

Hamilton: the Rapvolution



On the Translation of Rap Musicals

MA Thesis Vertalen
Utrecht University
Renske Dunnewold
4256735

Supervisor: Lette Vos, MA
Second Reader: dr. Lieke Stelling

Abstract

This thesis explores the translation of the relatively new phenomenon 'rap musical'. It does so by exploring the history and translation of both musical theater and rap music. In chapter one, the word 'musical' is defined, and the theory of making singable translations is explored. Chapter two defines the word 'rap', and looks at the history and musical structure of rap music. It also examines ways to approach the translation of rap. Chapter three applies the theory of the previous chapters to the rap musical *Hamilton*, from which three songs have been translated.

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Introduction

The place of the musical in western culture has not been consistent over the decades. In the 1940s and 50s, musicals were very popular: cast albums topped the Billboard charts, and everyone wanted to see the best Broadway had to offer. Over the years, while several hit shows have been able to reach a wider audience, the popularity of the musical has declined (Viertel 12-13). This is not very surprising, when one considers that any kind of theater is by nature exclusionary: a theater can only hold a certain amount of people at any given time, and only some are able to afford the generally high cost of a ticket. By the time we reach the 2010s, the musical has settled in a corner of the cultural field. The common viewpoint is that

[m]usicals are flossy and flimsy; wonderful but lightweight. They don't really *matter*, we are told; and if we show more than a passing interest we become *one of them* — a character from *Glee* who must be a misfit or an emotional wreck or who must keep to himself/herself the fact that he/she likes musicals. (Taylor & Symonds 1)

This common up-front dismissal of an entire form of entertainment makes it all the more surprising that one of the most influential cultural entities of 2016 was, in fact, a Broadway musical. *Hamilton* opened in 2015 at the off-Broadway Public Theater, but due to its popularity soon moved to the Richard Rodgers Theater. It received a record-breaking sixteen Tony nominations, and won in twelve of its possible thirteen categories, including the coveted Best Musical. The show then went on to win numerous other prizes, and prices for tickets escalated; it became a well-known joke that nothing in the world was harder to get than *Hamilton*-tickets. *Hamilton* has seeped into America's cultural conscience; even politicians (most noticeably former president Barack Obama and current vice president Mike Pence) have gone to see it. In a contemporary America that is starkly divided over political

issues, *Hamilton* has been able to reach audiences on both sides of the political spectrum (Romano & Bond Potter 297).

So how can we account for *Hamilton's* unprecedented success? There is no definitive answer. *Hamilton* diverges from the usual musical in several significant ways; it is a sung-through musical about the forgotten Founding Father Alexander Hamilton, which heavily relies on the sounds of rap music. The musical was written and composed by one man: Lin-Manuel Miranda. Miranda was on vacation when he read Ron Chernow's biography *Alexander Hamilton* (2004), and he found that Hamilton "embodie[d] hip hop" (Miranda & McCarter 15). Miranda originally planned to write a concept-album, but the idea evolved and after seven years became the finished musical we know today. The idea of a musical about the first treasury secretary seems alien to most people who encounter it for the first time; that it also involves rap seems even stranger. The concept of a 'rap musical' does not yet have a long history. While popular music genres have been explored in musicals in the past (rock especially has been utilized in many musicals), hip hop has largely been ignored. In this thesis, I will use the following definition for the phrase rap musical: a musical that utilizes rap music in a majority of its songs. While the combination of subject matter and musical style of *Hamilton* confused people, after seeing the show many doubts were put to rest. The cast of this historically fairly accurate musical is highly diverse, with black and Latino actors portraying the white Founding Fathers, which makes the music seem natural: "this is a story about America then, told by America now" (Miranda & McCarter 33). The plot is engaging and dramatic, and the themes *Hamilton* deals with are applicable to the world of today: issues such as the role of immigrants in a country and states' rights versus big government are equally relevant today as they were in Hamilton's time.

Hamilton brought new audiences to a Broadway theater that otherwise would never have been interested in the medium, bringing new life to the industry. The musical *Dear Evan Hansen* (2015) for example became hugely popular due in part to its ability to engage some of the new audiences that *Hamilton* had brought to the medium. Shows such as *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* (2012) and *Frozen* (2018) adapted the colorblind casting practices that *Hamilton* revolutionized. One effect that has not yet been observed, but which is to be expected, is an increased number of rap musicals. Hip hop-loving youth that never showed any interest in musical theater discovered Broadway through *Hamilton*. This opened up the door for talented rappers to try their hand at writing musicals. Historically, rap musicals have been a rarity. Miranda's first musical, *In the Heights* (2005), was the first to feature rap in a significant way, but it did not have the reach of its successor, and therefore inspired few others to do the same. *Hamilton*, however, broadcasted something to a wide audience: rap is a great narrative medium. As Broadway expert Jack Viertel explains:

It ... provided a fascinating discovery that should have been obvious: rap is a great way to tell a theatrical story. Unlike in classic pop-rock, where the lyrics tend to be abstractly poetic, ruminative, or simpleminded pleas for love and/or sex, the best of rap wants urgently to communicate something bigger – a personal and political creed and a contextualized view of the world as it really is. As a key component of the hip-hop life, it is always on the attack, trying to change things and call things by their right name. (15-16)

There are numerous excellent rappers active who are capable of writing intelligent and interesting lyrics. The success of *Hamilton* signaled to them that they too can try their hand at playwriting. Not all rappers will be interested and not all rappers will be capable of writing

musicals, but the amount of rappers in the field makes it likely that at least some will succeed.

Successful musicals have the tendency to spread to other countries, such as the Netherlands. Most musicals that appear on a Dutch stage are originally American or British, and have already proven themselves to be popular with audiences; a Dutch production of *Hamilton* was announced in 2016, though no official announcement has been made yet. If more rap musicals were to succeed, it is likely these would also be translated into Dutch at some point. While the translation of musical lyrics poses several interesting problems in itself, the addition of rap brings in even more new issues (rap being something that is not traditionally translated); this thesis will therefore explore this fairly new subgenre. I will tackle this in two parts: the first chapter will discuss musical theater, and the second chapter will deal with rap. In the third chapter I will explore the issues one is faced with in translating *Hamilton* specifically. The general aim is to shed light on the translation problems a rap musical poses, both opposed to a 'regular' musical and in its own right.

Chapter 1 : Musical theater

Musical theater has a history and certain conventions, that one should be aware of when translating musicals. It is important to understand when and why librettists or composers diverge from these conventions, so the translator can make informed choices as to where and when it is advisable to move away from the source text. This chapter will therefore start by exploring what a musical is and what conventions have developed over the years, before moving on to the translation of lyrics in general and musical lyrics specifically.

