps out the syncopated lyric "my . . . shot." During the empty downbeat in the middle of that lyric, the entire cast is caught in the middle of this move, stretching their arms up to the sky. This gesture, which flashes by very briefly during "My Shot," is actually the iconic movement depicted in silhouette on the posters for *Hamilton* (figure 3). While in the song the gesture is literally about throwing something away, in the moment of the silent downbeat, the rhythm and movement combine to leave a momentary image of the up-from-your-bootstraps narrative at the center of the musical.³¹

Example 1. In (a) I have analyzed a verse and the corresponding choreography from “Yorktown” using Kyle Adams’s and Adam Krims’s techniques. The rows alternate between lyrics (in white and normal font), with corresponding choreography beneath (in gray and italics). Each line in the chart represents one measure in the song, and the columns divide those measures into sixteenth-note subdivisions. I have recorded the movements as they happen in time. I use dashes to represent movements that continue fluidly over the course of a longer period of time, and I have bolded those movements that are accented, just as Adams and Krims bold words that are accented in the rap. Accompanying this illustration, (b) shows a piano reduction of the accompaniment from “Yorktown” during the lyric “Then I remember my Eliza’s expecting me / Not only that my Eliza’s expecting.” Notice the syncopated emphasis on the fourth sixteenth-note subdivision. Arrangement by Alex Lacamoire and Lin-Manuel Miranda.

a.

1	2				3				4						
	Then	I	re-	mem-	ber	my	E-	li-		za’s	ex-	pect-	ing	me	
<i>shoulder shrug</i>	-	-	- crouch	-	-	- <i>over</i>	-	- <i>and</i>	-	- <i>touch</i>	-	- <i>head</i>	-	-	
	not	on-	ly	that;		my	E-	li-		za’s	ex-	pect-	ing		
<i>turn, hand at head</i>	-	-	- hand pulses	- <i>move</i>	-	- <i>hand</i>	-	- <i>away from</i>	-	- <i>head</i>		hand flick down			
	We	got-	ta	go		got-	ta	get	the	job		done		got-	ta
<i>spin</i>	-	-	-	<i>point</i>		<i>turn</i>		<i>turn</i>		<i>head tilt</i>		<i>flick hand</i>		<i>move hand down</i>	
start	a	new		na-	tion	got-	ta	mcet		my		son!			
<i>lean</i>	<i>step</i>		<i>step</i>			<i>hands flick up</i>		<i>step turn</i>		<i>step turn</i>		<i>step turn</i>			<i>raise hands</i>

b.

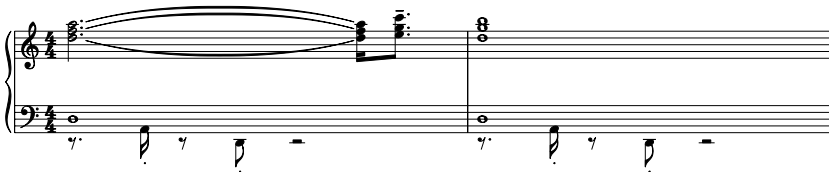




Figure 3. The silent downbeat in the chorus of “My Shot,” embodying the *Hamilton* logo. Screenshot.

Quotation

Like many hip hop artists, Miranda creates meaning in his music not just through words but through a web of intertextual references. As Justin Williams argues in *Rhyming and Stealin'*, recontextualization of found objects is one of the core aesthetic principles of hip hop.³² The choreography to *Hamilton* is similarly rich in references, incorporating gestures from a variety of dance styles from the last three hundred years, including contra dance, swing, tap, b-boying, and popping and locking. The bulk of the choreographic references in the show, much like the musical references, are from African American styles of dance.³³ During the song “Right Hand Man,” for example, the American troops perform a short excerpt of stepping, a semimilitaristic style of movement developed in black fraternities and sororities. The quotation helps demonstrate the emotional bond and strength in this newly formed group. Quotations of b-boying also appear in thematically appropriate places. The martial moves in “Yorktown” help depict the final battle of the Revolutionary War. During the middle of “The Schuyler Sisters,” dancer Seth Stewart b-boys while holding an open book, drawing a connection between the scene’s setting in an eighteenth-century common and the twentieth-century public spaces where b-boying originated.

