



PRINCE HAL AND HAMILTON: BECOMING A LEADER  
IN SHAKESPEARE'S HENRIAD AND LIN-MANUEL  
MIRANDA'S MUSICAL

*EL PRÍNCIPE HAL Y HAMILTON: EL CAMINO HACIA EL  
LIDERAZGO EN LA HENRIADA DE SHAKESPEARE Y EL MUSICAL  
DE LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA*

Ana Crespo Roca

Research done while studying at Universidad Nacional  
de Educación a Distancia

([ana.crespo.roca@gmail.com](mailto:ana.crespo.roca@gmail.com))

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7486-7737>



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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to explore the similarities between the musical *Hamilton* and the *Henriad*. It shows how Miranda and Shakespeare use similar strategies to depict the evolution of characters that become leaders. Prince Hal and Hamilton have to combine political and martial abilities to attain power. Hal learns from his rival Hotspur to be braver in battle, while Hamilton learns from Burr to be more cautious. However, only Hal is successful in keeping himself in power by balancing both types of skills. Another parallelism shared by the plays is how they show the negative consequences of the actions of the leaders by incorporating the voices of other characters. A secondary objective of this piece of writing is to explore Shakespearean elements in contemporary pop culture. In that regard, this study contests the traditional

negative view of pop culture that considers popular manifestations of Shakespeare as lesser versions of the originals.

**Key Words:** William Shakespeare; pop culture; *Henriad*; *Hamilton*, the musical; Lin-Manuel Miranda

**Resumen:** El objetivo de este trabajo es explorar las similitudes que existen entre el musical *Hamilton* y la *Henriada* de Shakespeare. El estudio muestra cómo estas obras emplean estrategias parecidas para narrar el camino hacia el liderazgo de sus protagonistas. En su lucha por obtener el poder, el príncipe Hal y Hamilton tienen que combinar habilidades políticas con habilidades para la batalla. Hal aprende de su adversario Hotspur a ser más valiente en combate, mientras que Hamilton aprende de su rival Burr a ser más cauto. Sin embargo, solamente Hal consigue alcanzar un equilibrio entre los dos tipos de cualidades y mantenerse en el poder con éxito. Otro paralelismo entre las obras es la forma en la que incorporan las voces de otros personajes para mostrar consecuencias negativas de las acciones de sus protagonistas. Además, un objetivo secundario de este trabajo es explorar los elementos Shakespearianos en la cultura popular contemporánea. En este sentido, el estudio rebate la tradicional visión negativa que considera las versiones populares de las obras de Shakespeare como de menor valía comparadas con las originales.

**Palabras clave:** William Shakespeare; cultura popular; *Henriada*; *Hamilton* el musical; Lin-Manuel Miranda

**Summary:** 1. Introduction. 2. Becoming a leader: the character development of Prince Hal and Hamilton. 3. Leadership: a combination of battle skills and diplomacy. 4. The dark side of the leaders' actions. 5. Conclusion. 6. Bibliography.

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ANA CRESPO ROCA has a degree in Journalism from University of Valencia (2010), a MSc in Electronic Publishing from City, University of London (2015, with Distinction) and a degree in English Studies from UNED (2020). Her main academic interest is literature and its intersection with popular culture. She has also conducted research on art books and new technologies.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The hip-hop musical *Hamilton*, premiered in 2015, became a critical and commercial success, earning multiple awards and selling out tickets in several cities. It has a compelling plot, high-quality performances and memorable songs that mix Broadway ballads, 60s style pop music, R&B and hip-hop. It is also a very rich and layered work, Shakespearean in several ways. Like some of the most popular plays of the Bard, *Hamilton* is based on historical events. Both Miranda and Shakespeare focus on entertaining audiences and making political points, and both use history as a starting point but are not constrained by it: they are not afraid of devising scenes and situations for the characters that add depth and colour to historical plots often known by the audience. In addition to these general similarities, *Hamilton* explores themes and motives around power and leadership that can be linked to several Shakespeare's plays, particularly to the Henriad (*Richard II*, *Henry IV Part One*, *Henry IV Part Two* and *Henry V*), which makes the musical a very interesting subject of study.

This essay seeks to show how Miranda and Shakespeare use similar strategies to depict the evolution of characters that become successful leaders. Additionally, the secondary objectives of this article are to compare *Hamilton's* and Shakespeare's characters and to explore Shakespeare's influence in contemporary pop culture. Regarding the characters in *Hamilton* and the Henriad, there are noticeable similarities in how the protagonists, Hamilton and Prince Hal, are presented in comparison with their adversaries, Aaron Burr and Hotspur. There are also parallelisms in the way Miranda and Shakespeare add nuance and complexity to their portrayals of leadership by incorporating the voices of other characters and showing the consequences of the actions that leaders carry out in their quest to attain and keep power. With regards to Shakespeare in contemporary pop culture, this essay looks at elements beyond direct adaptations of his plays. Instead, it identifies how other Shakespearean elements appear in contemporary pop culture, demonstrating the timeliness and relevance of Shakespeare's craft.

