

The Curriculum of the Jester

An Examination of *Hamilton, An American Musical*

GABRIEL S. HUDDLESTON

Texas Christian University

HAMILTON, AN AMERICAN MUSICAL (Miranda, 2015) continues to be a critical and economic success (Passy, 2019). Along with a profitable Broadway run, the musical's reach includes a residency in Chicago (Jones, 2019), a highly successful national tour (Pressley, 2019), a performance in Puerto Rico to bring awareness and raise funds to aid the island's struggles in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria (Schulman, 2019), and most recently, streaming a recorded performance of the original cast on the streaming service Disney+. The musical has been the topic of scholars as well, debating its historical accuracy and cultural impact (Craft, 2018; Mineo, 2016; Monteiro, 2016; Nathans, 2017; R. C. Romano & Potter, 2018; Schocket, 2017). This paper is another such academic consideration, but it takes a slightly different tack. Relying on a curriculum theory framework and the work of Sylvia Wynter, this paper asks the questions, "What curricular value does *Hamilton* have?" and "What does the musical teach?"

Lin Manuel Miranda was inspired to write *Hamilton* after reading a biography of the United States' first Secretary of Treasury that was written by Ron Chernow (2004). Miranda saw similarities between himself and Alexander Hamilton. He also envisioned that the broader story of the U.S. founding fathers lent itself to hip-hop and rap (Binelli, 2017). From a curriculum theory point of view, the musical is interesting for its counter-race casting (actors of color are mostly used to portray white historical figures), its overall hip-hop aesthetic (songs from the musical are decidedly in the hip-hop genre, with R&B grooves, the inclusion of rap lyrics, and actors who, while portraying historical figures, often engage in slang and mannerisms that allude to hip-hop culture), and the seeming desire of the show's creators for it to be pedagogical. This pedagogical desire (whether it is realized requires further analysis and is up for debate) is demonstrated in the lyrics to the show's closing song, "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story":

I hate to admit it
But he doesn't get enough credit for all the credit he gave us
Who lives, who dies, who tells your story
Every other founding father's story gets told

This paper is not an examination of *Hamilton* as a piece of theatre or a work of art but as a curriculum, and as such, it does not rely on scholarship that analyzes film and theatre along their aesthetic merits. Rather, given the intrinsic pedagogical premise and that the musical is not a straight retelling of history, it seems pertinent to ask, “What history is it teaching?” On face value, the story Miranda offers could be seen as counterhegemonic, working against dominant narratives that glorify the founding of the United States and that reinforce it as mostly white and mostly male. However, as will be discussed, the musical itself contains many historical inaccuracies that may solidify the founding fathers’ places on pedestals rather than knocking them off. Instead, by using a curricular lens combined with the work of Sylvia Wynter and Anne Tsing, the analysis shifts away from only looking at the musical’s historical accuracy and toward a consideration of it as something more complex, as something between domination and resistance. Furthermore, this paper argues that whether the piece was written as an intentional act of resistance becomes less interesting and important when it is seen as a site of friction between the hegemonic and counterhegemonic. In other words, by viewing *Hamilton* curricularly, in terms of what Pinar (2004) calls “the complicated conversation,” this paper moves away from judging the play in terms of its inherent counterhegemony and instead examines it as a site where the hegemonic and counterhegemonic intersect.

Hamilton has had its share of critiques, and as Manuel-Miranda admits, they are all valid (Bate, 2020). The historical accuracy of the musical is shaky at best, taking this historical figure of Alexander Hamilton, an elitist who was hardly a friend of the masses, and portraying him as a lover of freedom for all is deeply problematic. Hamilton owned slaves and played a large role in the genocide of Native Americans. Furthermore, Manuel-Miranda inserts an abolitionist thread in the overall plot of the story that is questionably present in the actual historical context of the founding the United States. These critiques and others are consolidated by the historian Ishmael Reed, first in his numerous written critiques of the musical and then in a play, “The Haunting of Lin Manuel-Miranda,” done as both a staged reading and full off-Broadway performance (Arjini, 2019). This paper does not seek to erase these criticisms. Instead, it offers that *Hamilton*’s existence creates a friction with both hegemonic and counterhegemonic effects that should be explored. More specifically, what characteristics of *Hamilton* make it a friction-causing cultural artifact?

Further complicating *Hamilton* and the ways it reverberates in society, is Manuel-Miranda’s own identity. Born in New York City to Puerto Rican parents, Manuel-Miranda’s first musical, *In the Heights*, placed his upbringing in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City front and center. This connection between his identity and his work continues to be implicit, due to both his status as a celebrity creator and the way that connection is discussed in the media. *Hamilton* is no different, especially since Manuel-Miranda was cast in the title role. This complicated connection can perhaps best be seen in his advocacy for Puerto Rico and the staging of *Hamilton* there to raise awareness and to bring aid in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Manuel-Miranda’s prior support of certain policies aimed at supporting Puerto Rico was seen by many Puerto Ricans as aiding continued oppression of the island on the part of the United States (Jackson, 2019).

As much as a curriculum theory frame sharpens the analysis to be more attentive to educative concerns, to fully understand the musical’s potential as a site of hegemonic/counterhegemonic friction, Sylvia Wynter’s (1979, 1984, 2003, 2015) work is also used. Wynter’s (2015) scholarship is relevant here because it is largely concerned with dominant conceptions of the human and possible revolutionary resistance to these conceptions. Most

importantly, Wynter's work demonstrates forcefully how these conceptions of the human are solely socially constructed, and as such, interventions into these constructions are not only possible, but necessary. Wynter seeks to identify the process by which the dominant conception of the human, through a socially constructed process, has become what she terms *homo economicus*. For Wynter (2015), this conception of the human is one that reifies dominant and oppressive structures and identities including patriarchy, white supremacy, and global capitalism. Wynter seeks an intervention by including the stories of those who are marginalized by the dominant narrative and, therefore, not considered fully human. Wynter has posited such an intervention as the work of the jester in a king's court because of how he can be included in the dominant narrative while simultaneously subverting it. By invoking the concept of jestering, Wynter imbues interventions with elements of strategy, luck, and happenstance. Using Wynter's work allows an analysis that gauges the success with which *Hamilton* intervenes with(in) the socially constructed telling of the founding of the United States by using the jester as a metric.