But there are darker allusions in *Hamilton* as well, many to the complex and often troubled racial and gender politics of historical Broadway dancing. This is true for the number “What Did I Miss?” the audience’s introduction to Thomas Jefferson at the opening of act 2. The music for this number is strangely sunny for the character. Not only is Jefferson often depicted as a solemn figure in popular culture, but in *Hamilton* the politician is the antagonist of the show’s second act and one of the only

characters whose status as a slaveholder is frequently discussed. In the staging, Jefferson appears at the top of a giant staircase, surrounded by the ensemble. As is frequently the case, the members of the ensemble perform two simultaneous roles in this scene. On the one hand, they are slaves; just before the number begins, they can be seen polishing the set in preparation for Jefferson's arrival. At the same time, the ensemble members act nonrealistically as a Broadway chorus line. During the number, they form up in straight rows and use traditional tap steps. The staircase itself evokes the many stair dances from golden age Hollywood and Broadway musicals, including *Swing Time*, *Stormy Weather*, *Broadway Melody of 1938*, *An American in Paris*, *Hello Dolly!*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, and *The Little Colonel*.³⁴ Using a staircase to stage a dance number provides tension and drama (as in *Swing Time* and *Stormy Weather*) and also highlights the virtuosity of the performers by giving them a smaller, trickier platform to work with (as in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* and any of the Robinson films).³⁵ It also, however, stages hierarchy, particularly when done with a chorus line, as in *Hello Dolly!*³⁶ The main characters tend to appear near the top center of the staircase, with the chorus line radiating outward and downward. The chorus line magnifies the main dancer's steps by echoing them in uniform while at the same time elevating the star by appearing underneath, to the side, or behind them. In "What'd I Miss?" members of the ensemble also push the staircase around the stage while Jefferson rides along.

The reproducibility of the chorus line dehumanizes each individual member in order to glorify the main singer. Indeed, in "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise" from the 1951 film *An American in Paris*, the female chorus line is lit and costumed so as to appear as if they are part of the staircase, no more than furniture. The use of these tropes in "What'd I Miss?" speaks to how little Jefferson regards the humanity of his slaves. The play between the light-hearted, nostalgic implications of the golden age staircase number and its hierarchical elements draw attention to Jefferson's hypocrisy as a slaveowner who proclaims himself a freedom fighter. In fact, the choreography is a much harsher judge of Jefferson's character than the music or lyrics of this number. In an interview with *Grantland*, Miranda complimented precisely this aspect of the dance, saying, "I grinned so hard when I saw Andy's staging for ["What'd I Miss?"] at first, and they introduced Jefferson and he's walking down the staircase and everyone's scrubbing the floor. They got it, before I even had to say anything. Like, yep—there's Jefferson, talking eloquently about freedom while a slave shakes his hand and he goes like this [looks disgusted]."³⁷ At the same time, the use of the choreographic trope to highlight Jefferson's relationship to his slaves can reflect back disconcertingly on the staircase number itself, perhaps reminding the audience of the politics of the Broadway stage.