## 1.1 State of the Art

There are multiple works published about dynamics of power and politics in Shakespeare's plays, which are relevant to the topic of leadership in this essay. Anthony DiMatteo (2011) has written that we can find several examples of sovereign violence being used by a few to obtain or keep power in Shakespeare's works. Regarding Shakespeare's own political stance, he believes that the Bard is "something of a centrist", as he features multiple views in his plays. According to him, this intention of "trying to find a middle ground" is a political act (DiMatteo, 2011, pag. 165). On this topic, Elizabeth Frazer (2016) argues that instead of looking for Shakespeare's personal stance on politics in his plays, we should see his works as vehicles that enact some aspects of politics, and as ways to communicate ideas of political life to audiences. Leonard Tennenhouse (1986) argues that there is a mixture of entertainment and politics in Shakespeare's works, which in his view is proved by the success of his historical plays, which are political, during Elizabethan times (pag. 2). For his part, Tim Spiekerman (2012) looks specifically at Prince Hal's rise to power. He believes that his relationships with his friend Falstaff and his enemy Hotspur "provide him with much of the knowledge that will guide his later political career" (Spiekerman, 2012, pag. 201). He analyses the notions of honour of all three characters and argues that Hal's own vision is shaped by the other two. In summary, several authors have looked at Shakespeare's view of politics and power and have noted that his own political ideas do not come across in a straightforward way. However, he does communicate some aspects of politics and power.

Regarding the other topic of this essay, the Shakespearean elements in contemporary pop culture, it is interesting to look first at the academic view of popular culture in general, which has shaped the academic debate for many years. During the 20th century, the ideas of the circle of the literary critics F. R. and Queenie Leavis had an influence in humanities studies. The Leavises divided culture into two categories: a high, worthy culture consumed by an enlightened few, and a low culture consumed by the working class through mass media (Walton, 2007, pag. 31-34). The Leavises disseminated these thoughts in the 1930s, but the effect of that distinction between a high culture and a low mass culture is still present in literary studies, and it can be noticed in the form

of literary canons. F. R. Leavis insisted on the importance of developing canons: compendiums of great works chosen by those who had the knowledge to make informed decisions (Walton, 2007, pag. 35).

If there is an author associated with establishing a canon, it is Harold Bloom, one of the most influential literary critics of the late 20th century. For Bloom (1994), Shakespeare is the central figure of the Western literary canon alongside Dante (pag. 46). The Bard is not only a key author in the canon, according to Douglas Lanier (2002) he is considered by many “the icon of high or ‘proper’ culture” (pag. 3). Although his works are thought to be grand literature and have been for years, Shakespeare had a wide appeal in his time, and his plays were far from elitist: they were intended as commercial works. As Marta Cerezo and Ángeles de la Concha (2010) explain, his plays were enjoyed by nobles who would ask companies to perform in their palaces, but also by humble people who stood in the cheap areas of theatres (pag. 199).

Despite Shakespeare’s wide appeal in his time, several authors who have paid attention to his presence in contemporary popular culture have made so keeping a marked distinction between pop culture and grand literature, in the line of the ideas of the Leavises. For instance, Anthony Hoefer (2006) wrote about the “McDonaldization of *Macbeth*” in regards of the film *Scotland, PA* (William Morrisette, 2001), while Elena Xení (2014) wondered if pop culture and Shakespeare can exist in the same classroom.

Other authors have stressed that the relationship between pop and high culture in Shakespeare is more complex. For instance, Diana E. Henderson (2007) has written about the rich variety of relationships that exist between Shakespeare and popular culture, stressing that Shakespeare and the actors that would interpret his plays “challenged a two-tier vision of high and low”, as they incorporated in the plays rhyme and prose, elegant rhetoric and dirty jokes (pag. 7). The Bard’s plays contain popular elements, like fools and clowns, non-aristocratic figures who could express some of the “lower class” experiences and views (Henderson, 2007, pag. 9).

Of the authors that have written about Shakespeare and pop culture, I find the approach of Douglas Lanier particularly interesting. Lanier does not look down on pop culture, and has argued that the relationship between Shakespeare and popular culture is “a legitimate, even important area of study” (Lanier, 2002, pag. 3). He has also argued that pop

culture is more than a vehicle to learn about the bard, and that Shakespearean elements in pop culture are more than mere decorations or “tokens of prestige”: there’s an interplay, a complex relationship between pop culture and Shakespeare’s works (Lanier, 2002, pag. 16).

Regarding *Hamilton*, a quick online search reveals that traditional media outlets, bloggers and youtubers have noted the myriad of Shakespearean elements it contains, from the use of historical elements (Mead, 2015; Bettinelli, 2016) to how the authors combine simpler or more complex language depending on which character is speaking (Stevens, 2020; Allred, 2020). Many have also noted a direct reference to *Macbeth* in *Hamilton* (like Whitemore, 2016 and Allred, 2020). A more in-depth search reveals that some of the points discussed in this article around parallelisms between *Hamilton* and the Henriad appear in a short article in the online magazine *Slate* (Butler, 2016).

*Hamilton* has made its way to academic journals as well, but the articles published deal with its historical roots and its potential as an education tool (Carp, 2017; Kelly, 2017 and McManus, 2018). However, no study has been published looking specifically at how power and leadership are depicted in *Hamilton* in comparison to Shakespeare’s plays. This would be the contribution to the existing literature of this article.