1.1 What is a musical?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following definition of the word 'musical':

3b. A play or film in which singing and dancing play an essential part; a musical comedy.

Traditionally, the theatrical musical has been populist and commercial, often tending towards comic or burlesque themes, and as such has been regarded as distinct from opera. More recently, however, it has been argued that the distinction is no longer so clear-cut. See also *musical comedy*. ("musical")

I am of the opinion that this definition is insufficient. Movies can include singing and/or dancing as an essential part, without being a musical; rather, the singing and dancing are part of the story. Many movies such as *Flashdance* (1983) and *School of Rock* (2003) feature dancing or singing as essential part of their narrative, and for example the 1980 film *Fame* features both. On the other end of the spectrum lies the 2011 Broadway musical *Bonnie and Clyde*, which does not include any dancing but which is nonetheless undeniably a musical.

Perhaps it is better to turn to those who operate within the Broadway circuit to find answers. Director and writer of musicals Julian Woolford defines a musical as “a theatrical presentation where the content of the story is communicated through speech, music and movement in an integrated fashion to create a unified whole” (5). I find this definition to be much more useful when regarding the musical as we know it today. Later in this chapter I will explain why this definition may not always have been useful, but this definition allows us to distinguish which shows that are released nowadays can be classified as ‘musicals’, and which are rather plays that involve music.

The key word in Woolford’s definition is ‘integrated’. Taylor & Symonds explain the integrated musical as “tell[ing] a story using song and scene in a way that makes dramatic sense, with musical numbers appearing as apparently naturalistic extensions of spoken scenes” (11). Integrated musicals have become the standard in the musical industry; even musicals which include diegetic music or performance build on integration for their narrative aspects (e.g. *The Sound of Music* (1959), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986), *School of Rock* (2015)). This aspect of a musical is what differentiates it from plays that feature songs. The West-End play *The Comedy about a Bank Robbery* (2016) for example includes several songs, which are sung by the characters, but it is not a musical. The songs are not part of the narrative, but rather background music to scenes (generally montages). This aspect of integration is why the definition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* falls short; the music of a musical needs to drive the narrative forward.

As I mentioned before, Woolford’s definition may not always have been equally useful. Some distinguish the show *The Black Crook* (1866) as the first musical; it was created when a group of ballet dancers joined the cast of *The Black Crook*, which was originally a regular play retelling the story of Faust (Woolford 18). Others point to *Show Boat* (1927),

which not only told a single story through song and dialogue, but also dealt with social themes (Taylor & Symonds 3, Woolford 19). These shows were not integrated as musicals are today. *Show Boat* was still very similar to the then highly popular vaudeville, which was a show consisting of several unrelated variety acts. The latest possible starting point for the modern musical is *Oklahoma!* (1943), which built upon the innovations of *Show Boat* and fully developed the concept of integrated music (Taylor & Symonds 11).

Around this period, several aspects of a book musical (a musical which tells a linear story, usually with both songs and dialogue) became industry standard; many of these are related to the structure of the narrative. One of the foundations of a musical is the I Want-song. As Jack Viertel explains:

There are no inviolable rules for the creation of enduring, popular musicals, possibly except this one. The hero has to want something that's hard to get, and go after it come what may. ... The I Want song is the mark of an active hero. (53)

Musicals generally tell the story of a character striving to get something. That something may be as straightforward as "I want to be a producer", but is usually less explicit: love, a better life, or a legacy. The entire musical revolves around the protagonist getting what he or she wants.

Another musical theater convention is the use of motifs (which originated in classical music). Motifs are short, usually recurring melodic or rhythmic units. In composing for media, motifs are usually developed for either locations, themes or major characters, so that when a specific set of notes play, the listener is reminded of that something. In a musical, speaking characters often get their own motifs, which reappear throughout the musical. In chapter three, I will discuss motifs further, as they play a significant part in *Hamilton*.

Generally, there are two types of opening songs: either the entire cast sings a song on stage, or the main character sings a solo. The purpose is the same for both: establishing the world we are looking into, and telling us what to expect for the evening. The kind of opening song can tell us more about the show we are about to see. Generally, a big chorus number tends to mean the show is more traditional, telling a straightforward love story and featuring a lot of humor. Musicals produced by Disney are perfect examples of this; they try to appeal to as broad an audience as possible, which means that darker stories do not get explored. More somber musicals usually go in the opposite direction. *Sunset Boulevard* (1991) for example, deals with themes of faded glory and insanity. It opens with the main character Joe informing the audience that there has been a murder, before the narrative abruptly leaps back six months; the song is simple and short, but the tone has been set.

1.2 Making performable translations

The translation of sung words has a long history and is still very present today in the form of surtitles. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, operas were performed in translation throughout Europe, but it was not until the nineteenth century when translating operas became a trend (Desblache 159-60). After the Second World War, public opinion turned on those opera houses that only housed shows in their original languages. It was agreed that they would continue to receive government funding, only if they would become more accessible to the public. These opera houses therefore added surtitles, which has become standard practice (though some still refuse) (ibid 164). Translating lyrics that can be performed into Dutch, however, is a very niche market: operas are no longer translated into Dutch, and pop music is more often adapted into carnival songs or parodies than translated (Bindervoet & Henkes). Most singable translations are actually made of musicals and

children's films, which are designed to reach a broader audience than the aforementioned operas. It is therefore not surprising that few publications on the topic have appeared.

Among those who have written on the subject, Peter Low is the most well-known. This is likely because he not only theorizes about the practice of making singable translations, but actually provides a methodological framework: the pentathlon approach. I will explore this in detail below.

Low's pentathlon consists of five aspects: singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm, and rhyme (79). To create the best translation, one needs to tackle the issue as an athlete would an actual pentathlon: trying to score as highly as possible on all events, without hindering your chances on the other events. It is also necessary to establish your priorities: some songs will have more leeway on meaning but absolutely need to rhyme, while others may have to be rhythmically perfect. The key is compromise; sometimes it is better to choose the second best option on one aspect, if it means more or better options on one or several others.