An even more fraught example of quotation appears in the show-stopping number “The Room Where It Happens” from act 2, in which Aaron Burr sings of his frustrations at being kept out of power. The dance for this number explicitly references “Bojangles,” a virtuosic solo from Fred Astaire’s 1936 musical *Swing Time* and the only blackface number in the tap dancer’s long film career.³⁸ Astaire spends a great deal of “Bojangles” with his hands up by his head, his elbows bent at nearly ninety-degree angles. This arm positioning is quoted frequently in “The Room Where It Happens,” along with another movement from “Bojangles,” a low lunge to the side with one hand out diagonally. This lunge arrives in “The Room Where It Happens” particularly in the section in which Hamilton taunts Burr’s inability to act. More generally, “The Room Where It Happens” also brims with tap steps, a dance form that itself is a legacy of minstrel performance.³⁹ Blankenbuehler’s reference to minstrel performance echoes Miranda and Lacamoire’s decision to orchestrate the song with a jangly banjo part. In quoting the movements and sounds of minstrelsy, Blankenbuehler, Lacamoire, and Miranda make an analogy between blackface performance and Burr’s relationship to Hamilton. Blankenbuehler argues that using quotations from minstrel performance suggests how deeply Burr feels Hamilton’s mockery.⁴⁰

The analogy may suggest even more to audience members familiar with the history of minstrelsy. It implicitly compares the ways that black people have been systematically kept out of power in American politics with the ways they have been kept out of power onstage.⁴¹ Again, more than simply fulfilling the number’s narrative demands, the quotations in “The Room Where It Happens” highlight the power relations in American musicals. Fans of Astaire usually brush off “Bojangles” as a type of tribute to the famous black tap dancer Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, not as a blackface number that should be judged accordingly.⁴² Blankenbuehler, however, is clearly interpreting it in the legacy of minstrelsy. While this critique of Broadway is by no means the number’s most obvious function, it can simmer in the background.

Confronting Broadway Today

At the same time that quotations in *Hamilton* grapple with the history of racial power relations on the Broadway stage, the musical itself is not free from this legacy. Though the show does make a point to employ actors of color, the bulk of the creative and production team is white, including Blankenbuehler and director Tommy Kail. Moreover, owing to the structure of Broadway finances, it is this creative and production team, not the actors, who receive most of the profits from the show. As of June 2016, the show’s three producers divvied up 42 percent of the net

profits, in addition to 3 percent of the adjusted gross from the *Broadway* production. The one hundred investors of the show, whose names have not been released, split another 42 percent of the net profits. Miranda receives 3 percent of the net profits, as well as 7.5 percent of the box-office gross. The lead creative team also participate in profits, ranging from 0.37 to 2.5 percent, in addition to receiving a portion of the box-office gross.⁴³ Initially, the cast members, who make up the majority of people of color working on the show, were paid only in salary and did not participate in the musical's profits. Eight months after the musical's Broadway premiere, the original cast members and some members of the show's workshop casts collectively bargained to receive 1 percent of the show's profits, split about thirty ways, in recognition of the role they played in shaping the musical. Nevertheless, their share remains much smaller per person than the portion controlled by the creators or producers.⁴⁴

None of this is to say that the situation on *Hamilton* is unusual for Broadway. I do not want to paint the producers and creative team of *Hamilton* as entirely white or as unthinking on practical issues of social justice. As Elizabeth Titrington Craft points out in this issue, Miranda has spoken out increasingly about political issues in the United States. The show has also made a concerted effort to perform at heavily discounted rates for low-income students at public high schools in New York, Chicago, and Oakland and to invite students from those schools to perform in a special education program.⁴⁵ Moreover, the main creative team for the show includes Miranda and Lacamoire, both Latino, and costume designer Paul Tazewell, who is African American.

Nevertheless, the majority of people on the *Hamilton* creative and production teams are white, and this is a situation indicative of systemic problems on Broadway. As Lee Seymour has outlined in *Forbes*, the business of the Broadway musical systematically makes it difficult for people of color to take part as producers and artists.⁴⁶ We must recognize that most Broadway creative teams, investors, and producers are white and that these are the people who typically receive the bulk of the show's profits. Thus, while the dance in *Hamilton*, like the music, comments on a history of racial discrimination in the United States, its profit-sharing setup still echoes that legacy. One side effect of the fact that reporting on *Hamilton* has focused solely on Miranda's contributions is that it allows commenters to ignore the racial economics of the Broadway stage. Most criticism of *Hamilton* from the Left has targeted the show's glorification of white historical figures, not the representation in the modern-day cast and crew.⁴⁷ Just as acknowledging Miranda's collaborators can bring depth to an analysis of the show, so too can acknowledging the musical's wider creative team move the politics of the show out of the past and into the present.