## 1.2 Methodology

As mentioned, Lanier has argued that there is an interplay between pop culture and Shakespeare’s works (Lanier, 2002, pag. 16). *Hamilton* is a successful musical, a form of popular theatre that appropriates Shakespearean themes and motifs, although it is not a direct adaptation of any of his plays. Therefore, it could be argued that it is a good example of that interplay Lanier points towards. This is a relatively new approach. During most of the 20th century, scholarship had a Leavisian view and used to focus on the “authentic” Shakespearean text and the concept of fidelity to determine the value of adaptations. Since the 1990s, there has been a rise in Shakespeare adaptation studies, alongside the proliferation of adaptations, as Lanier (2014) explains. Often these studies paid attention to how adaptations compare against the original. However, this work takes the approach discussed by Lanier. Instead of focusing on how adaptations relate to a canonical Shakespearean text, and

treating them as lesser versions of the “original”, his approach looks at the different manifestations of what we label as “Shakespearean”. He argues that the so-called “adaptations” of Shakespeare’s works do not only engage with the Bard’s canonical texts, since these are a part of a much more complex network of adaptations which can influence each other. Shakespeare’s plays adapted other narratives, while contemporary adaptations connect the Bard’s texts “with the protocols—formal and ideological—of genres and media that have little to do with the Shakespearean text” (Lanier, 2014, pag. 23). Lanier (2014) sees Shakespeare’s plays as an important part of a complex web of “adaptations, allusions and (re)productions” that constitute “the ever-changing cultural phenomenon we call “Shakespeare”” (pag. 29). His theory seeks to identify the similarities and differences in the adaptations and tries to shed some light into how these represent the nature of “Shakespeare” (Lanier, 2014, pag. 31). Following Lanier’s ideas, *Hamilton*’s Shakespearean elements connect the Bard’s plays to other contemporary pop culture manifestations, like Broadway-style musicals or hip-hop. These have little to do with Elizabethan theatre conventions or *Holinshed’s Chronicles*, the source Shakespeare used for several of his plays, including the ones analysed here.

This analysis takes a qualitative approach, seeking to observe and compare the themes of power and leadership and the similar strategies to depict them in *Hamilton* and Shakespeare’s works. I considered some of the best known historical and political plays, like *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. However, I decided to focus my analysis on *Henry IV* (Parts One and Two) and *Henry V* instead. These plays depict, like *Hamilton*, the making of a leader: how a young careless prince, son of Henry IV, becomes Henry V, a king in his own right. All references to these Shakespeare plays are from the 2008 Oxford World’s Classics Editions (2008a; 2008b; and 2008c).

## 2. BECOMING A LEADER: THE CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCE HAL AND HAMILTON

A key element shared by *Hamilton* and the Henriad plays that deal with the story of Prince Hal (*Henry IV* and *Henry V*) is how, at the start of their stories, the abilities of the protagonists are questioned by other



characters. They are considered unlikely to be leaders. In the case of Hamilton, this mostly has to do with his background, while, for Prince Hal, it is a matter of his behaviour. They both will have to prove that they are capable of becoming leaders.

From the opening lines of *Hamilton*, Aaron Burr, the narrator and main antagonist in the musical, doubts the likelihood of Alexander Hamilton becoming the key figure that he became:

How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a  
Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten  
Spot in the Caribbean by providence, impoverished, in squalor  
Grow up to be a hero and a scholar? (Miranda, 2016, pag. 16)

This bewilderment is echoed throughout the play by Burr and other characters from a privileged background who question Hamilton's rise to power. Burr uses "immigrant" as a slur (Miranda 2016, pag. 199 and 266), US President John Adams calls him "creole bastard" (Miranda, 2016, pag. 224), while Jefferson attacks him instead of his ideas during a cabinet meeting, accusing him of smelling "like new money" and dressing "like fake royalty" (Miranda, 2016, pag. 192).

In a similar manner, Prince Hal's qualities as a leader are called into question throughout *Henry IV* (Part One and Part Two) and *Henry V* by his family, his allies and his enemies. Although he is the son of a king, he has spent his youth hanging out with disreputable characters. The Archbishop of Canterbury says:

His companies unlettered, rude, and shallow,  
His hours filled up with riots, banquets, sports,  
And never noted in him any study,  
Any retirement, any sequestration  
From open haunts and popularity (*Henry V* 1.1. pag. 97)

When Henry V makes his claim to the throne to the King of France, the Dauphin sends him some tennis balls to mock him, instead of a present to appease him. He knows about his wild youth and does not trust him as a leader. His own father, in his deathbed, fears that when Hal inherits the crown he will act without restraint, and the country, affected

by internal quarrels, will end up populated by wolves (*Henry IV Part Two* 4.3. 242).

Prince Hal is the eldest son of the king, and therefore the rightful heir to the throne. However, power could not be taken for granted in medieval times, it had to be earned and kept. As King Henry IV puts it in part 1, “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown” (*Henry IV Part One* 3.1. 191). Different noblemen have claims to the throne based on family ties. King Henry IV himself usurped the throne to Richard II. The rebels in Part One have a claim against Henry IV. His son, Henry V, also has a claim to the throne of France. If he is perceived as a weak leader, it does not matter so much that he inherited the crown through his father. He has to make an effort and prove himself to remain in power, otherwise someone else will make a claim. Although the political context is very different, this is Hamilton’s struggle too. Both Hamilton and Prince Hal must learn and demonstrate their battle skills and their political ones in order to be seen as the right leaders.

## 2.1 The riotous youth

Another similarity shared by the stories of Hal and Hamilton is that they both start having fun with friends in taverns, bragging about drinking and sexual prowess. In the case of Hal, these scenes exemplify why the other characters doubt the prince’s abilities as a leader. These scenes also introduce characters that will be important for the protagonists: Sir John Falstaff in the case of *Henry IV*; John Laurens, and Marquis de Lafayette in the case of *Hamilton*. These moments of the plays have a comical, light-hearted tone, very different to the war and political ones that will follow. They also set a mood that will create a stark contrast with the more serious events to come.