1. Singability

When Low refers to singability, he means the "relative ease of vocalization" (81), in other words, how well one is able to sing the words. The perfect singable translation would be a "homophonic translation, in which a source text is translated not for its sense (as in interlingual translation) but for its sound. The sound qualities are transmuted into their sonorous equivalents within the target text" (Minors 95). This would be ideal because, as Low explains, the perfect translation should have the same mouth-feel as the original song (81). An example of this kind of translation would be Bindervoet & Henkes's translation of the title of the Beatles' 'We Can Work It Out' as 'Weekend wordt het koud' (102). The meaning of the original phrase has disappeared, but it is highly homophonic and therefore perfectly singable. Unfortunately, this kind of translation will rarely be practical; the

constraints of meaning and making sense in the target text stand in its way. This, however, does not mean that singability should be disregarded; actors in a stage musical only get one chance to convey their message to the audience, and if they cannot sing their lines the translation has failed them. When trying to make a singable translation, several aspects need to be taken into account: whether the singer has enough time to breathe, how many words a singer can pronounce clearly in a given amount of time, whether a word be sung on a specific note. This last constraint is best explained by the best known musical translator of the Netherlands, Martine Bijl: “De zangers moeten het elke avond doen en als je ze een hele lange, hoge noot laat zingen op, zeg maar, het woord ‘herfst’ — nou, dan maak je je niet geliefd” (Bezembinder et al. 54).

2. Sense

The term ‘sense’ encompasses all semantic matters: meaning, content and intent (Low 87). When translating integrated musicals, sense cannot be forgotten: after all, the narrative is imbedded in the lyrics, so losing the meaning of the words is detrimental to the play. Luckily, this does not mean that there is no room for adjustments. If the source text says “if not then I’ll be Socrates throwing verbal rocks at these mediocrities”, that does not mean that my translation needs to use the same analogy. The intent is more important than the content.

3. Naturalness

If a translation is natural, it means that it seems as if it could have been created spontaneously in the target language. Low explains that “[t]ranslations which sound translated – sometimes called overt translations – do not work properly in performance,” (88). An odd choice of words or a forced rhyme can remind an audience member that he or she is watching a play. The best translated songs are the ones that do not seem as if they are translated; they sound good, the register makes sense, and the meaning is conveyed

properly. This second point is especially easily glossed over, but it can be of great importance. Occasionally, an entire musical or a single song will call for non-standard Dutch. *Billy Elliot* (2005) is set in a working-class town in the north-east of England, *Newsies* (2011) is about a group of penniless orphans in 1900s New York, and *In the Heights* deals with the life and struggles of a group of Latino's in the *barrio*. If any of the characters in these musicals spoke flawless ABN ('Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands'), they would not fit in the textual world.

As in normal speech, the stress pattern of a song plays a large part in whether something sounds natural. The stress pattern of lyrics often match the up- and downbeats in the music, which sounds natural but poses a challenge in translation. When translating the final song of *Hamilton*, for example, the key phrase of the song is "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?". Since the Dutch 'verhaal' has two syllables, just like the English original, one might be tempted to use this word in his or her translation. However, 'verhaal' stresses the second syllable, while 'story' stresses the first. This stress is reflected in the musical accompaniment, so anyone trying to sing 'verhaal' will erroneously stress the first syllable.

4. Rhythm

In Low's pentathlon, rhythm does not refer to the natural rhythm of speech, but rather musical rhythm: the rhythm of the existing music, fitted in measures and beats (95). When translating, the pre-existing music dictates which options are available. When translating a melismatic line (more notes than syllables), it is easier to add syllables, but syllabic music (one syllable per note) is less forgiving. Professor Johan Franzon stated that "[i]n general, the longer the musical lines, the easier it may be for translators to accommodate the syntax of their particular language, perhaps allowing a fairly close translation by moving a few words around" (387). The reverse of this is also true: shorter lines are more challenging. The

rhythm also dictates where the up- and downbeats are, which, as I discussed earlier, is critical for translation. Besides this, as opera translators Apter and Herman mention, the musical phrasing and the verbal phrasing do not always match, and rhythms can change during the course of a song (198). This makes it harder to establish how a line can be changed musically or rhythmically.

5. Rhyme

Out of Lows five criteria, rhyme is probably the least important. If a translation scores highly on the other four aspects but does not rhyme at all, it will still be good. Rhyme, however, is such a standard in the musical industry, that to do away with it altogether would seem strange to the listener. Besides that, rhyme does have added value. Respected songwriter Stephen Sondheim once said that “without [good rhyming], lines tend to flatten out. Jokes don’t land the way they should. Even emotional lines don’t land the way they should” (Rosen 15). Rhyme (or rather, the lack thereof) can also toy with the listener’s expectations. For example, the snowman Olaf sings in *Frozen*: “Winter’s a good time to stay in and cuddle / but put me in summer and I’ll be a... happy snowman!” The character doesn’t realize that he would melt in the heat of summer, but the audience does. The use of the word *cuddle* at the end of the line, sets the audience up to expect the word ‘puddle’. If a similar technique is not used in the translation, the joke is lost. Low pragmatically states that “song translations do not always need as much rhyme as the [source text]” (104). It is much more practical to focus on the most important rhymes, i.e. rhymes at the end of stanzas, or on long, stressed notes. Starting with the key phrase and then adapting the surrounding lines accordingly results in better translations than simply starting at the top and working your way down. It is also unwise to try to keep all perfect rhyme intact; when assonance and other forms of half rhyme are permitted, many more options will be available.

In his book, Low mentions that the main limitation of his approach lies in its understatement of the requirements and constraints of (all forms of) musical theater. With musical theater, the songs are being sung as part of a larger narrative: the person singing a song is a character, and needs to think what they are singing (Low 110). This aspect puts much more emphasis on sense (and singability) than Low does in his pentathlon approach; certain plot points need to be conveyed to the audience, and cannot be dismissed for the greater good of the text. When Angelica sings in the act I finale that she is “sailing off to London”, the translator needs to make sure that Angelica really announces her departure. If not, the narrative will crumble. In the end, it is important to see the whole picture:

Opera translations, according to one wit, ‘are like opera plots — all about unfaithfulness.’ That is an exaggeration. Yet people who think that translating is ‘all about words’ may well form this impression, and that is because they are looking too hard at the actual words and ‘can’t see the forest for the trees’. In truth, however, the overall forest matters more. Translating operas and other musicals is more about storyline, character emotion and overall style — the spirit rather than the letter.

(ibid. 110)

Chapter 2: Rap music

What is a rap musical, and how can one be translated? That is the central question of this thesis. After having explored the musical theater side of this question, I will now be discussing rap. It will be discussed only in the context in which it relates to rap musicals such as *Hamilton*, and therefore rap in other musical genres (such as metal) will not be discussed.

2.1 What is rap?

Let us start once again with a definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

8b. Music (orig. U.S. colloq.). A performance in which lyrics (typically rhyming and sometimes improvised) are spoken rhythmically over a strong background beat; a rap song, a set of rap lyrics (see sense 8c).

8c. Music (orig. U.S. colloq.). A genre of popular music in which lyrics (typically rhyming and sometimes improvised) are spoken rhythmically, and usually rapidly, over an instrumental backing which has a strong background beat and often features samples. (“rap”)

In the context of the phrase rap musical, both of these definitions can be used; both the style of delivery (8b) and the genre of music (8c) are featured in what I define as a rap musical. These two meanings are closely related; before appearing in other genres of music, rap originated in rap music. To really understand how rap works, a basic understanding of where it came from, both musically and culturally, is required.