Collaboration and Multiple Narratives

Bringing dance back into the center of *Hamilton* provides a more honest accounting of its artistic process. It also allows a new interpretation of the show to emerge, one that spends somewhat less time glorifying the actions of individual men, such as Hamilton and Jefferson, and more time dealing with the movements of the crowd surrounding them. Just as the choreography condemns Jefferson in "What'd I Miss?," it is a harsher judge of Hamilton's character in the scene "Say No to This," in which the audience learns about Hamilton's affair with Maria Reynolds. The lyrics in this number seem to justify Hamilton's conduct, while the choreography expresses the ensemble's disappointment in the main character. The music and choreography diverge the most in such scenes, where the focus is on the actions of individual men: "What'd I Miss?," "Say No to This," "Wait for It," or the final duel scene. The two media overlap the most in those scenes that are focused on the ensemble and crowd: on the soldiers in "Yorktown," the ballgoers in "Helpless," and the young revolutionaries in "The Schuyler Sisters." The concerns of the individual are so easily conveyed through the virtuosic rapping, while the concerns of the crowd tend to be expressed in movement across the bodies of the ensemble.

It is fitting, then, to remember that a Broadway show is no more the result of a single genius than a historical revolution. In recent years, musical theater scholarship has foregrounded the importance of the collaborative process, and this practice should not fall down with *Hamilton*.⁴⁸ We do not need to throw out Miranda's contributions in order to acknowledge the fact that other people shaped *Hamilton* along with him. Indeed, the makers of the musical often emphasize this in their interviews; Miranda himself is perhaps most likely to point out the valued input of his "cabinet": Kail, Blankenbuehler, and Lacamoire.⁴⁹ In addition to these four, the designers of the lighting, costumes, sets, and sound have impacted the musical to a great degree. Even attributing the choreography solely to Blankenbuehler, as I have largely done in this article, belies the complexity of the full picture. New choreography must always be created on the bodies of dancers and is thus shaped partly in the studio in collaboration with those dancers. The original ensemble members of *Hamilton* have each laid a stamp on their part. Seth Stewart's facility with props, for example, allowed certain scenes in "Yorktown," "You'll Be Back," and "The Schuyler Sisters" to take shape.⁵⁰

There is particular irony in the way the press has approached *Hamilton* as a single-artist work. The musical itself foregrounds the process of collaboration and compromise between its characters, as in Hamilton's decision to work with Jefferson and Madison in "The Room Where It Happens." It also acknowledges history's multiple lenses and sources in

the refrain “Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?”⁵¹ Though this encourages the viewer primarily to think about multiple written sources, we might apply the same thinking to look at the show’s multiple narratives lenses. Just as different documents tell different stories about the past, so too do the music and dance in *Hamilton* offer parallel narratives to the audience. The structure of the dance is the musical’s structure, its successes and challenges are the musical’s successes and challenges, and its ethical dilemmas belong to the musical as well. Functioning as *Hamilton*’s “parallel score,” Andy Blankenbuehler’s choreography brings forward crucial elements of the drama and must be treated as a cornerstone of the show.

NOTES

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1. The full title of the show is *Hamilton: An American Musical*. Rebecca Mead, “All About the Hamiltons,” *New Yorker*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/hamiltons>, (accessed July 24, 2017); Charlotte Runcie, “What Is Hamilton? A 12-Step Guide to Your New Musical Obsession,” *Telegraph*, January 30, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/what-is-hamilton-a-12-step-guide-to-your-new-musical-obsession/> (accessed July 24, 2017); Erin McCarthy, “20 Things You Might Not Have Known about *Hamilton*,” *Mental Floss*, November 17, 2015, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/71222/20-things-you-might-not-have-known-about-hamilton> (accessed July 24, 2017).