To view *Hamilton* along these lines of dominance and resistance is to risk reinforcing a dichotomy of hegemonic and counterhegemonic with an eventual determination as to where the musical itself rests. Wynter's concept of the jester is ideally suited to interrupt this dichotomous line of thought. The jester could not engage in pure rebellion, or the king would have him executed. Wynter uses the jester as a metaphor for potential change because they can never fully be categorized as part of either the dominant or resistant. In other words, pay less attention to the jester and more to mischief he creates and its aftereffects. In this sense, Wynter's jester is akin to Tsing's (2005) ethnographic research on global capitalism's effect on the environments of Indonesia, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Tsing resists what she sees as the common move in similar work to focus on the seeming conflict between two cultures—the dominant global versus the local/native resistance. Instead, Tsing sees real change happening in the friction within this dichotomy not in the sides themselves. Indeed, Tsing posits that the potential to create friction is deeply connected to the ability to operate both within the hegemonic and the counterhegemonic. This ability is perhaps best seen in Tsing's (2015) book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, in which she examines how the matsutake mushroom can be both a product of the destruction caused by global capitalism and still offer avenues of resistance away from such devastation. With this view, the focus of this paper moves away from seeing *Hamilton* as a piece of resistance and toward looking at the type of friction it generates.

While other scholarship examines *Hamilton*'s success or failure as a historical work in terms of its accuracy (Craft, 2018; Mineo, 2016; Monteiro, 2016; Nathans, 2017), this paper attempts to move beyond those questions with using curriculum theory, Wynter, and Tsing (2005) and positing *Hamilton* as a friction-causing curriculum of the jester. In this sense, the friction can be seen along pedagogical lines—such as the Deweyian discomfort of not knowing that pushes an individual to learn more (De Waal, 2005) or Woodson's (Grant et al., 2016) insistence upon teaching counternarratives to the White epistemological legacies we have come to accept as singular truth. The musical pushes against the many myths upon which the United States is built even while simultaneously reinforcing them, and the friction created has ramifications beyond each staging of the show or viewing on a television.

In order to fully investigate *Hamilton* as a possible curriculum of the jester, this paper starts with an outline of what Wynter identifies as the major shifts in the social construction of the human. It then presents her discussion of the jester as a move within and against such a narrative. It will briefly discuss how curriculum theory enhances the ability to identify jester work as

curriculum work and will, finally, use this combined framework to analyze four songs from the musical (and one inspired by the musical) as examples of a jester curriculum.

Man1 to Man2 to Hybrid Human

A major theme throughout Sylvia Wynter's (1979, 1984, 2003, 2015) work is examining historical and theoretical shifts in the social construction of the "human." For Wynter, tracing such shifts is key to understanding how oppression works. In other words, by examining dominant conceptions of the human and how they came to be, we can identify ones that are marginalized. Furthermore, the dominant conceptions are not everlasting; they shift, they move, and there is slippage to be seen, and as such, interventions can be made. Wynter (2003) works to not only identify the "human," but also to find places where others have offered alternatives to dominant conceptions. By putting dominant versions of the human in conversation with non-dominant ones, she underscores the slippage and advocates for a better overall conception, one that strives to include all people. The focus here is to use Wynter's work as a method for identifying cultural objects that could be seen as interventions and create possible alternatives to dominant conceptions of man—namely, male, white, heterosexual, cisgender, and capitalistic. Combined with Tsing, these interventions became identifiable by the friction they create rather than a template for resistance. As will be discussed later, Wynter's (1984) court jester is an example of how friction can be created in moving between, even playing with, dominance and resistance.

Before examining why the jester is a useful model of intervention, one must first understand Wynter's (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) discussion of the socially constructed transitions from Man1 to Man2. Wynter deftly points out that the choices made in terms of how the human was posited dictated how it related to other elements of the perceived universe. The first conception (Man1) is prior to Copernicus, when Christian theology dominated epistemology and ontology. In this conception, the Earth and its inhabitants were seen as the dregs of creation, the bottom of the barrel in the hierarchical structure that put heaven and god on top with Earth and man on the bottom. As such, man was seen as a lesser being living on a lesser plane. This conception is symbolized by the prevailing notion of the time that placed the Earth at the center of the universe. At first blush, one might think this runs counter to the idea that man is at the bottom, placing him, rather, at the center. Wynter (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015), however, argues that, pre-Copernican conceptions of the universe did not place Earth at its center to exalt man, but rather to reinforce that other heavenly bodies were above him, with moving up towards heaven as the ultimate goal. Moreover, Earth's position as the non-moving center further devalued its worth in comparison to heavenly bodies that moved across the universe. In other words, we start at Earth, but we don't want to stay there. This theocratic vision the universe is important when considering the shift to Man2 as represented by Copernicus. Wynter (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) writes:

Now, many bourgeois scholars keep saying: Oh, Copernicus took man away from the center, thereby devalorizing the human. But they are liberal scholars, right? They see the world biocentrically. And they do not understand that, seen theocentrically—as would have been the case then—to be at the center was to be at the dregs of the universe. The center was then the most degraded place to be! (p. 14)

Wynter notes that Copernicus changed the conception of man by arguing that the Earth was not the center of the universe, but rather a moving body that rotated around the sun. The Earth was no longer a static, non-moving rock, but an equal heavenly body along with the other stars and planets. With Earth's status elevated, the status of man changed as well. Man became a biological being equipped with reason as a means to move within a larger system. Man was no longer subject to all that was above him, but an organism with agency that could move beyond his means. If Earth could move and be equal with other stars, so could man.