In the third song of the musical, John Laurens, a friend of Hamilton who will later fight in the war with him, introduces himself by expressing his intention of drinking a third pint of beer (Miranda, 2016, pag. 25). Later on, Burr tells us that he and Hamilton are both “reliable with the ladies” and that women “delighted and distracted” Hamilton (Miranda, 2016, pag. 70). Hamilton is spending time in the taverns having fun, but at the same time he is creating meaningful relationships with

Laurens and Lafayette, who have ideals and will fight alongside him in the revolution.

Since we know they are friends and we know about his anti-slavery ideas, Laurens' death later on will strike as more painful. Lafayette will later advocate for Hamilton so he can fight in the war, which was instrumental for him to break class barriers and become Secretary of the Treasury. Later in the play, Hamilton will have to consider sending military aid to France during the French Revolution, in which Lafayette had a military role. Hamilton argues the US is too weak to send aid and convinces President George Washington not to do so. This is framed by Jefferson as a treason to Hamilton's friend:

JEFFERSON. Have you an ounce of regret?  
 You accumulate debt, you accumulate power  
 Yet in their hour of need, you forget  
 HAMILTON. Lafayette's a smart man, he'll be fine  
 And before he was your friend, he was mine  
 If we try to fight in every revolution in the world, we never stop.  
 Where do we draw the line? (Miranda, 2016, pag. 193)

Although Hamilton skilfully explains his stance, Jefferson's accusation echoes Hal abandoning his friend Falstaff for political reasons in the *Henriad*.

The exploits of Hamilton's friends seem tame compared with those of Falstaff and Prince Hal. In his first appearance, Falstaff quickly establishes himself as a thief, revealing that he "takes purses" at night. He is also a character that lives with gusto, enjoying himself and trying to preserve his life, beyond considerations about honour that the noble characters have. Hal also steals (*Henry IV Part One* 1.2. pag. 135), ostensibly for fun since he has wealth. In their first conversation together, they also imply that he paid the hostess several times to have sex with him (*Henry IV Part One* 1.2 pag. 136).

Unlike Hamilton, Hal does not treat the other characters as friends, and he often insults Falstaff, for instance calling him "this sanguine coward, this bed-presser, this horse-backbreaker, this huge hill of flesh" (*Henry IV Part One* 2.4. pag. 190). He goes as far as disguising himself and robbing Falstaff in *Part One* to ridicule him. He is presented from the start as a manipulative character. Hal reveals that spending time

with his friends is all part of a plan, a way to learn about how common people behave and speak (*Henry IV Part One* 2.4. pag. 179). He claims that his true self is not what he is showing, and promises his worried father that he will be “more himself” (*Henry IV Part One* 3.2. pag. 226). He wants to redeem himself and he believes that, later on, people will see him in a more favourable way:

So when this loose behavior I throw off  
And pay the debt I never promisèd,  
By how much better than my word I am,  
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;  
And, like bright metal on a sullen ground,  
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,  
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes  
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.  
I'll so offend to make offense a skill,  
Redeeming time when men think least I will. (*Henry IV Part One* 1.2,  
pag. 144)

Many critics have noticed that this scheming makes Hal come across as manipulative or hypocritical, and see him in a negative way (Bloom, 2017, pag. 2; Hazzlitt, cited in Taylor 2008, pag. 2). These scenes are also full of jokes and puns, and a good example of the mixture of entertainment and politics in Shakespeare's works that Leonard Tennenhouse (1986) wrote about (pag. 2).

The fact that the youth of both Hal and Hamilton is presented in this manner, having fun with their friends, makes them more human, relatable and complex. These scenes also introduce key characters in an entertaining way and show important formative experiences for the protagonists, making their later transformations and actions more striking. We know and like Lafayette and Falstaff, so we feel a sting of pain when Hamilton and Hal turn their backs on them, particularly in the case of Hal, who acts cruelly. In these initial scenes, the differences between the idealistic Hamilton and the hypocritical Hal also become obvious. Following Lanier's ideas around identifying similarities and differences to represent the nature of “Shakespeare” (Lanier, 2014, pag. 31), these differences do not devalue *Hamilton* as a cultural artifact.

They instead add richness to the network of Shakespearean adaptations that he wrote about.

### 3. LEADERSHIP: A COMBINATION OF BATTLE SKILLS AND DIPLOMACY

The evolution of Hal and Hamilton from their riotous youth to establishing their power entails not only leaving their friends behind, but also assimilating and displaying battle and political or tactical skills. Their opponents Hotspur and Burr play an important role in their development, as the protagonists learn from them. Another trait they have in common is that they both have a light-hearted vision of war at the start of the plays, and both are right in that winning it would improve their stances.

Hamilton, who comes from a poor background, openly admits several times from the start of the play that he wants to fight in a war to improve his life prospects:

HAMILTON. God, I wish there was a war  
Then we could prove that we're worth more than anyone bargained for  
(Miranda, 2016, pag. 23)

Despite the initial reluctance of George Washington, his commander in the war, he gets a chance to fight alongside his friend Lafayette, who was introduced in the tavern scene and who advocates for Hamilton (Miranda, 2016, pag. 118).

In *Henry IV Part One*, when Hal learns about the rebels plotting against his father, he sees the war as an opportunity to be with more women (*Henry IV Part One* 2.4. pag. 196). However, he takes it more seriously when his father confronts him about his dissolute life. He promises him to erase his shame through blood, which is to say by fighting (*Henry IV Part One* 3.2. pag. 228). Later, once he is king, he envisions the campaign in France as a way to assert his power and put behind any doubts over him being king, motivated by his old antics. This is a good example of the observation by DiMatteo (2011) regarding how we can find several instances of sovereign violence being used by a few to obtain or keep power in Shakespeare's plays (pags. 160–170).