2. There are a few exceptions. See Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 133; Suzannah Friscia, “Hamilton’s Dance Revolution,” *Dance Magazine*, May 31, 2016, <http://dancemagazine.com/inside-dm/magazine/hamilton-dance-revolution/> (accessed July 24, 2017); Richard Brookhiser, “Funky Founder,” *National Review*, March 21, 2015, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/415767/funky-founder-richard-brookhiser> (accessed October 31, 2017).

3. Notes from rehearsal, New York, August 22, 2016.

4. “Gotta Dance! HAMILTON Broadway Ensemble Dancers Photographed by Matthew Murphy,” directed by Nick Shakra, [youtube.com/watch?v=XowAQMoBueA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XowAQMoBueA) (accessed February 26, 2016).

5. *Hamilton’s America*, directed by Alex Horwitz, television documentary (Arlington, VA: PBS, 2016).

6. “Hamilton Choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler Performs Original Choreography at #Ham4Ham 8/3/15,” August 13, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMQ5ogjlnUM&t=1s> (accessed July 24, 2017). The Ham4Ham shows were a series of street performances conducted by the *Hamilton* cast, creative team, and numerous other Broadway celebrities. Originally intended to entertain the crowds who came out for the *Hamilton* ticket lottery each day, the performances took on a life of their own, and most were filmed for YouTube. “Choreographing *Hamilton*: the Meaning Behind the Moves”

and “‘Hamilton’ Choreographer Breaks Down His Moves,” produced by Robert Libetti for the *Wall Street Journal*, May 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmYT5OrnWP0> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb67f2HLVGM> (both accessed July 24, 2017); “Gotta Dance!,” directed by Nick Shakra; Friscia, “Hamilton’s Dance Revolution.”

7. Various television segments on the musical have been posted to YouTube, along with their accompanying B-roll, totaling ten minutes of footage. In addition, the cast performed “Alexander Hamilton” for the Grammy Awards ceremony and “Yorktown” for the Tony Awards ceremony, and clips of these have also been posted to YouTube. In total, this means that about thirteen minutes of footage from the musical circulates relatively openly online. One clip from the Tony Awards, for example, has received over six million views, as of this printing. “70th Annual Tony Awards ‘Hamilton,’” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5VqyCQV1Tg> (accessed November 27, 2017).

8. Profiles of the show often double as profiles of Miranda, frequently describing Miranda as a “genius” similar to Alexander Hamilton. “Off-Broadway ‘Hamilton’ Is a Smash Hit,” *All In with Chris Hayes*, MSNBC, May 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWO7VZl7iGA> (accessed July 24, 2017).

9. Miranda in interview with Katie Couric, “‘Hamilton’s’ Lin Manuel-Miranda: The Genius behind Broadway’s Biggest Hit,” *Yahoo! News*, March 24, 2016, https://www.yahoo.com/katiecouric/hamiltons-lin-manuel-miranda-the-genius-behind-164127779.html?soc_src=mail&soc_trk=ma (accessed November 1, 2017).

10. My analysis of the dance in *Hamilton* is informed by an interview with Blankenbuehler, two experiences viewing the show, and informal discussions with associate choreographer Stephanie Klemons and Chicago resident choreographer Michael Balderrama.

11. For example, Erik Piepenburg, “Why ‘Hamilton’ Has Heat,” *New York Times*, updated June 12, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/06/theater/20150806-hamilton-broadway.html> (accessed November 1, 2017).

12. Liza Gennaro, “Evolution of Dance in the Golden Age of the American ‘Book Musical,’” in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 45.

13. Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 2.

14. Mary Jo Lodge, “Dance Breaks and Dream Ballets: Transitional Moments in Musical Theater,” in *Gestures of Music Theater: The Performativity of Song and Dance*, ed. Dominic Symonds and Millie Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 77–78.