Wynter makes an important note that, while the transition from Man1 to Man2 resulted in a more exalted status, it did not result in a more enlightened one. She (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) writes, "Humans are, then, a biomutationally evolved, hybrid species—storytellers who now storytellingly invent themselves as being purely biological" (p. 11). In other words, within the epoch of Man2, the stories used to conceive man as biological were stories disguised as scientific fact. Wynter sees a better version of the human as a hybrid in which stories are laid bare, stripped of any "scientific" origins to reveal a human who is both biological AND made from stories:

So, if the biocentrists are right, then everything I'm saying is wrong; but, if I am right, I cannot expect them to accept it easily. For our entire order of secular knowledge/truth, as it has to do with ourselves, is devastated if we are hybrid beings! If humans are conceptualized as hybrid beings, you can no longer classify human individuals, as well as human groups, as naturally selected (i.e., eugenic) and naturally dysselected (i.e., dysgenic) beings. This goes away. It is no longer meaningful. (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 16)

The key here is that Wynter's "new" human isn't really new, but one in which our already existing hybridity is exposed and acknowledged. She goes on to say that the acceptance of this new hybridity will then create new possibilities of exploration for all fields of research concerned with conceptions of what "human" means. In other words, placing the hybrid human in conversation with previous conceptions creates friction, and this friction generates change. Dominant epistemological and ontological frames become exposed as limiting and exclusionary, allowing new conceptions to not only be possible, but accepted. This is more complex than simply counterhegemonic resistance, as there are no guarantees with the friction Wynter hopes to create, but she is sure that, if the human is seen as hybrid and not solely biological, it will be different than what came before.

According to Wynter, in the first two iterations of man, society was unaware that the conceptions of human were part logos/myth. In both cases, the stories we used to create ourselves, what Wynter calls the "poesis" side of the human, were obscured or hidden. She clarifies this by discussing Fanon's and DuBois' work around double consciousness. Fanon and DuBois demonstrate that the personal experience of marginalized people of color is to know that they are both biological and discursive. In other words, the construction of a "black man" is the biology of the person inscribed with how difference is socially constructed through language. Perhaps this is no better demonstrated than when Fanon (1967) describes his experience of riding a bus and having a little white girl point at him and say, "Look mother, a black man." Fanon describes this moment as a crystallization of the experience of being marked biologically as "black" and simultaneously feeling the corresponding social construction that is connected to such a marking.

The Jester

Wynter (1984) expresses hope in our ability to move beyond the concept of Man2, the human as solely biological, to something more inclusive due to the fact that change happened in the move from Man1 to Man2. She argues that the transition from Man1 to Man2 should be examined as a means to locate markers and/or aides that may make another transition possible. Additionally, as mentioned above, she highlights the work of DuBois and Fanon, as well as the works found in popular culture, for possibilities to start such a shift. Wynter points to another possible intervention to expose the human's inherent hybridity, the jester. In "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," Wynter (1984) discusses the role of the jester in the court of rulers as powerful for their ability to expose the fallacies of the prevailing thought of the day and, therefore, expose the social construction of current conceptions of the human. Somewhat equivalent to modern-day stand-up comedians who blur the line between humor and offense, jesters walked a fine line demonstrated by their overall mission—to make fun of nobility to their faces. Jestering allowed cover for a person to say what in other circumstances might get them killed. While the explicit role of the jester was for entertainment, the implicit one was to take what was considered to be heretical and make it expressible in the presence of the king. Wynter (1984) explained,

The term "heresy" is used here in the context in which it is used by the Polish philosopher, Kolakowski. He argues that all realms of culture, philosophy, as much as art and customs, exemplify a fundamental antagonism, whereby everything that is new grows out of a permanent need to question all existing absolutes. This movement can therefore be defined as a dynamic one in which the Jester's role in the pursuit of human knowledge alternates with the Priest's role—transforming heresies into new orthodoxies, the contingent into modes of the Absolute. (p. 21)

The jester, because of his ability to move between the dominant and what she describes here as the heretical, represents the ceremony of change for which Wynter encourages us to seek modern day examples. In other words, we shouldn't be looking for jesters as markers of resistance, but rather for their ability to move between the dominant and the heretical, to utter the profane in the halls of conformity and get away with it. In this sense, control over the discourse that shapes conceptions of human move from those in power to the powerless.

Two examples of jesters in the mold of what Wynter outlines come to mind. The first is Feste from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Feste, the court fool, in his first scene with the lady of the house (Olivia), openly makes fun of her mourning over her brother's death, trivializing it. The lady plays along, all the while knowing that Feste is playing a dangerous game in which she could be seriously offended at any time. This danger creates a friction that opens up the possibility of Olivia ending her mourning. A more modern-day example is Margaret George's (2013) historical fiction, *The Autobiography of Henry the VIII, with Notes by his Fool, Will Somers*. The premise of the book is that Henry wrote a memoir decidedly from the king's point of view justifying even his most cruel of actions. The fool's notes and intervening chapters are there to present a more honest look at the king's life, one that does not hold back and takes the king down a few notches. The reader experiences the friction created between these two different accounts and must contend with both of them, ultimately settling on some new combination thereof.

The Curriculum of the Jester

While Wynter's work offers a helpful lens through which we can examine something like a musical as a possible modern-day jester-as-ceremony, it is enhanced by curriculum theory. In shifting from jester-as-ceremony to jester-as-curriculum, *Hamilton* can be seen as a musical designed to teach rather than as a ritual meant for others to experience. In other words, we should not be seeking ceremonies, but curricula that cause friction by teaching juxtapositions between Man2 and the hybrid human. As a curriculum, the jester and their performance of speaking the profane in normative spaces become knowledge that is meant to be shared and gained. Like the fool found in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, who tries to teach the stubborn king how he must correct his course towards ruin and death, jesters like *Hamilton* could be doing something similar with the audience (and potentially society at large) by speaking truth to power in the form of the friction it creates.

Schubert (2006) (re)emphasized the need to posit things outside of schools *as curriculum* in order to understand "all aspects of society that shape our outlooks, identities and actions" (p. 100). In this way, the intersection of curriculum theory (Pinar, 2004, 2012; Pinar et al., 2008) and Wynter's work (McKittrick, 2015; Wynter, 1979, 2003) seems like a natural fit given that both value an examination of popular culture (Huddleston, 2017b). Whereas Schubert sees curriculum as a lens of critique of societal elements that reinforce oppression, when combined with Wynter's call to search for ceremonies similar to the jester's and Tsing's discussion of friction, such a lens becomes the search for curricula that present the dominant and the counterhegemonic in a way that has the potential to cause friction because of the movement between the two.