As we have seen, both characters share a similar superficial view of war, disregarding its human cost and seeing as a way of advancing their careers. It is interesting how, in both cases, the plays will prove the initial assumptions of the characters right: war is useful for both. It will provide a context for them to prove their bravery and military abilities which will help them in their power quest.

### 3.1 Aaron Burr and Hotspur: the mirror antagonist

In the process for Hal and Hamilton to learn and demonstrate their bravery and military skills, their mirroring antagonists play important roles. The key antagonist in *Hamilton* is Aaron Burr, who starts off as one of the main character's friends. However, the two men gradually become more distant. They have similar goals to attain power, but their motives and their different approaches clash. Hamilton is brave, impetuous and enthusiastic in battle and in life, which contrasts with Burr, who is calculating and scheming. There is also a key antagonist in Hal's story: Sir Henry Percy, nicknamed Hotspur, who becomes the leader of the rebels plotting against his father in *Henry IV Part One*. Hotspur is bold, fearless, cocky and quick tempered. His nickname reflects these traits: a spur is a metal spike attached to horse riding boots, which is used to push the animals to move. The calculating behaviour Hal shows creates a juxtaposition between him and Hotspur. The contrast of these pairs is key, as in the main characters' evolution and quest for leadership, both learn from their antagonists: Hamilton to balance his impetuosity, Hal to be bolder in battle. Hal/Burr and Hotspur/Hamilton represent different approaches to leadership and power, but eventually a balance of the attitudes of both is what will prove successful.

### 3.2 Bravery and war skills

From the start of *Henry IV Part One*, we know that Hal has planning abilities, but he must display the bravery and war skills that other characters associate with Hotspur. At the beginning of *Henry IV Part One*, king Henry IV sees Hotspur as more honourable than his own son, since Hotspur is helping the king defeat a rebellion. He envies Hotspur's

father and complains about the dishonour that his son brings him (*Henry IV Part One* 1.1. pag. 131).

The bravery in battle is the feature that makes king Henry IV admire Hotspur and see him favourably when compared with his son. Despite being the same age as Hotspur and the rightful heir, Hal has not shown any bravery, achievements or Hotspur's leadership abilities, who can command older lords into battle (*Henry IV Part One* 3.2. pag. 227). Later on, Hal will keep the promise he made to his father and establish himself as a valuable warrior. At the end of *Part One*, he also kills Hotspur in a one-on-one fight, displaying his skill in that type of combat.

In *Hamilton*, the main character and his antagonist are also very different from each other at the start of the plays. While Hamilton shows his bravery in battle by stealing cannons from the British enemies (Miranda, 2016, pag. 61), Burr approaches Washington explaining that he has watched him firing on the British from afar. The phrase is ambiguous: it is not clear if Washington has been firing from afar or if Burr has been observing from afar, but in any case, it contrasts with Hamilton's fearless attitude (Miranda, 2016, pags. 62-63). Burr, who lacks Hamilton's attitude to battle, displays instead more tactical and political skills, which Hamilton will learn later on.

### 3.3 The political and tactical abilities

Hal displays his planning abilities from his very first appearance in *Henry IV Part One*, but there are other instances in which the tactical skills are useful for him. When he becomes Henry V in the play that bears his name, he is shown thinking carefully about whether to invade France or not, seeking advice from his counsellors and researching his claim to the throne. Spiekerman (2012) stresses that, at that point of the plays, his allies are surprised at this transformation, but this is not astonishing for the readers/viewers, who know that Hal has been planning it all along (pag. 204).

In *Hamilton*, the cautious stance is represented by Burr, who is committed to thrive at all costs, and seems to be lacking the democratic ideals that other characters, particularly Hamilton, have. He is too

calculating and, like Hal, comes across as less likeable than other characters. He sums up his philosophy in this manner:

BURR. (...) Talk less.  
Smile more.  
Don't let them know what you're  
against or what you're for. (Miranda, 2016, pag. 24)

Burr compares himself with Hamilton, who like Hotspur “exhibits no restraint” (Miranda, 2016, pag. 92) and makes risky choices, often winning. He is however willing to wait for success, and takes small steps towards it. Burr’s strategy, like Hal’s, has a point. He notes that others who exhibit Hamilton’s risky behaviour do not manage to survive (Miranda, 2016, pag. 92).

However impetuous he is, Hamilton has to learn the art of negotiating and compromising from Washington and Burr. When he is serving as Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton tries to get his plan to have all states assume the national debt, as a way of financing the newly created state. After some heated arguments with Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, Washington encourages him to calm down and find a compromise. He devises a different strategy, based on planning, negotiating and compromising rather than on confrontation, which proves to be successful. This is something he claims to have learnt from Burr:

HAMILTON. I guess I'm gonna fin'ly have to listen to you.  
BURR. Really?  
HAMILTON. Talk less. Smile more.  
(...)  
HAMILTON. Do whatever it takes to get my plan on the Congress floor.  
(Miranda, 2016, pag. 186)

The tactical and compromising abilities of the main characters are an important element in the vision of politics Shakespeare and Miranda create in their plays. Miranda, consciously or unconsciously, takes Shakespeare’s view of politics and makes it a central part of his successful musical. Following Lanier’s ideas regarding the exploration of similarities and differences of contemporary Shakespearean manifestations, it is relevant to stress that although these abilities are useful for both



protagonists, there is a key distinction between them. For Hal, these abilities seem to be effortless, but Hamilton must learn them to attain power.