15. Geoffrey Block, “Integration,” in Knapp, Morris, and Wolf, *The Oxford Handbook*, 107–8; McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*, 13–14. Jessica Sternfeld also points to musical cohesion or sameness as a hallmark of the megamusical. Sternfeld, *The Megamusical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

16. Lodge, “Dance Breaks,” 78.

17. See Elissa Harbert, “*Hamilton* and History Musicals” in this issue.

18. Notes from rehearsal, New York, August 22, 2016.

19. Andy Blankenbuehler, interview with the author, New York, August 23, 2016. My distinction draws on work done by Mary Jo Lodge in distinguishing between the realistic and nonrealistic contexts in which dancers perform in stage musicals (“Dance Breaks,” 85).

20. Blankenbuehler interview; *In the Heights*, filmed October 10, 2008, Theatre on Film and Tape Archive, New York Public Library, New York.

21. Notes from rehearsal, New York, August 23, 2016.

22. In email correspondence about drafts of this article, Blankenbuehler clarified that this lift was not meant to recall the lift from “Hurricane” but that he was interested in letting the audience add their own meaning to the musical and thus was happy with my interpretation. Andy Blankenbuehler, email correspondence with the author, December 7, 2017.

23. Thomas DeFrantz, "Hip-Hop Habitus v.2.0," in *Black Performance Theory*, ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Joseph G. Schloss, *Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls, and Hip-Hop Culture in New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

24. DeFrantz, "Hip-Hop Habitus v.2.0," 230–32.

25. Blankenbuehler interview. Blankenbuehler did not collaborate in this way for the creation of *Hamilton*.

26. Notes from rehearsal, New York, August 23, 2016.

27. Kyle Adams, "Aspects of the Music/Text Relationship in Rap," *Music Theory Online* 14, no. 2 (May 2008), <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.08.14.2/mto.08.14.2.adams.html>; Adams, "On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music," *Music Theory Online* 15, no. 5 (October 2009), <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.09.15.5/mto.09.15.5.adams.html>. Adams bases his analysis partially on the work of Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

28. Many of these demos are available on Miranda's Soundcloud page, https://soundcloud.com/lin_manuel/sets/hamildemos (accessed July 24, 2017).

29. Notes from rehearsal, New York, August 22, 2016; Blankenbuehler interview.

30. Libetti, "'Hamilton' Choreographer."

31. In the final duel, the same gesture is reinterpreted as Hamilton literally throwing his shot away by firing into the air.

32. Justin Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin': Musical Borrowing in Hip Hop* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 25.

33. Blankenbuehler interview. This is similar to the music, which, as Loren Kajikawa points out in this issue, draws from a variety of Afro-diasporic sounds. See "'Young, Scrappy, and Hungry': *Hamilton*, Hip Hop, and Race."

34. These were in turn adapted from numerous vaudeville stair routines, the most famous one performed by African American tap dancer Bill Robinson. Jim Haskins and N. R. Mitgang, *Mr. Bojangles: The Biography of Bill Robinson* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1988; repr., Linus Multimedia, 2014), 99–101.

35. Brian Seibert, *What the Eye Hears* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 115–16, 243–44.

36. Stacy Wolf discusses how the staircase number both celebrates and objectifies the main character in *Hello Dolly!* in *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 72–76.

37. Lin-Manuel Miranda in interview with Rembert Brown, "Genius: A Conversation with 'Hamilton' Maestro Lin-Manuel Miranda," *Grantland*, September 29, 2015, <http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/genius-a-conversation-with-hamilton-maestro-lin-manuel-miranda/> (accessed December 2, 2016), quoted in rapgenius.

38. This is also one of the only choreographic references that has been explained explicitly to the musical's fans, as Blankenbuehler briefly mentioned it during his Ham4Ham performance in August 2015.

39. Seibert, *What the Eye Hears*, 60–71.

40. Blankenbuehler interview. Carol J. Oja argues that the show uses stereotypes from minstrelsy to make fun of Jefferson as well. See "Hip-Hop History," *Times Literary Supplement*, April 13, 2016, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/hip-hop-history/> (accessed August 13, 2017).