As both Weaver and Daspit (2003) and Weaver and Mashburn (2006) point out, popular culture is fertile ground for curriculum in the classroom due to its ability to both connect with students and present knowledge in creative ways. Moreover, by acknowledging the importance of popular culture, instructors could unlock the potential of a truly egalitarian society in which the desires of all people across culture and class are acknowledged as important. This type of teaching is best demonstrated by the work of Love (2019) who emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the genius of black culture while simultaneously recognizing and battling the racism that works against students of color. To that end, Ali and Barden (2015) write of how the popular aspects of a specific culture, when seen as curriculum, state and impart cultural awareness and understanding. Dimitriadis (2015) contends that popular culture, when examined curricularly, can demonstrate how something can both instruct and be instructed by society, show that the intrinsic lesson of a pop culture curriculum can travel across mediums and contexts, and highlight the importance of audience interpretation. This calls to mind the work of Stuart Hall who saw popular culture as a place where the dominant could be read differently and such readings could prove instructive (Dimitriadis & Kamberlis, 2006). It is with this in mind that Wynter's jester becomes a more powerful lens of examination when thought of as a curriculum of the jester.

The question could be asked, how then do we gauge the effectiveness of a curriculum in terms of its ability to be a jester? Clearly, traditional means of evaluation would fall short for many of the same reasons discussed by Doll (2004), Eisner (2009), and Flinders (2004). It is here that revisiting Tsing's conception of friction is useful. Instead of judging a curriculum in terms of its inherent jestering or jester-like qualities, Tsing forces us to consider the friction it can create by inhabiting a space in between the hegemonic and the counter, the global and the local. This would shift our focus to include things to the periphery of the curriculum itself to gauge and judge the cultural reverberations emanating out from the source material. In the case of *Hamilton*, it means

focusing on key aspects of the musical while simultaneously considering the friction it creates, has created, or could potentially create.

The confluence of a Wynter/Tsing/curriculum theory lens used to examine *Hamilton* calls to mind other work that considers movements between and representations of the hegemonic and counterhegemonic. *Hamilton*'s juxtaposition of a color-conscious cast against a story of white men (which had become more concrete through the subsequent retelling by more white men) calls to mind Puar's (2007) expansion of the concept of assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Puar notes how bodies, discursive social constructs, and other contextual elements of society simultaneously are contaminated by and contaminate each other. In this sense, assemblages become much more viral in nature and also contingent on shifting social patterns and structures. Puar (2019) states:

Because Deleuzian-inspired assemblages prioritize encounter and movement over positioning and location, one can never know in advance 'how' to organize. A main component of assemblage is that it resists the call to announce a complicity-versus-resistance binary, recognizing that complicities are multifarious and just as unstable as resistances, and our efforts (including my own) to redress the fetish of resistance by emphasizing complicity have indeed led to a reification of the polarity of the two terms.

Pushing beyond a binary of complicity and resistance by removing intentionality, Puar offers a more complex view of *Hamilton*. Whether Miranda intended the musical to be a form of resistance is irrelevant given how its theatrical and aesthetic elements come together with traditional telling of the U.S.'s founding, the political climate of our times, and the friction the musical creates in its relation to those competing narratives. *Hamilton*, as an assemblage, can be read as a curriculum of a jester that resides within hegemony while offering lines of flight out of it.

Puar (2007) does not discount intentional acts of resistance, but they, by themselves, cannot necessarily result in what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) saw as lines of flight escaping hegemony. When combined with other elements, they create lines of flight in oftentimes unplanned ways. Conceiving of hegemony and counterhegemony in a non-dichotomous way is not to discount outright acts of resistance, but it allows an examination of *Hamilton* that doesn't try to make of it something it isn't. Positing Lin-Manuel Miranda's work as an assemblage of points of friction instead of some example of the dominant and/or resistant (or combination thereof) could further clarify the intentions of this paper. To do this, Muñoz's (1999) concept of disidentification is helpful. As Muñoz writes:

Disidentification is the hermeneutical performance of decoding mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy. (p. 25)

He goes on to say:

The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. (p. 31)

Disidentification can serve as a guidepost for when a curriculum stops being a jester and starts to veer into outright resistance or defiance of the king. In looking at *Hamilton*, it fails to be an example of disidentification because it doesn't implicitly teach the audience how the original story of America's founding is deeply flawed due to the stories it excluded (and continues to exclude) and how those excluded stories are equally, if not more, important. Disidentification could be seen as explicitly counterhegemonic because it indicates an intentionality to decode cultural messages in ways other than how they are intended to be interpreted. In other words, while disidentification might be another way to jester, it is not the type in which *Hamilton* engages.

With the framework outline above in mind, the following sections present points or aspects of the musical from which friction could emanate. In some examples, the connected lines are incomplete and the possibilities for friction are envisioned. In others, connected lines or parts of a possible assemblage of friction are discussed. In both cases, the examples are not an exhaustive list and the connections made are not endpoints. In all cases, the examples are possible sites of friction because of their inherent ability to jester or their jester-like characteristics.

***Hamilton*—An American Musical**

Hamilton (Miranda, 2015) is an American stage musical about the life and times of Alexander Hamilton. Written by Lin Manuel Miranda, the music is mostly in the style of hip hop with rapping as well as singing (there are few other musical styles including British pop and R&B). Miranda first rose to prominence with his musical, *In the Heights* (2008), which followed the lives of characters in the mostly Latinx community of Washington Heights in New York City. While on vacation after the closing of *In the Heights*, Miranda read Ron Chernow's (2004) biography of Alexander Hamilton (Binelli, 2017; Mead, 2017). Inspired by the story and seeing similarities to his own life, Miranda wrote the music, lyrics, and book that eventually became the staged musical. Additionally, Miranda designed the show to have color-conscious casting in which people of color would be used to play the "founding fathers" and other major white historical figures. Miranda made such a choice because he saw that his idols, many of whom were modern day rappers, and Hamilton shared a defining characteristic, an ability to write themselves out of dire circumstances (Binelli, 2017; Mead, 2017). Considering *Hamilton* as a curriculum of the jester, below, I examine four songs for their ability to teach the heretical.

