

Live Spectacles, Paratexts, and Ancillary Outlets

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Hamilton is a musical obsessed with legacy. It asks how an individual can have an impact beyond his immediate life, which stories are repeated after that life ends, and who gets to tell them. Because of the show's exploding popularity (and skyrocketing ticket prices), the ready availability of the cast album, and the omnipresence of Lin-Manuel Miranda on all kinds of media, the show ended up in a curious position. Many of the "Elizas" telling the story of *Hamilton* are sharing their enthusiasm for a mediated legacy, since they (and to be frank, I) have not seen the live show itself. *Hamilton: A Revolution*, known by fans as the #Hamiltome, then serves an important purpose for the *Hamilton* audience. Instead of being one more iteration of the transmedia juggernaut, the book repeatedly points back to the live performance of the original cast. In this way, it becomes as a source of authority and of wish fulfillment, giving fans the sense that although they were never in the audience they were somehow closer.

The issue of legacy is a particularly important one for musical theater as a genre, since the original cast's interpretations establish the baseline against which revivals and film adaptations are measured. We generally think of original cast albums, or perhaps filmed performances, as the primary media for memorialization of the musical in its original form. But I want to argue for the importance of *Hamilton: A Revolution* as the paratext most self-conscious about its status as a mediating object representing an absent original.

Hamilton: A Revolution is a weird in-between form of book, with the arguments about historiography sitting next to backstage gossip. It's both a piece of literature and a piece of memorabilia. Only musicals with a significant cultural impact end up having a companion book, and only major cultural touchstones such as *Rent* and *Wicked* had equivalently lavish volumes. The design for the Hamiltome as a book object stakes its claim as a book belonging to an important musical. In her *LA Review of Books* essay "What's in a Name?" Evelyn McDonnell notes, "especially in the photo layouts, the *Rent* book and the Hamiltome look like cousins." (As the author of the production history in the *Rent* book, she ought to know.) The marbling and fake cut pages evoke *The Grimmerie*, the book for *Wicked* that was designed to mimic the spell book in that show. The coffee table to-be-looked-at-ness of the book is undeniable. This is a book that does not translate to Kindle. Does its sheer presence as an object offer a kind of substitute liveness?

The Hamiltome becomes an important and authoritative source in conversations about the show. Many of its inclusions and notations can be read as correctives to the misreadings (distant readings?) based on the original cast recording alone. That album does not include one song from the live performance, "Tomorrow There'll Be More of Us." By including it in the printed libretto, the book restores intimacy between Hamilton and Laurens that is visible onstage but not audible on the album.

The book seems particularly interested in refuting many of the criticisms of *Hamilton* by historians. Josh McCarter's descriptions and Lin-Manuel Miranda's footnotes repeatedly invoke the nonverbal choices made by cast members and reactions by the audience. Chris Jackson cannot reconcile the heroism of George Washington with his slave ownership in the text itself, so we read that Jackson bows his head during the show's final song. Miranda discusses the catharsis felt by Burr and the audience alike when he castigates Jefferson for his hypocrisy.

Taking into account both the content and the form of books like *Hamilton: A Revolution* allows media studies scholars to think about theatrical paraphernalia and how it fixes and mediates the live spectacle of the original cast performance. Since the central trio of the original cast has departed, with more cast members soon to go, *Hamilton: A Revolution* becomes an even more poignant representation of that legacy.