Jeff Chang explains that during the 1960s, almost all white people moved out of inner city New York due to racist housing policies; businesses followed, and what was left of the Bronx was plunged into poverty (11-15). The official youth unemployment rate in the neighborhood reached 60 percent, though some stated that the actual number was closer to

80 percent; the people were left to their own devices (ibid. 13). This is the context in which youth gangs returned. Gangs fought each other, rival gang members and the police.

According to Chang, whole neighborhoods were separated into turfs, and anyone found on the wrong block would be beat up (42-43). In the summer of 1971, a gang member fighting to establish peace was killed; but instead of the usual retaliation, his gang called for a peace meeting. Out of this meeting came a peace treaty, declaring all gangs to be part of one family (ibid. 54-62). Chang states that the effect was not immediate, but the gangs lost their drive; slowly but surely they disbanded (62).

In the meantime, sound systems were immensely popular in Jamaica. Some people had started mixing records together, and everybody wanted to outdo each other with bigger and better equipment (Chang 29). Thus, when Clive Campbell moved from Jamaica to the Bronx, he brought this drive with him. Using his father's sound system, he started organizing parties as DJ Kool Herc (ibid. 69-70, 76). He discovered that people would be waiting for the musical breaks in songs to really let loose on the dance floor, so he used two copies of the same record to prolong the breaks; in doing so, he created 'break music' (Chang 79). DJs started rapping over their new music, and those DJs that did not rap themselves started forming crews around them that would rap while they played (ibid. 81). While DJ- and b-boy crews had not replaced rumbles and riots, the power dynamics had shifted in their favor (ibid. 84-85).

Over the years, rap would evolve with the times, but one thing remained constant: it came from a place of disadvantage. The founders of hip hop played their music to keep their peers from joining gangs, and while they succeeded, this did not end the bad conditions that they lived in. During the eighties, drugs became a massive problem in black neighborhoods, even as some rappers started getting financial success through their music. In black

neighborhoods in Los Angeles new subsets of hip hop were created while police violence and race riots were plaguing the city. Rap, being the sound of minorities, was always a way to tell stories; stories of hope, revenge, or despair.

As hip hop became more and more widespread, people started criticizing it; for its crude lyrics, for inciting violence, and for not being *real* music (Rose 81). Those concerning themselves with the study of music seemed to think that there is nothing to say about rap from the perspective of music theory (ibid 62), and in many ways they are correct. Popular music theory concerns itself with tonal music, matters of chords and melody, tension and release; this is not applicable to rap music, because rap music is not Western in its origins. Rap does not adhere to these concepts, as it is descended from African music instead. African melodic phrases are generally short with a lot of repetition (ibid 66). Rap goes beyond these African rhythms, however. As we just found, rap originated as spoken words over loops of sampled sounds. These loops can be taken from anywhere: the sound of a car driving past, the ticking of a clock, anything can be used in production. Samplers were regularly pushed to their extremes to create interesting sounds, something which would be unthinkable if one were to adhere to the rules of Western music. Many rap producers were not trained as musicians, which allowed them to think outside of the box (Rose 81). Musically speaking, rap consists of “rhythmic complexity, repetition with subtle variations, the significance of the drum, melodic interest in the bass frequencies, and breaks in pitch and time (e.g., suspensions of the beat for a bar or two)” (Rose 67). Combining these elements with the practice of sampling and spoken lyrics creates a rap song.

2.2 Translating rap

As opposed to musicals, art songs and opera, rap has never been officially translated into Dutch for release or performance. As we saw in the previous section, rap is deeply rooted in its history and local culture. The black experience in New York is different than in New Orleans or Los Angeles, so they all have different kinds of rap music. This logic can of course also be extended outside of the United States. During the eighties the first Dutch rappers appeared. These, being modeled after the artists from the USA which they were familiar with, rapped in English. It was not until 1989, when the group Osdorp Posse released their song 'Moordenaar', that Dutch rap started to take off (Huisman 5). Since then, so-called Nederhop has become a regular aspect of the Dutch cultural scene, just as hip hop is in America. The language of Nederhop is characterized by many of the same aspects as English hip hop: the use of street vernacular, playing with double meanings and creative rhymes. While Nederhop is definitely a translation of sorts of American hip hop, that does not mean that lyrics ever actually get translated. Dutch rap has always produced lyrically original music, which aligns with the culture it originated from: "Language agency, and the freedom to shape your own language, is a key component of Hip Hoppers' identity" (Taviano 23). This striving for originality is what drove rap to become such an expressive medium, with its impressive rhymes and complicated metaphors. Rap is in many ways very much like poetry: it relies heavily on figures of speech and metaphors, and often uses phrases that can be interpreted in several different ways. Due to its kinship to rap I will now briefly explore several strategies for translating poetry, before trying to apply this to rap.

The possibility of translating poetry has been called into question many times over the years.

[L]inguistic relativism suggests that our culture, through our language, affects the way we think; and its more extreme interpretation, linguistic determinism, proposes

that language actually *determines* thought and that as such, any kind of equivalence between two languages is impossible. (Attwater 123)

In other words, any expression in one language cannot be reproduced in another. Translator Wim Bronzwaer states that texts are not inherently untranslatable: the world of the source text can be reproduced in translation, even though it is seen through the interpretation of the translator. Poetry, however, is the exception: because in poetry, form and content are one, it cannot be reproduced (369-70). This perceived impossibility of poetry translation has never stopped anyone from trying. André Lefevere named seven strategies for poetry translation, on a scale from phonemic translation (what we called a homophonic translation in chapter 2) to “poetry into prose” (Attwater 126-129). Lefevere concluded that while “poetry into prose” distorts the text too much, more emphasis should be placed on semantic content rather than meter (*ibid.* 129). James Holmes distinguished four approaches, which can be placed on two axes: retaining the form – taking on a new form, and retaining the content – writing new content. The kind of approach determines the effect of the translation (*ibid.* 129-30). Translator Sugeng Hariyanto divides the form of a poem into three aspects: poetic structure (form), metaphor, and sound (which includes rhyme and rhythm). While he states that a translator should try to maintain all of these, “if the translation is faced with the condition where he should sacrifice one of the three factors, ... he should sacrifice the sound” (Hariyanto 25).