"Alexander Hamilton"

While he wasn't originally slated to play the title role, Miranda was cast as Hamilton (Binelli, 2017; Mead, 2017). He has often been quoted as saying that he was fascinated by Chernow's biography because Miranda himself shared so many similarities with Hamilton—i.e., they were both immigrants who rose from dire circumstances to great heights of achievement. The very first song of the musical gives a brief overview of Hamilton's life before he arrived in New York City (and foreshadows things to come). Aaron Burr, Hamilton's rival and eventual murderer, opens the song by rapping the lyrics:

How does a bastard, son of 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?

As I have stated elsewhere, origins stories are key in cementing hegemonic structures (Huddleston, 2017a). Their validity becomes irrelevant when compared to their ability to create a mythology that pushes a specific ideology. For Wynter (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015), all stories humans tell about themselves and others operate in this same manner, but in the cases of Man1 and Man2, they are obscured because they are presented as irrefutable fact. She argues that to expose the story element of the human is to reveal its hybrid self, that some parts of our stories are open to interpretation, artistic license, and subjectivity. Returning to *Hamilton*, by focusing on a “founding father” of the United States, Miranda worked with two bedrock origin stories—the creation of the U.S. and the notion of the American Dream.

The mythology of the founding of the United States connects American ideals to democracy, often focusing on origin stories of the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary War, and the writing of the U.S. Constitution. While these stories have been dramatized and retold in various ways, both fictionalized and “historical,” Miranda flipped the script, so to speak, by equating Hamilton’s story to his own story (a person of color with a family legacy of immigrating to the United States) and his various rapper role models who used their ability to write to overcome systemic oppression. Indeed, while there is even another musical about the founding of the United States, *1776*, no other example has gained quite as much attention as Miranda’s casting the founding fathers as people of color. As Zinn (2017) demonstrated, the stories of the U.S. that are most often told are done from a white male point of view. Miranda challenges the notion that the American story is inherently one of white men and boldly claims it for people of color. Similar, but not as literal as the process for which Chakrabarty (2006) advocates, Miranda has (re)inscribed American stories with those from people of color. To solely criticize *Hamilton* in terms its historical accuracy misses an overriding lesson—history is malleable and can be subverted, upended, and amended. Using a framework that focuses more on the musical’s ability to jester and cause friction, the accuracy of *Hamilton* is less important than teaching us that the American histories we have come to know as objective fact are open to interpretation.

The second mythology Miranda upends is the American Dream. The story of the American Dream is one in which anyone can “pull himself up from his bootstraps” to make a better life in America. Indeed, *Hamilton* is one such story. As the opening song describes, his life was one of tragedy and hardship. While he worked hard to achieve (epitomized by a reoccurring line throughout the musical that he “wrote his way out”), he also benefitted from privilege that allowed for his mobility. The lines of privilege were clearly drawn during his time through the oppressive, decades-long institution of slavery, colonization, and the mass genocide of indigenous people. Miranda, however, does not directly push against Hamilton’s privilege, but rather calls attention to the lack of voices of people of color in this American Dream story by intentionally casting against race. In the lyrics towards the end of the song, the chorus sings:

Alexander Hamilton
 We are waiting in the wings for you
 You could never back down
 You never learned to take your time

Oh, Alexander Hamilton
 When America sings for you
 Will they know what you overcame?
 Will they know you rewrote your game?
 The world will never be the same, oh

Miranda seems to be literally talking about Hamilton while figuratively talking about this musical itself and its positioning of a color conscious class imposed on a story of white men. Will America know and appreciate what people of color overcame? The line, “Will they know you rewrote your game?” is striking. Here, Miranda is referring to Hamilton’s writing ability as his main strength and reason for his success. At the same time, could Miranda be referring to how stories of history are not a retelling, but a rewriting? Is he being self-referential to how he, his musical, and his cast mates are rewriting history? There are no definitive answers here, but this is how Miranda is able to act as jester, to make the heretofore heretical stories of communities of color equally worthy to be taught alongside those of the white founding fathers. He accomplishes this by telling the historical “facts” of America’s founding through a cast of color and using a style of music most often associated with underrepresented cultures.

“My Shot”

The third song of the musical, “My Shot,” builds on the themes presented in the opening number while introducing in the main point of contention between Hamilton and his rival Aaron Burr. “My Shot” is written as a rap battle in which Hamilton presents his skill to spit rhymes to his new compatriots (Marquis de Lafayette, Hercules Mulligan, and John Laurens). In this song, Miranda’s interpretation of Alexander Hamilton’s story as a modern rap is crystalized. Take an excerpt from his first “monologue”:

I prob’ly shouldn’t brag, but dang, I amaze and astonish
 The problem is I got a lot of brains but no polish
 I gotta holler just to be heard
 With every word, I drop knowledge
 I’m a diamond in the rough, a shiny piece of coal
 Tryin’ to reach my goal my power of speech, unimpeachable
 Only nineteen but my mind is older
 These New York City streets get colder, I shoulder
 Every burden, every disadvantage
 I have learned to manage, I don’t have a gun to brandish
 I walk these streets famished
 The plan is to fan this spark into a flame

Such lines are even more striking given that a Latino is delivering them as a white founding father. Wynter’s hybrid human is brought to life on stage as the story of the protagonist is inscribed into the skin of Miranda and vice versa. Miranda exposes the process obscured by the overarching conception of Man2 during the time of Alexander Hamilton, the white body being inscribed with American traits (rugged individualism, Western reason, and capitalism). Within the context of a

curriculum of the jester, this song teaches the audience that the founding fathers contained no inherent biological qualities that made them special, but rather demonstrates that they were partly constructed with stories of racial privilege that made it only seem so.