### 3.4 A balance between war and politics

Shakespeare shows that a balance between political and battle skills secures the position of Hal/Henry V. This vision of politics is echoed in the musical by the fate of Hamilton and Burr, whose failure to keep a balance between politics and battle brings their demise. This is the case of Hotspur as well.

The fearless attitude of Hamilton and Hotspur is both their greatest asset and their worst flaw. Spiekerman (2012) goes as far as saying that “by political standards he [Hotspur] is a failure” (pag. 201). Hotspur’s tendencies are at the core of the start of the conflict in *Henry IV Part One*. King Henry IV starts mistrusting him when he fails to send him the prisoners from battle, as it was the custom at the time. Hotspur excuses himself explaining that he was tired and wounded from the fight and got angry because the messenger asking for the prisoners was clean, not dressed appropriately for battle, and talking in an effeminate way that he found annoying (*Henry IV Part One* 1.3. 147).

He refuses to hand in the prisoners, unless the king pays a ransom for his brother-in-law, who has been captured. The king declines and when he exits, Hotspur begins a series of angry tirades, stating that he will not deliver the prisoners to the king because that will relieve him, even if it costs him his head (*Henry IV Part One* 1.3. pag. 150). Other rebels have troubles appeasing Hotspur, who cannot contain himself, and can almost alienate his allies at times. For instance, he mocks Glendower, a Welsh leader who is joining the rebellion and who claims to have magical powers and be capable to summon spirits (*Henry IV Part One* 3.1. pag. 210)

Hotspur’s passionate ways make him brave and a good asset in battle, which are the reasons why Henry IV praised him. But they also play a crucial role in his demise. When the rebels are getting ready to fight in *Part One*, Hotspur learns that neither his father nor Glendower will be able to send their armies. However, he is still optimistic and wants to fight, displaying a fascination for death in battle:

My father and Glendower being both away,  
The powers of us may serve so great a day.  
Come, let us take a muster speedily.

Doomsday is near. Die all, die merrily. (*Henry IV Part One* 4.1. pag. 248)

He refuses an offer of peace, citing their past grievances with the king. Another rebel encourages this, refusing to deliver Henry IV's offer of peace to Hotspur, being aware of his rushed ways. Hotspur goes to battle when the odds are not good for them and dies. With him, the rebellion dies too. In another parallelism between Shakespeare's plays and the musical, Hamilton also has a fascination for death in battle, openly admitting he fantasises about dying like a martyr:

WASHINGTON. Head full of fantasies of dyin' like a martyr?

HAMILTON. Yes. (Miranda, 2016, pag. 64)

Hamilton, like Hotspur, also has troubles sometimes stopping his tirades and can alienate his potential allies. In the first cabinet battle against the other politicians he needs to convince, he starts by explaining the reasons why the United States should adopt his financial plan, but by the end of the song he outright insults his opponents, which makes them angry and does not help his cause (Miranda, 2016, pag. 162).

It's Hamilton's hot headedness what brings his downfall. He cannot resist having an affair with a married woman, and the adventure ends up destroying his chances of becoming president. The lover's husband threatens to publicise the relationship, and he pays him to keep him silent, leaving a document trail that his opponents will use against him. At the end of the musical, when Burr is angry at him, he leaves aside the tactical skills he claimed to have learnt and refuses to back down and de-escalate the conflict with him. He chooses to duel instead, and he is fatally wounded.

Shakespeare and Miranda tell us that a lack of restraint has negative consequences for leaders like Hotspur and Hamilton, but too much caution can have negative consequences for a potential statesman as well. Burr's calculating approach makes him take less successful decisions. For instance, he changes political party to have more chances of winning a seat in the Senate, but he runs against Hamilton's father-in-law, which creates tension between him and Hamilton. He cynically explains

that he did not change parties because his ideas changed, he just took an opportunity to advance his political career (Miranda, 2016, pag. 191).

Hamilton learns from Burr, but Burr is influenced by Hamilton too, acting on impulse at the end of the play. When his former friend runs for president, Hamilton accuses him of lacking ideals and instead backs Jefferson, who ends up winning. This angers Burr and makes him challenge Hamilton for a duel. In the letters the men exchange leading up to the duel, Burr uses an openly threatening tone (Miranda, 2016, pag. 267) that is unlike the character we have met. He lets himself be guided by feelings, which Hamilton has done throughout the play. Hamilton, although has learnt some of the political arts from Burr and Washington, is still impulsive and does not minimise the conflict (Miranda, 2016, pag. 267). It is a dramatic irony that the only time when Burr engages in Hamilton's rushed behaviour he ends up fatally wounding Hamilton. Like Hal and Hotspur when they fight one-on-one, the final duel shows that they are more alike than it looks at the start of the play.

These examples show that in their vision of leadership, both Shakespeare and Miranda create an interesting interplay between their characters' opposing traits. The failure of Burr's extreme caution and Hamilton and Hotspur's fearlessness contrast with Hal's success. Hal manages to attain and maintain his power by balancing the tendencies of the other characters better than them. Again, Miranda takes core elements of the characters in the *Henriad* and makes them an essential part of his musical, thus bringing Shakespeare's representation of political life and leadership to contemporary pop culture.