In the literature, poetry is often divided into two main aspects: form (i.e. meter, rhyme, figures of speech etc.) and content (themes, metaphors, actual word choices). While generally, all try to replicate both aspects in their translation, most sources seem to agree that it is more important to retain the content, even if the form suffers. This is not applicable to rap. While the content of the lyrics can be important, the aspects of rhythm and rhyme

come first. In some subgenres of rap music (most prominently mumble rap), the intelligibility of lyrics is completely disregarded, and only sound remains; even in rap that does try to convey a message, the beat takes center stage, and the lyrics need to fit the music. Another significant way in which rap diverges from poetry is the medium through which it is communicated. Though some poetry is written to be recited, most is intended to be read in silence; rap, on the other hand, is always meant to be performed. If the choice between content and form needed to be made when translating rap, the latter should be chosen.

Some people believe that poetry should only be translated by poets, and the same might be said for rap. The argument could be made that rap has its own language which is difficult to understand for outsiders, so only an insider is capable of making a translation. A problem arises however when you consider that Dutch and African American vernacular are not the same. Varieties of English cannot be translated into varieties of Dutch, because they are not the same: cockney, despite being the sociolect of the working-class of the capital of the United Kingdom, is not the same as Amsterdams (the sociolect of the working-class of the capital of the Netherlands). African American Vernacular has a unique background, which no variety of Dutch shares. However, if not Dutch vernacular, in what language should rap music be translated? ABN would certainly not be appropriate, since it would level the tension that existed between the language of the song and 'normal' English. It seems to me that the best solution would be to find a balance between the two. The question remains whether a rapper is best suited for this task. He or she would certainly be aware of the options, being at least familiar with both variations of Dutch, but I think a professional translator or songwriter with a knowledge of Dutch vernacular might be better suited. Rap, as we learned, is after all generally a personal expression, and translators do still need to

service the source text (to some extent). I would, however, be very interested to see rap translations made by rappers.

Since performance is important for rap, any translation of a rap song should be performable. Let us therefore look once again at Low's pentathlon approach, and see how it applies to the genre. As you may recall, the five aspects of the pentathlon are singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm and rhyme. Immediately we notice an aspect that does not apply: singability. Since rap is not melodic, singability is not an issue; rap can just as easily place 'herfst' at the end of a line as 'ga'. It should instead be replaced by a criterion such as 'performability', since some issues that are part of singability still apply. Instead of singability, rhythm is most important when it comes to rap. The beat is the most important part of a rap song, and the lyrics need to fit on the beat. Rap is not about meter but about flow, and a translation of rap should therefore first and foremost flow. This also relates to naturalness; if one struggles with pronouncing a line, it will never flow. Rap has been known to use very creative rhymes, so rhyme also cannot be disregarded. Sense, finally, cannot be decided for rap music as a whole, and should be considered for each song individually. Rap lyrics exist on a spectrum from 'fuck bitches get money' to intricate storytelling or a call to political action. These extremes would of course need different levels of fidelity to the original wording.

Chapter 3: *Hamilton* case study

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the recurring problems that I faced while translating three songs from *Hamilton*. I will start by discussing some general problems, before moving on to problems that were of particular importance for specific songs. This does not mean that these problems did not also occur in the other songs, but rather that that song showcases this issue the most.

When translating songs from a musical, having its sheet music at hand is usually very useful; it allows you to discover where it is possible to add more syllables to a line, or where a longer note can be split into two shorter ones. When I started translating the opening song of *Hamilton* (and later in 'Non-Stop' as well) however, I soon came to the realization that in this case, sheet music would be of no help. As we explored in the last chapter, rap music does not adhere to the rules of Western music, and this was evident in the opening stanzas of 'Alexander Hamilton': while there were clear up- and downbeats, these did not consistently fall on the same note, nor was there a clear distinction between lines. Most stanzas involved syncopation (the lyrical breaks did not match the musical breaks). I found that each character had a different kind of flow, which dictated how they would deliver their lines. Instead of trying to recreate these exactly, I decided to give the characters distinct flows in my translation as well, even if these were different from the source. If one were to try to rap my translation over the original song, the words would not match those said by the original actor; they would, however, flow, and take the same amount of time as the original, thus fitting on the music.

Hamilton, being a sung through musical, contains a considerable amount of rhyme. Miranda regularly uses multiple instances of rhyme, alliteration and assonance in a few short lines. An example:

Corruption's such an old song that we can sing along in harmony

And nowhere is it stronger than in Albany.

This colony's economy's increasingly stalling and

Honestly that's why public service seems to be calling me.

The rhymes “harmony – Albany – calling me” and “colony's economy's” are easily spotted; the first occur at the end of lines (the kind of rhyme people are most familiar with), the second pair of words is placed directly next to each other. The perfect rhyme of “song – along – strong” is slightly harder to find, since its words are placed in the middle of lines, and the “stalling – calling” pair is overshadowed by the first rhyme pair I mentioned. The alliteration of the ‘k’ in “colony's economy's increasingly” and the many repetitions of the ‘s’ throughout the verse are also easy to miss. As we can see in this verse, and many other times throughout *Hamilton*, Miranda plays fast and loose with what can be considered rhyme; in the above example, the rhyme “harmony – Albany – calling me” is tied together by two aspects: the first stressed syllable with an [a], and the last syllable with an [i] (and secondary stress). The second syllable receives no stress, and as such is not part of the rhyme. As Low tells us, rhyme is generally not as important as the other four criteria, but that does not mean that it should be abandoned altogether. After the example of the source text, I often opted for assonance instead of perfect rhyme. In instances where the rhyme was emphasized (e.g. the repetition of “Why do you assume you're the smartest in the room?”), I have tried to keep perfect rhyme intact.

It is hard to distinguish a target audience for *Hamilton*, since it seems to appeal to so many different groups of people. This broad appeal is also reflected in the register of the musical, which effortlessly combines high-register phrases like “by providence” and “from whence you came” with African American Vernacular like “the brother” and “his rep”. The

way I tried to replicate this is by allowing myself to use words from a wide range of registers. This gave me greater freedom to focus on the translation of a song, rather than worrying if a word fitted in the register. Because Dutch vernacular uses a lot of English (Huismans 9), I felt comfortable using the English proper names for phrases such as “Founding Fathers” and “the Constitutional Convention”, both of which when translated into Dutch would not carry the same connotation.

3.1 Alexander Hamilton

In Chapter 2, we discussed the two main types of opening songs: a big chorus number and a solo from the protagonist. *Hamilton*'s ‘Alexander Hamilton’ is a mix of the two. Before the audience knows who the characters are, all main actors appear on stage and deliver a significant amount of exposition. One by one, characters appear to explain a period of Alexander Hamilton's life, filling the audience in on everything they need to know before the play starts. Many translations of lyrics are parodies: the music and its lyrical aspect are kept, but the actual meaning of the words is changed. The lyrics of integrated musicals, however, cannot be treated this way. If a character conveys plot points through singing, these plot points cannot be translated away or the story will not survive. Especially in a sung-through musical like *Hamilton*, there is no dialogue to correct any mistakes that were translated into the songs. Sense gains importance.