41. Historian Lyra Monteiro notes that the very lyrics of the song "The Room Where It Happens" disregard the presence of the slaves who would have been serving the dinner. See "Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*," *Public Historian* 38, no. 1 (February 2016): 89–98.

42. Kathleen Riley, *The Astaires: Fred and Adele* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 50; Alistair Macauley, "Astaire the Artist, Even in Blackface," *New York Times*, January 27, 2011.

43. These numbers reflect the profit-sharing arrangement following the musical's successful recoupment of its mounting cost. Rebecca Sun, "'Hamilton': Who's Making Millions off Broadway's Hottest Show," *Hollywood Reporter*, April 6, 2016, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hamilton-whos-making-millions-broadways-881205> (accessed November 15, 2017); Michael Paulson and David Gelles, "'Hamilton' Inc.: The Path to a Billion-Dollar Broadway Show," *New York Times*, June 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/12/theater/hamilton-inc-the-path-to-a-billion-dollar-show.html> (accessed November 15, 2017).

44. Michael Paulson, "'Hamilton' Producers and Actors Reach Deal on Sharing Profits," *New York Times*, April 15, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/16/theater/hamilton-producers-and-actors-reach-deal-on-sharing-profits.html?_r=0 (accessed November 15, 2017); Paulson and Gelles, "'Hamilton' Inc."

45. Elizabeth Titrington Craft, "Headfirst into an Abyss: The Politics and Political Reception of *Hamilton*," this issue; BWW News Desk, "*Hamilton's* Celebrated Education Program Makes History Today," broadway.com, April 26, 2017, <https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/HAMILTONs-Celebrated-Education-Program-Makes-History-Today-20170426> (accessed July 12, 2017); Bob Bullen, "#EduHam: Inspiring Young Minds through the Power of 'Hamilton,'" *Huffington Post*, March 19, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/eduham-inspiring-young-minds-through-the-power-of_us_58ce8b9ce4b07112b6472ec7 (accessed July 12, 2017).

46. Seymour's articles responded to 2016 criticisms of the Oscar Awards for nominating only white people in the acting categories and subsequent praise of the Tony Awards, which in 2016 gave all its musical acting awards to people of color (three of these—Leslie Odom Jr., Renée Elise Goldsberry, and Daveed Diggs—were from the *Hamilton* cast). As Seymour explains, however, this was an unusual year. Over the history of the Tonys, 95 percent of all nominees have been white, nearly the same proportion as for the Oscars. Furthermore, most of the black artists nominated for Tonys have been for acting, not for behind-the-scenes roles. Lee Seymour, "The Tonys Are Just as White as the Oscars," *Forbes*, April 4, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/leeseymour/2016/04/04/the-tonys-are-just-as-white-as-the-oscars-here-are-the-tonyssowhite-statistics/#676475c750a4>; and Seymour, "Why Broadway Is So White, Part 1: Real Estate, Nepotism and David Mamet," *Forbes*, April 7, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/leeseymour/2016/04/07/why-broadway-is-so-white-part-1-real-estate-nepotism-and-david-mamet/#449410c722bb> (both accessed October 7, 2017).

47. Monteiro, "Race-Conscious Casting"; Joanne B. Freeman, "Will the Real Alexander Hamilton Please Stand Up?," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 256–57.

48. Recent examples of musical theater scholars highlighting collaboration in the artform include Carol J. Oja, *Bernstein Meets Broadway: Collaborative Art in a Time of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Paul Laird, *Wicked: A Musical Biography* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011); Steve Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); and Steven Suskin, *The Sound of Broadway Music: A Book of Orchestrators and Orchestrations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

49. Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution*, 136.

50. Discussion with Michael Balderrama, notes from rehearsal, New York, August 23, 2016.

51. Benjamin L. Carp, "World Wide Enough: Historiography, Imagination, and Stagecraft," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 293.