#### 4. THE DARK SIDE OF THE LEADERS' ACTIONS

This essay has focused so far on the traits and development of leaders. At first sight, it could look like the *Henriad* and *Hamilton* are solely praising these men and the wars they fought in. However, the authors paint a more nuanced picture by showing us the negative impact their actions have on other characters, and by giving these characters voices to express their stances.

As discussed on section 2, the protagonists of the plays see war as an opportunity and use it to advance their social standing and cement their leadership positions. War is shown as painful but ultimately justified in

both plays. *Hamilton* tells the story of the creation of the United States of America, and war is mostly portrayed as necessary to get away from British colonial power. In the case of *Henry V*, war is the means to establish the young king's power in England and to reign in France. However, the king's cruel behaviour goes beyond the need of establishing his power. Gary Taylor (2008) explains, in the introduction to his edition of *Henry V*, that some contemporary critics have wondered if Shakespeare disliked Prince Hal/Henry V, and if he "tried hard to communicate his moral distaste to the more discerning members of his audience" (pag. 1). Other critics, "partisans of Henry" see the play as a "blunt straightforward Englishman's paean to English story", ignoring that some details conflict with this interpretation (Taylor, 2008, pag. 1). Apart from his Machiavellian plans, we can hardly ignore the graphic and extremely cruel threats Henry V makes to the French ambassador, threatening to rape women, skewer babies and smash old men's heads, and blaming the French for that outcome if they do not surrender (*Henry V* 3.3. 174).

Another example of the ambivalent picture Shakespeare paints of Henry V is how the king defers the responsibility for his cruel actions several times. In *Henry V*, when the monarch in disguise is taking to the troops, one of the fighters acknowledges the responsibility of the king in sending soldiers to death without confessing their sins, since they cannot disobey him (*Henry V* 4.1. 212-213). The king compares his position to the one of masters and fathers, and his soldiers to servants and sons, arguing that masters and fathers do not wish their servants and sons to die (*Henry V* 4.1. pag. 213). However, as the soldier points out, the king commands people into battle, but masters and fathers do not have his monumental powers. Shakespeare did not need to make Henry V as cruel and hypocritical if he simply wanted to glorify English history. Still, we can only make assumptions on what he really thought of the king. Elizabeth Frazer (2016) has argued that we should see Shakespeare's works as vehicles that enact some aspects of politics, and as ways to communicate ideas of political life to audiences. If we consider that Shakespeare enacted some aspects of politics (like the ruthlessness of rulers) we could infer that he is painting a grim picture of politics, which is taking a stance. In that sense, DiMatteo (2011) writes that by featuring multiple views in his plays Shakespeare is "trying to find a middle ground", which is in itself a political act (pag. 165).

Regarding the picture that Shakespeare paints of Hal/Henry V, another element that supports the view that the bard did not simply glorify the monarch is the description about how he uses his friends. One of the most compelling elements of the *Henriad* is his relationship with Falstaff, a beloved character since Elizabethan times. From his first appearance in *Henry IV Part One*, the prince treats Falstaff and his other friends badly, insulting and mocking them. The changes in behaviour that Hal promised to undertake in *Part One* are settled in *Part Two*, when he rejects Falstaff at the end of the play. He states that he does not know him, calls him old and swollen with excess and compares the time he spent with him with a bad dream that he awoke from (*Henry IV Part Two* 5.5. pags. 269-270).

After the monarch banishes him in *Part Two*, Falstaff replies that the king is pretending and that he will be called afterwards, but he is not. We assume he is hurt by this rejection. In the following play, *Henry V*, we learn the king kept his promise and left his former acquaintances behind. Falstaff is absent from the play, and when his servant announces that he is dying, his friends criticise the king and blame him for Falstaff's illness, saying that he broke his heart and confirming that he has been affected by what happened (*Henry V* 2.1. pags. 127-130).

That is not the only time Shakespeare included some critical voices in the common characters of *Henry V*. Diana E. Henderson (2007) wrote about how he incorporated non-aristocratic figures that could express some of the "lower class" experiences and views (pag. 9). In *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, the non-aristocratic characters may not have the highest moral stance, and they may be acting as comic relief, but their commentary and views criticising the king are there. After the moment in *Part One* in which the noblemen are preparing for battle, and as a counterpoint to the fight related discussion, Falstaff ends the scene with a speech in which he asserts his will to live and ponders that honour is just a word that will not help him keep his life. Indeed, the rebels like Hotspur, with all their ideas about honour, died. His value system is different to that of the ruling class and he questions the notion of honour that gets people killed. He says that honour "pricks him on", or encourages him to fight, but stresses that honour cannot fix his wounds and it is a quality had by those who die, who cannot feel it or hear it. In that sense, honour is for Falstaff a "scutcheon", a funeral tablet (*Henry IV Part One* 5.1. pags. 266-267).

Apart from his criticism of the concept of honour, there is also his mockery of battle: after Harry kills Hotspur, Falstaff pretends to be dead and rises up later, claiming that he killed Hotspur. Instead of caring about honour, Falstaff sees politics and war as opportunities for personal and financial advancement, as Spiekerman stresses (2012, pag. 203). Bloom (2017) goes beyond that and thinks that Falstaff mocks “organised violence” because he carries a bottle of alcohol in his holster to battle, instead of a pistol that could be more useful if he is attacked (pag. 120). Falstaff’s view, so attached to life could be read as a subversion of the notions of leadership and honour and glorious death that Hotspur and Hal (to a lesser extent) uphold.