Hamilton (both the character and his real life equivalent) has been influenced by his past; his ambition, his relentlessness, his willingness to sacrifice himself make sense when you know where he came from. This is why it is so important to convey the meaning of *Hamilton*'s opening verses. Hamilton's parents being dead, his experience with trade and slavery, the hurricane, all of these pieces of history are relevant later in the play, so they

must be retained. These facts are also based on the real life of Alexander Hamilton, and while the musical takes some liberties with history, it is mostly based on real events; it would be a disservice to the musical to disregard its historical character.

3.2 Non-Stop

Nevertheless, if certain statements or metaphors are not relevant to the narrative, it is wise to leave the exact meaning of words behind if it suits the singability, rhyme or rhythm better to do so. There is, however, one kind of line where this is not possible: motifs. As I explained before, a motif is a recurring piece of music in a larger work. In a musical, speaking characters often get their own motifs, which is also the case in *Hamilton*. Most named characters and all characters that appear in both the first and second act have at least one but often several (musical) phrases that they repeat; sometimes characters even use motifs that originate from other characters. Motifs are capable of changing depending on context. A good example of this is one of Eliza's motifs, "Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now." When Eliza first sings this in 'The Schuyler Sisters', she is standing in the middle of a lively square in New York, marveling at the technology and excitement of the times. She contextualizes the motif with her next line: "History is happening in Manhattan and we just happen to be in the greatest city in the world!" The next time the line shows up in 'That would be enough', the meaning of it has drastically changed. The Revolutionary War is raging, and the pregnant Eliza has begged general Washington to send her husband back from the front, when she sings "look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now". Later in the song she makes it even more explicit: "Look at where you are, look at where you started, the fact that you're alive is a miracle. Just stay alive, that would be enough." The line is no longer about the marvel of the times; it celebrates not dying in

the war. Even within a single song, the meaning of a word can be versatile, sometimes to the point of (intentional) ambiguity. Angelica's motif, the single word "satisfied", can be interpreted on many different levels: content with one's place in life, fulfilled (needing nothing more), the satisfaction of a demand, even sexual satisfaction; all of these different interpretation options are explored in *Hamilton*, and most within Angelica's song 'Satisfied'. The motifs in *Hamilton* are generally as short as a single word or part of a sentence, and can therefore be used in a completely different musical context than where they originated. This versatility makes them difficult to translate. Motifs are more challenging than most lines: they are phrases that need to not only fit into their origin song, but also in every other song that they happen to show up in. A motif might rhyme with something different in a different song, or take on a different meaning, but translating it differently each time is doing serious harm to the overarching aspects of the musical.

The end of Non-Stop is generally referred to as an 'all-skate', wherein all main characters sing their own motifs at the same time. In total, I count nine actual motifs in 'Non-Stop', and several more repeating phrases. Each of these motifs have been established in their own songs. When translating these motifs, I returned to their origin song; what does the phrase mean in that context, whose line was it originally, what interpretation options did it have in its original song. I translated motifs first as lines in their original song (disregarding rhyme, since I would not be translating the entire song), before returning to 'Non-Stop'. I wanted to treat my translations as if they were not individual songs, but rather excerpts from the complete musical.

3.3 Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story

Motifs are not only connected to certain characters, but often to certain themes as well. All great musicals deal with large themes, and *Hamilton* is no exception. The opening song sets the scene by asking the question that will drive Alexander Hamilton throughout the musical:

when America sings for you,

will they know what you overcame?

Will they know you rewrote the game?

Hamilton wants to be remembered, he wants to leave his mark on the world. In his I want-song “My Shot”, he not only says as much, but most importantly he declares how he will achieve this goal: by not throwing away his shot. The entire musical is concerned with this notion of legacy; what is a legacy, what are you willing to sacrifice for it and how do you achieve it? The final song of the musical answers the last question: the people who loved you will tell your story. Two aspects of ‘Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story’ are important above all else: the phrase “who tells your story” and the word “time”. The first one, because it is so relevant to the theme of the entire musical, the second because it is so relevant to Hamilton’s character. ‘Alexander Hamilton’ tells us that Hamilton never learned to take his time, ‘Non-Stop’ tells us that he always worked as if he was running out of time, and ‘Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story’ asks what else he might have done had his time not been cut short. Most of the song is sung by Eliza alone, but the ensemble joins her every time the word “time” is sung at the end of a line. This emphasis on the word at the end of the musical really solidifies its connection to Hamilton’s character; he never sings the motif, but whenever it returns it is sung about him.

This emphasis of “time” occurs seven times in the song, each in a different context. This makes it hard to translate. Nevertheless, I felt it was important enough to try to keep

this consistent. This is why I deviated from the practice I mentioned in 3.2 of translating motifs in their original context, to instead start with the word “tijd” at the end of the motif “write like you’re running out of time” (originally from ‘Non-Stop’). Apter and Herman mention that some people argue that all important words should always be kept in the same place in a line, regardless of what the effect on grammar (38). While I am not a proponent of this, I do believe it to be the case here. If one were to translate the line “you could have done so much more if you only had time” with the otherwise singable ‘jij had zoveel kunnen doen had je de tijd gehad’, the ensemble would chime in on a completely illogical word (or in the middle of the line, which is equally disagreeable). While it is easier in English to place important words at the end of lines (since the object comes last, even in a subclause), in cases like these I feel it is important that the translation does so as well.

Conclusion

Though the rap musical is still a new concept, exploring its translation is a worthwhile effort. Many interesting problems arise, such as how one should or could combine Peter Low's pentathlon approach with the non-western type of music of the rap world, and who is qualified for this kind of translation.

Let me first address the first concern. Even though it was not created with rap in mind, I believe Low's pentathlon is still incredibly useful in its translation. While not everything is equally important, the concept of finding a balance between several aspects of a song is definitely applicable. As to the importance of certain aspects of the pentathlon, I believe sense, rhythm and performability are most important when translating rap musicals. The plot must be conveyed, and the actors need to be able to perform; without rhythm, rappers cannot rap.

The question of who should translate rap musicals is a difficult one to answer. While rappers are not translators, and might not be able to find the appropriate words as well as someone who has been trained to do so, they are familiar with writing lyrics and street vernacular. The best translator of a rap musical might be someone who has both the training of a professional (song) translator, but who is also very familiar with Dutch rap music. Alternatively, a team of translators including a rapper might also be a good solution. I made my translations alone, with some occasional help of my family. It was no easy task, and the help of a Dutch rapper might have been of great value, but I am content with the results. I hope you will enjoy the translations you will find below.