As mentioned earlier, “My Shot” and the song it immediately follows, “Aaron Burr, Sir,” introduce a main point of conflict between the musical’s protagonist and antagonist. On one side, Hamilton is cocky, arrogant, and willing to take chances. He speaks his mind and sometimes is reckless. On the other, Aaron Burr is cool, calculating, and patient. Moreover, Burr can be overcautious and condescending towards his fellow revolutionaries. If this story were to be told in a traditional manner with casting along racial lines, Hamilton and Burr’s differences might be framed purely in the political sense as two men jockeying for power. However, for the aforementioned reasons, an additional framing comes into play. Echoing the discussion of mimesis found in Bhabba (1984) and Chakrabarty (2006), Hamilton and Burr represent two paths of the subaltern, to either emulate the culture of the oppressor or to strike out against it. In the middle section of “My Shot,” Burr admonishes the other characters, and Hamilton responds:

Burr: Geniuses, lower your voices
 You keep out of trouble and you double your choices
 I’m with you, but the situation is fraught
 You’ve got to be carefully taught
 If you talk, you’re gonna get shot
Hamilton: Burr, check what we got
 Mister Lafayette, hard rock like Lancelot
 I think your pants look hot
 Laurens, I like you a lot
 Let’s hatch a plot blacker than the kettle callin’ the pot
 What are the odds the gods would put us all in one spot
 Poppin’ a squat on conventional wisdom, like it or not
 A bunch of revolutionary manumission abolitionists?
 Give me a position, show me where the ammunition is

Wynter (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) herself points to such a struggle in Fanon’s work where he often discusses his limitation to express himself as a black man in a mostly white world. Again, Miranda has laid upon the American story what it had heretofore obscured, that its founding is built on a legacy of violent “othering” that subjugates people of color into either roles of mimesis or rebellion. Miranda has created an intertwined curriculum of the jester in which the American story and the story of violent oppression interact on stage in order to allow the audience to contend with both simultaneously. All in all, it is not just that Miranda lays a cast of color on top of a story that has been historically told as white, but he intertwines the myth of the American Dream with the experiences of those bodies oppressed by its original and subsequent tellings. This is exemplified in the introductory raps by the other characters in this song:

Lafayette: I dream of life without a monarchy
 The unrest in France will lead to ‘onarchy?
 ‘Onarchy? How you say, how you say, oh, ‘Anarchy’!
 When I fight, I make the other side panicky
 With my

Hamilton/Laurens/Lafayette/Mulligan: Shot!
Mulligan: Yo, I'm a tailor's apprentice
 And I got y'all knuckleheads in loco parentis
 I'm joining the rebellion 'cause I know it's my chance
 To socially advance, instead of sewin' some pants!
 I'm gonna take a
Hamilton/Laurens/Lafayette/Mulligan: Shot!
Laurens:
 But we'll never be truly free
 Until those in bondage have the same rights as you and me
 You and I. Do or die. Wait till I sally in
 On a stallion with the first black battalion
 Have another
Hamilton/Laurens/Lafayette/Mulligan: Shot!

In these introductions, we see the issues of overthrowing monarchical rule (Lafayette), social mobility as a class concern (Mulligan), and the abolition of slavery and advancement of African American rights (Laurens). In this curriculum of a jester, these stories gain the same level of importance as the one previously thought to be central to America's founding, overthrowing colonial rule.

Miranda is not blind to the level of oppression and violence that historically follows the story of American independence, as evidenced by the closing lines rapped by Hamilton:

Scratch that
 This is not a moment, it's the movement
 Where all the hungriest brothers with
 Something to prove went.
 Foes oppose us, we take an honest stand
 We roll like Moses, claimin' our promised land
 And? If we win our independence?
 Is that a guarantee of freedom for our descendants?
 Or will the blood we shed begin an endless
 Cycle of vengeance and death with no defendants?

To continually question what is established as foundational is a defining characteristic of a curriculum of the jester. In the case of *Hamilton*, Miranda does not wish to wash away the sins of the original story, but rather acknowledge them, openly question them, and *then* present an alternative. *Hamilton* presents a universe in which, from the very beginning, the struggle for American independence is inclusive of all people, not just the white colonials who had the ability to fight for their freedoms. As others (A. Romano, 2016) have pointed out, *Hamilton* is a form of fan fiction that presents an alternative to the original story. However, as seen in the lyrics above, while it might be an alternative universe, the world of the musical never loses sight of what actually happened. To be clear, while representation matters¹, we cannot assume that just because bodies of color are prevalent in the cast itself that their stories are considered alongside the founding fathers'. This is the start of friction, not a full blown bonfire of resistance.

“The Schuyler Sisters”

It is not only men of color that Miranda (re)inscribes into the stories of America’s founding. More specifically, as evidenced by the song “The Schuyler Sisters,” it is women of color. Miranda makes sure to move the women in the life of Alexander Hamilton from the periphery of the story to the center. While it does take until the fifth song for the major women characters to be introduced (and they are still small in number compared to their male counterparts), the song that introduces the Schuyler sisters is an interesting example of a curriculum of the jester for a few reasons. First, the song opens with Aaron Burr, who serves as the musical’s narrator as well as the antagonist, introducing the sisters as “slumming” in the streets of New York to watch the various minds discuss the issues of the day. The sisters enter, and their first lines contextualize the times in which they live—they are not supposed to be there and certainly are not seen as equals to the men who are discussing “important” ideas. However, they assert their right to engage and, more importantly, point out the missing element in the conversations. Angelica Schuyler begins:

I’ve been reading *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine
 So men say that I’m intense or I’m insane. You want a revolution? I want a revelation.
 So listen to my Declaration:
 (Joined by Eliza and Peggy): “We hold these truths to be self-evident
 That all men are created equal”
 Angelica: And when I meet Thomas Jefferson
 Company: Unh!
 Angelica: I’mma compel him to include women in the sequel.
 Women: Work!