Hamilton is not cruel like Hal. The musical touches upon the loss of lives at war, but these are mostly detached from the protagonist. Again, at first sight, the musical shows a positive vision of the main character, who is brave, intelligent and charismatic. However, a closer look shows that the picture it paints of Hamilton is more complex. The musical does show in detail the negative impact of the actions of the protagonist on the people that surround him, particularly his child Philip and his wife Eliza. They suffer the consequences of his bad advice and rushed actions. His son is killed in a duel that he attended to clear his father’s name, following Hamilton’s bad guidance and his view of what constitutes honourable behaviour. Philip asks his father for advice and instead of talking to him out of the fight, Hamilton lends Philip his guns and describes his vision of dueling etiquette: standing “like a man” in front of his opponent and firing the weapon in the air, expecting his rival to do the same “if he’s truly a man of honor” (Miranda, 2016, pag. 246). Hamilton once more talks about honour in a similar way to Hotspur. There is a connection here with Falstaff’s ideas about the close link between honour and death. This notion of honour is what gets Philip and Hamilton killed. As Falstaff would argue, honour has no skill in surgery and cannot take away Philip’s gun wounds. He dies after the duel, and the view of honour he inherits from his father becomes the scutcheon, or funeral tablet, Falstaff talked about.

Hamilton’s affair is the other event that shows his impact on other characters. Displaying a lack of restraint, he engages in a romance with a married woman. Since he pays off the husband of his lover to keep seeing her, he leaves a paper trail of the payments. His financial records are used to accuse him of taking advantage of his position as Secretary

of the Treasury to misuse government funds. He publishes a pamphlet to clear his name, explaining what happened and stressing that he paid off the husband with his own funds. Admitting to the affair clears him of political misdoings, but his public admission brings great distress to Eliza:

ELIZA. You published the letters she wrote you.  
You told the whole world how you brought  
this girl into our bed.  
In clearing your name, you have ruined  
our lives. (Miranda, 2016, pag. 238)

Eliza's voice stands out among the multiple voices of the musical, despite the fact that, as a woman, she could not be involved in the official historical narrative that inspires the musical. Miranda chose to close the musical with a number led by Eliza that reflects upon how historical narratives are built, and acknowledges her role in preserving the work and legacy of Hamilton:

BURR. And when you're gone, who remembers  
your name?  
Who keeps your flame?  
BURR, MEN. Who tells your story?  
(...)  
WOMEN. Eliza.  
ELIZA. I put myself back in the narrative.  
(...)  
ELIZA. I stop wasting time on tears.  
I live another fifty years.  
It's not enough. (Miranda, 2016, pag. 280)

Since Hamilton died early, her work was crucial. She explains that she curated his writings, interviewed the people that fought with him, spoke against slavery and collected funds for a monument to honour President George Washington. She also built an orphanage in New York because that was important for her. This way, Miranda adds a gender perspective by recognising her own achievements, and also her work in establishing Alexander Hamilton's legacy and keeping his

story alive. The reflection of the closing song about building narratives is relevant when thinking about Shakespeare's works and their role in building popular narratives. He used *Holinshed's Chronicles* as a source for his historical plays, but he chose to tell the stories of certain rulers. He also chose to tell them in a certain way. In his adaptations, he made thematic, narrative and stylistic choices that created such compelling works that they have shaped our perspective of English history, power, leadership and politics to this day. His view was part of the popular culture of his time, as several authors noted (Cerezo and De la Concha, 2010; Henderson, 2007) and it is still part of contemporary popular culture. *Hamilton*, which incorporates elements of his view of politics and leadership and uses similar strategies to depict them, is a great example of Shakespeare's presence in nowadays pop culture. Miranda continued Eliza's biographical narrative by taking American historical characters and making them protagonists of a very successful and Shakespearean Broadway musical. His rich and layered work defies the Leavisian negative view of pop culture. In line with Lanier's ideas, *Hamilton* has multiple manifestations of what we label as "Shakespearean", displaying a rich interplay between pop culture and the Bard's works. The musical is thus part of the web of adaptations that Lanier talked about, and brings its own ramifications, like Alexander Hamilton's story, a gender perspective, hip-hop or musicals to this network of adaptations.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As a consequence of the pervasive Leavisian view in academia, pop manifestations of Shakespeare's works have traditionally been regarded as lesser versions which pale in comparison to the originals. However, as several authors have noted, the relationship between the Bard and pop culture is more complex. The thematic and narrative parallels between the Shakespeare plays and the musical explored in this analysis contest the traditional Leavisian negative view of Shakespeare representations in pop culture. *Hamilton* is an example of how rich, complex and interesting the links between contemporary pop culture and Shakespeare can be. This is aligned with Lanier's ideas regarding the manifestations of Shakespearean elements in contemporary culture. He advocates for looking beyond the concept of fidelity of adaptations and



considers them a part of a larger network of adaptations that are interesting because of the ways in which they display the “nature of Shakespeare”, not because of their fidelity to the canonical sources. There is much more to be explored on this topic. Hamlet’s character evolution, King Lear’s misguided decisions or Macbeth’s damaging ambition could all be linked to *Hamilton*. These comparisons could be the basis of some further work that explores Shakespearean manifestations in contemporary pop culture. When I started working on this analysis, I was only able to find discussions about *Hamilton*’s Shakespearean elements in informal online sources. This study contributed to the existing literature by looking closely at how power and leadership are depicted in *Hamilton* in comparison to Shakespeare’s plays. It also highlighted Shakespeare’s relevance in contemporary pop culture and made a contribution to the discussion regarding adaptations, exemplifying how fascinating it can be to look beyond fidelity to canonical sources.

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