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Note on the Translations

The songs below are not solo's, and often switch between speakers. I have therefore used abbreviations for the names of the characters, so the translations are easier to read; a list of these can be found below. The lines have been grouped together in verses or scenes.

Occasionally, either the entire company or the chorus will chime in on a line sung by a single character; these lines will be italicized. Sung sounds such as 'oh' and 'aw' will not be included, as they do not need to be translated.

Aaron Burr	B
Alexander Hamilton	H
Angelica Schuyler	A
Eliza Hamilton	E
George Washington	W
Hercules Mulligan	M
James Madison	Ma
John Laurens:	L
Marquis de Lafayette	La
Thomas Jefferson	J
Ensemble man	En1
Second ensemble man	En2
Ensemble	En
Company	C

Alexander Hamilton

B Hoe wordt een bastaard, weeskind, zoon van een slet¹ en een gokker², plots in het midden van een eiland in de Cariben vroeggeboren, verloren, door armoede gekweld, in 's hemelsnaam een wijsgeer³ en een held?

L De Founding Father⁴ op de tien dollar zonder een vader was een stuk sneller, en kwam zo een stuk verder.
Hij was een stuk slimmer.
Hij was een opklimmer.
Was pas veertien, toen hij werd benoemd tot handelsschipper.

J Zag elke dag de slaven worden afgeslacht en weggebracht ver over de golven, was moe maar bleef op zijn hoede.
In hem begon te branden: de wil naar sterke banden.
Hij was bereid tot alles, zou zelfs zijn ziel verpanden.

¹ Hamiltons mother was not really a whore. She had been married before, and lived unmarried with Hamilton sr. for several years. She did not prostitute herself. The term is used here as it can also be used nowadays, as an insult. I chose to use the word 'slet' instead of 'hoer', because the connotation is the same and 'hoer' is not very sonorous.

² Alexander Hamiltons father James was the fourth son of a Scottish laird, and as such was expected to make his own fortune. Unfortunately, he had neither drive nor an eye for business; several of his risky ventures in the Caribbean failed, and his brothers "would tirelessly bail out the hapless James Hamilton from recurrent financial scrapes" (Chernow 14). Since the Dutch 'Schot' is a syllable short, I decided to use a different description for his father that would still be true to the actual facts and fit the stress pattern.

³ Though 'wijsgeer' means 'philosopher' rather than 'scholar', I felt it would still be useful here. The image of someone longing for wisdom fits Hamilton, and all translations of the word 'scholar' were too long.

⁴ The phrase 'Founding Father' is so specific in meaning that to replace it with 'grondlegger' or something similar would hinder the understanding of the text (Hamilton was after all literally a Founding Father of the United States).

- M Toen landde een orkaan, zijn wereld zou vergaan.
Onze vriend wist totaal niet hoe hij door zou kunnen gaan.
Kon maar één manier bedenken, bracht een potlood naar zijn brein,
en hij schreef daar een refrein, een reflectie op de⁵ pijn.
- B Nou die tekst, die ging rond, men zei 'dat joch is te gek, man.'
Ze zamelden wat geld in, hij moest naar het vasteland.
'Ga en krijg je scholing, maar vergeet nimmer je start, en
de wereld heb je in de hand. Wat is je naam, man?'
- H Alexander Hamilton.
Mijn naam is Alexander Hamilton.
Er zijn miljoenen dingen die ik kan,
dus wacht maar af, wacht maar af...
- E Hij was pas tien, zijn vader ging, had geen zin, vol schulden.
Twee jaar later zat Alex met zijn moeder in bed
vuurrood⁶, van levenslust beroofd,
hij hield zich groot,
- C en Alex werd beter maar zijn moeder ging dood.

⁵ It was a deliberate choice to not use 'zijn pijn' here, both because the word 'zijn' is too long to pronounce for this syllable, and because the rhyme here would be distracting.

⁶ I originally translated 'half-dood'. As Low mentions however, one should start with the key phrase and work backwards. I realized that the whispered line at the end of this verse had to include the word 'dood', so the line was changed. Hamiltons mother died of a fever (the specific disease is unknown), so the imagery here seemed fitting.

W Trok in bij zijn neef maar die neef die schoot zich door de kop,⁷
liet hem daar met slechts gekrenkte trots. Iets kwam in hem op, een stem die zei

C 'Alex,

W *zorg nu maar eens voor jezelf.*

Trek je terug en ga studeren tot je al je boeken kent.'

B Dit was het dan voor hem geweest,

het einde van de lijn.⁸

Hij was dood of op de straat beland,

maar Alex heeft zijn brein,

begint te werken – klerken⁹ voor zijn wijlen moeders huisbaas,

handelt suikerriet en rum en alles wat hij zelf niet haalt,

zwendelt voor elke* tekst die hij kan gebruiken [e-le-ke]

Denkend aan de toekomst

staat hij nu, borst vooruit, op het dek van een schip

dat gaat naar een nieuw land.

In New York gaat je leven van start.

C In New York gaat je leven van start.

H Wacht maar af!

⁷ The original line is 'the cousin committed suicide', and the choreography shows the nephew hanging himself. When we consult Chernow however, we find that "Peter Lytton was found dead in his bed, soaked in a pool of blood. According to court records, he had committed suicide and either 'stabbed or shot himself to death'" (26). Though my translation is more explicit than the original line and clashes with the choreography, I believe the historical accuracy warrants it. The choreography can be changed accordingly.

⁸ This phrase is not often used in Dutch, but in instances where it is used it always refers to the end of someone's life. The line is also a nod to the New York subway (as much of the musical takes place in New York).

⁹ 'Klerken' is not a Dutch verb (only a plural noun), but the context makes it clear that it is in fact used as a verb here.

In New York gaat je leven van start.

Wacht maar af!

In New York gaat je leven van start.

H Wacht maar af!

C Alexander Hamilton

wij wachten vol geduld op jou.

Je ging altijd maar door,

je nam nou nooit een keer de tijd!

O, Alexander Hamilton,

als Amerika zingt voor jou,

weet zij dan wat je hebt doorstaan?

Wat je voor dit land hebt gedaan?

Niets zal ooit nog hetzelfde zijn.

B Het schip komt in de haven aan, zie

C Wacht maar af.

je dat: hij staat er.

Weer eens zo'n immigrant,

Wacht maar af.

opklimmend op de ladder.

Zijn vijanden sloopten zijn rep,

Amerika vergat hem.

Mu, La Wij vochten met hem.

L Ik? Ik stierf voor hem.

W Ik? Ik vertrouwde hem.

E, A Ik? Ik hield van hem.