Concurrently, two levels of critique are working within the song. The first is a familiar strain sometimes seen in period pieces, the women of that particular time advocating for rights and struggling against sexism. The Schuyler sisters are very much in this vein. They sing of wanting a man not for his money but for his mind, they have opinions about the events of the day, and they push against the expectations for women of their time period. At the same time, by casting against race, a new dimension is added to this trope, and we see the potential of Wynter’s hybrid human fully realized. By recognizing the poesis side of the concept of human, Miranda has enhanced the original, “historical” story of the Schuyler Sisters beyond a first wave feminist retelling. Women of color being cast as the Schuyler sisters pushes the issues of women’s rights beyond a traditional portrayal and into a more complex one. In other words, by being of color, the Schuyler sisters embody a shift from second wave to third wave feminism before it actually happened historically. Second wave and third wave feminism are put in direct conversation with a time period that was stuck within a moment that predates first wave feminism. This is best demonstrated by the choreography in this song in which traditional dances of the period are joined with hip hop dance moves (Cast of *Hamilton*, 2015). This is some next level jestering on the part of *Hamilton* to acknowledge previously tried forms of resistance to patriarchy while simultaneously offering more recent ones.

In terms of bodies and where they find themselves both spatially and temporally, one of the repeated stanzas in “The Schuyler Sisters” is:

Eliza: Look around, look around at how

Lucky we are to be alive right now!

Eliza/Peggy: Look around, look around at how

Lucky we are to be alive right now!

Eliza/Angelica/Peggy: History is happening in Manhattan, and we just happen to be
In the greatest city in the world!

Schuyler Sisters and Company: In the greatest city in the world!

A literal interpretation of this line is the sisters counting themselves lucky to be present at the beginning of a revolution—the founding of a country. However, the casting of this show, again, adds another layer of interpretation. Miranda could be calling attention to the fact that, yes, for those with the means to benefit from the coming revolution (and their decedents), it is a fortunate time to be alive. For people of color, this was mostly not the case. Indeed, the lack of bodies of color that “just happen to be in the greatest city in the world” will have an historical legacy that plays out in where slavery was legal and where it was not. All this being said, the conflux of historical figures that are the Schuyler sisters and the actors who portray them make for double awareness of the violent historic legacy of America’s founding versus the possibility of what an inclusive start of that founding might have portended. However, Miranda’s jestering prevents him from directly dealing with the real history of the Schyler sisters, whose family profited immensely from the slave trade.

“Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)”

The last song to be examined is perhaps the clearest example as to why *Hamilton* is not only a jester, but a curriculum of the jester. The song itself is a crucial one in which Hamilton finds himself finally on the battlefield after serving most of the war as the aide of George Washington. Hamilton has long desired such a move, but Washington insisted he was more valuable in the role of aide than that of general. When Hamilton at last finds himself on the battlefield, he helps to execute the decisive battle of the war, Yorktown. The song describes the various maneuvers Hamilton and his colleagues take to win the battle, but there is one line of the song that has taken on a life of its own. Towards the beginning of the song, Hamilton and the Marquis de Lafayette meet in the middle of the stage and have this exchange:

Lafayette: Monsieur Hamilton

Hamilton: Monsieur Lafayette

Lafayette: In command where you belong

Hamilton: How you say, no sweat

We’re finally on the field

We’ve had quite a run

Lafayette: Immigrants

Hamilton/Lafayette: We get the job done.

Here the contrast of color conscious casting juxtaposed with the question of immigration is striking. The musical acknowledges that there were immigrants who played major roles in the most pivotal battle of the American Revolution, and the point is driven home when Miranda, a

descendent of immigrants himself, utters these lines. While the lines themselves are significant, given the political climate of the time in which *Hamilton* opened and rose to popularity, it is little surprise that it was launched into an orbit beyond the musical itself. The beginning of that launch was when then Vice-President Elect Mike Pence attended a performance of the musical in November of 2016 (Mele & Healy, 2016). As the vice-presidential candidate of Donald Trump's xenophobic, racist, and sexist campaign that exemplified and relied on institutional white privilege, Pence's presence in the audience that night made for a markedly different performance. While the musical is certainly political in nature, the interpretation of its inherent ideology was always left open, mainly due to Miranda's equivocation when pressed on his own political views (Binelli, 2017). As such, the musical had been a hit on both sides of the political spectrum (Schuessler, 2015), which in and of itself demonstrates how the profane can be uttered in multiple normative contexts. However, that night was different, as the performance and audience reaction was in direct response to Pence's attendance.

Reports vary, but the consensus is that the biggest audience reaction of the night came when the line, "Immigrants, we get the job done" was met with huge applause, some of it directed at Pence (Mele & Healy, 2016). Clearly, the audience was linking this line to the Trump campaign's more xenophobic promises, including the building of a wall on the border between the United States and Mexico and Trump's call for an immigration ban of all Muslims coming into the country. At the curtain call of the show, Brandon Dixon, who had only recently taken over the role of Aaron Burr from the original cast member, delivered a speech that was directed at Pence (Marans, 2016). What follows is an excerpt from that speech:

Vice President-elect Pence, we welcome you, and we truly thank you for joining us here at *Hamilton: An American Musical*, we really do. We, sir, we are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us—our planet, our children, our parents—or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights, sir. But we truly hope that this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us. *All of us.*

Reports are mixed as to how Pence received the message or if he heard it at all (Marans, 2016; Mele & Healy, 2016). However, the ramifications were widespread with those in the media seeing this as a major political statement and then President-elect Trump reacting negatively to it on Twitter. In other words, the friction inherent in the juxtaposition of modern immigrants' stories with those of the founding fathers' was amplified when the cast delivered a message to a representative of an administration that promoted and enacted racist policies against immigrants and their families, thereby, making the musical's implicit message about immigration explicit—and more people felt the heat.

The following month, an album featuring new interpretations of *Hamilton* songs and original music inspired by the musical was released. One of the tracks was called, "Immigrants, (We Get the Job Done)" (Miranda et al., 2016). This new song, taking its cue from the immigrants line, is overtly political. In the following excerpt, the rapper, Residente, explicitly names the struggle of those who come to a country for a better opportunity even though it is built on the violent oppression of people and the seizing of lands from Mexico:

Residente: Por tierra o por agua
Identidad falsa

Brincamos muros o flotamos en balsas
 La peleamos como Sandino en Nicaragua
 Somos como las plantas que crecen sin agua
 Sin pasaporte americano
 Porque La mitad de gringolandia Es terreno mexicano
 Hay que ser bien hijo e puta
 Nosotros Les Sembramos el árbol y ellos se comen la fruta
 Somos los que cruzaron
 Aquí vinimos a buscar el oro que nos robaron
 Tenemos mas trucos que la policia secreta
 Metimos la casa completa en una maleta
 Con un pico, una pala
 Y un rastrillo
 Te construimos un castillo
 Como es que dice el coro cabrón?

The lyricists of the song (K'naan, Snow Tha Product, Riz Ahmed, and Residente) have a history of putting their ethnic identities at the forefront of their work, so this song is a continuation of that work. The repeating chorus of the song, "Look how far I've come," along with an interlude that repeats the line, "It's America's Ghost Writer's, the credits only borrowed," can be seen as a postscript to the tone set by *Hamilton*, rewriting history with the stories it has long erased. *Hamilton* as a curriculum of the jester demonstrates its portability from one medium to another and shows its adaptability in the face of a Trump administration. In other words, the musical teaches others how to be jesters.

Conclusion

Due to the intersections of history, performance, and bodies of color, *Hamilton* is instructive—its curriculum bona fides as a jester causing friction are not in doubt, as it makes the heretical not just expressible but also teachable. Whereas the jester pushes the boundaries of what can be spoken to the king, the curriculum of the jester pushes the boundaries of what can be taught to his subjects. In this sense, when Wynter says, "a ceremony must be found," *Hamilton* makes the case that an effective ceremony is one that is curricular in nature—designed to teach and ultimately create friction. The effect is twofold. Teaching the heretical story is to elevate it to gospel and no longer heresy, thereby, forcing a consideration of the two together. Second, as demonstrated by "Immigrants (We Get the Job Done)," the friction created in the original juxtaposition *Hamilton* presents results in other modeled juxtapositions creating their own friction. Time will tell if this compounded friction originating with the musical will be enough to cause a fire. As the justified critiques of the musical point out, it might be that *Hamilton* is too closely aligned with both global capitalism and white supremacist (re)tellings of history to actually cause any worthwhile friction along the lines outlined in this paper. However, this danger is the price to be paid for a curriculum to be jester-like; it must operate in the marginal space between the king and his realm, the sacred and heretical, the hegemonic and the resistance and the global if it wants to create openings for others to do more than it can as a jester. We shouldn't judge *Hamilton* as a

site of resistance; it would fail miserably, but it can be judged for its ability to create possibilities of resistance. This is a small distinction, but an important one.

Lastly, the theatrical aspect of *Hamilton* is an essential piece as to why it makes for a curriculum of the jester that causes friction—it instructs on how bodies can be in the world. Whereas Freire (1968/2000) emphasized the importance of those who are oppressed naming the word, Boal (1985) amended this discursive act with physically being in the world as well. Boal agreed with Freire that, in order to fight oppression, a meaningful dialogue between oppressor and oppressed must take place, but Boal also recognized that speech includes our physical actions as well. Therefore, while Freire used a mostly discussion-based pedagogy, Boal used theatre and acting. *Hamilton* is a staged performance in which bodies move in concert with each other, the music, and the historical legacy of the story it tells. It engages with America’s history beyond the written account of it and into a realm in which the ghosts of the past are forced to contend with the bodies of the present. Boal saw the importance of such an interplay with his conception of the joker in *Theatre of the Oppressed* exercises. The joker was a character who could move across space and time, forcing the stories of those on stage into contact with the ones from the audience, making them contend, debate, and interact with each other. By relying on the conventions of the theatre, Boal believed that we could learn not only how to speak to one another, but to “be” with one another as well. Building off of Brecht’s belief that if the audience knew more information they would act differently, Boal left nothing to chance by bringing the audience on stage to learn directly how to act differently and actively fight oppression by inhabiting the role of the joker. While *Hamilton* is no example of *Theatre of the Oppressed* (it might still be more in the mode of Brecht than Boal), it’s theatricality points to potential of artistic work to be received by the audience in a different way than if it were only read as words on a page.

Returning to the continuum between Puar and Muñoz mentioned earlier, if a playwright or theatre troupe wanted to be more explicit in its attempt to cause friction, or better yet, be an inherent act of resistance that is effective, moving from a jester to a joker model might be needed. This idea can apply equally to a work like Ishamel Reed’s that critiqued *Hamilton* and perhaps shield it from critiques of being overly didactic (Vincentelli, 2019). If theatre were conceived more along the lines of Boal, we might see plays that inspire us beyond *thinking* differently to *acting* differently. Even with audience taking a more active role in which they participate in the play rather than just witness it, to view their involvement through a dichotomy of hegemony and counterhegemony might not witness its fullest effect. Boal never saw *Theatre of the Oppressed* as prescriptive, but rather an open invitation to “play” and imagine different possibilities—perhaps, even, to try on the “fool’s hat” of the jester and operate within the liminal space between the dominant and the resistant. Boal offers a possible confluence point between *Hamilton*, an imperfect example of true resistance that is wildly popular, and Ishamel Reed’s play, which is more counterhegemonic in its intentions but fails to garner as much support or acclaim due its refusal to be part of the global capitalism machine.

Regardless of whether a play is an example of a curriculum of the jester or *Theatre of the Oppressed*, resisting the urge to label it as part of hegemony or an act of defiance can offer a different perspective on its effect. Wynter’s background includes playwriting, and maybe this is why her work on the jester and elsewhere seems to share a certain kinship with the world of the theatre, *Hamilton* included. Indeed, similar to Boal, Wynter’s notion of the human hybrid demands that the coming ontology is a communally active one, and as such, we all must learn to play new roles.

Notes

1. For a powerful example of how representation matters, see this girl's reaction to watching Phillipa Soo (<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-07-06/hamilton-phillipa-soo-little-girl-video-representation>) (Carras, 2020)

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