B En ik? Ik, een idioot, vermoordde hem.¹⁰

C Er zijn miljoenen dingen die ik kan,
dus wacht maar af!

B Wat is je naam man?

C Alexander Hamilton!

¹⁰ My original translation of this line was 'Ik ben de idioot die hem neerschoot'. However, the construction of this line deviated from the rest of the lines in this section of the song, in that it did not end in 'hem'. To keep this element consistent, I changed the line to what it now reads.

Non-Stop

B Vlak na de oorlog ging ik terug naar New York.

H Vla- vlak na de oorlog ging ik terug naar New York.

B Ik haalde mijn diploma en werd advocaat.

H Ik werd advocaat, Burr werkt hiernaast.

B Hoewel we begonnen rond dezelfde tijd,
schoot Alexander Hamilton me snel voorbij.

Hoe komt het toch dat hij vliegt naar de top?

Man, die man is *non-stop!*

H Mijnheren van de jury, let op mij, attentie,
bent u zich bewust van wat u hier ziet?

Dit land beslist hier vandaag over haar eerste moordzaak.

We zoeken naar de rechten in de B, En Non-stop!
rechtspraak.

Ik bewijs vandaag wat de politie was ontgaan,
met mijn hulp-advocaat —

B Collega, Hamilton, kalm aan.

De cliënt Levi Weeks is schuldloos. Roep de getuige op.

Meer hoeft je niet te zeggen.

H Oké. Nog één ding —

B Hoe denkt deze man dat ie alles beter kan?¹¹

Hoe denkt deze man dat ie alles beter kan?

Hoe denkt deze man dat ie alles beter kan?

Straks wordt dat gedrag zijn ondergang.

B, En Hoe kan het dat je schrijft alsof je vecht tegen de tijd?

B Schrijft dag en nacht alsof je vecht tegen de tijd.

B, En Elke dag die strijd alsof je vecht tegen de tijd.

B Altijd verder. In de tussentijd—

En Non-stop!

H Corruptie is zo een oud lied dat we het meezingen in harmonie
en nergens is het erger dan in Albany.

De economie die we hier zien is ingesneeuwd en

eerlijk waar dat is waarom een B, En Hij is non-stop

toppositie naar me schreeuwt.

Rechtsbeoefening baart kunst, ik ben de kunstenaar.

Ik zag het onrecht in de wereld en deed er wat aan.

Op naar een centrale sterke overheid,

¹¹ For a long time, this line read 'Hoe kan het dat je dacht dat je alles beter kan?' It used the same first few words as the rest of the choruses, and the assonance of the 'a' meant it still retained some rhyme. However, the word 'dacht' did not match the sense: Hamilton still believes this, it was not just in the past. To avoid this issue, I changed the line.

al wordt het iedereen tegen mij

ik geloof niet in middelmatigheid!

B Hamilton, bij de Constitutional Convention:

H Ik was erbij bij de Constitutional Convention!

B Een jochie uit New York dat van ideeën overloopt.

H Nou wat ik nu ga zeggen klinkt misschien wat tactloos.

B Staat daar en oppert zijn eigen En Wat?
soort overheid.

Zijn eigen plan voor een nieuw Wat?
soort overheid.

Praat zes uur lang. De zaal is het zat!

En1 Slimme jongeman..

En2 Yo, wie de f is dat?

B Hoe kan het dat je steeds weer zegt wat je gelooft?

B, En Hoe kan het dat je steeds weer zegt wat je gelooft?

B Elke keer dat je weer kleur bekent
geeft ammunitie aan je opponent!

B Hoe kan het dat je schrijft alsof het *uit de mode raakt*?

Schrijft dag en nacht alsof het *uit de mode raakt*.

Elke dag die strijd alsof het uit de mode raakt.

Doe wat je doet.

B Alexander?

H Aaron Burr.

B Het is midden in de nacht.

H Kan ik je spreken?

B Is het een rechtskwestie?

H Ja, en het is voor mij belangrijk.

B Wat heb je nodig?

H Burr, jij bent een betere advocaat dan ik.

B Oké.

H Ik weet, ik praat teveel, ik doe geweld en
jij bent geweldig in de rechtbank. Je bent beknopt en helder.
Er is wat verwarring. Ik hoop dat jij dat rechtzet.

B Wie is de cliënt?

H De nieuwe VS grondwet?

B Nee.

H Niet zo snel.

B Echt niet!

H Een serie van essays, anoniem gepubliceerd,
die het bestand verdedigt voor de mensen.

B Dat gaat niemand lezen.

H Daar zit je fout.

B En als het faalt?

H Burr, het moest zo wezen.

B De grondwet is een zootje.

H Dus je moet 'm verfijnen.

B Hij zit vol met contradicties.

H Net als koningsvrij zijn.

Je moet ergens beginnen.

B Nee. Geen kans.

H Dit kun je niet menen.

B Fijne nacht.

H Hé.

Waar wacht je toch op?

Waar komt dit gedoe door?

B Wat?

H We wonnen de oorlog,

waar was dat goed voor?

Sta je achter deze grondwet?

B Natuurlijk.

H Steun hem dan.

B En wat als je verkeerd hebt ingezet?

H Burr, je werkt en je vecht en je doodt.

En dat doe je voor de visie: deze natie hier wordt groot.

Eens in je leven zal je voor iets moeten staan.

Ik begrijp niet hoe je zo'n kans voorbij laat gaan.

B Ik houd mijn beleid dicht bij mezelf.

En Wacht af wacht af wacht...

B Ik wacht op mijn beurt en *kijk wat de wind ons brengt*.

B, En Ik neem goed de tijd en kijk naar de intrede van ons land en
zie hoe de spanning stijgt.

A Ik vertrek vandaag naar Londen,
ik word beg'leid door een heer die me alles geeft.
'k heb een rijke man gevonden,
die belooft voor mij te zorgen zo lang hij leeft.
Hij is niet bepaald gezellig, maar er is niemand
die echt jouw gevatheid heeft.
Mijn Alexander.

H Angelica.

A Schrijf me elke week.

E Kijk naar waar je bent.

Kijk waar je vandaan komt.

Het feit dat je nog leeft is een gift van God.¹²

Blijf leven schat, echt dat is genoeg.

En als je vrouw mee mag delen in je tijd

¹² The real Eliza Hamilton was a very religious woman, so I decided to reflect this in her idiolect. In my translation, she regularly references God or uses religiously charged words.

maak ik jouw hoofd leeg en vrij.

Is dat dan genoeg?

- B Alexander verenigt zich met James Madison en John Jay om een reeks essays te schrijven om de nieuwe grondwet te verdedigen, genaamd de Federalist Papers. Het plan was om in totaal 25 essays te schrijven, het werk eerlijk onder de drie mannen verdeeld.
- Uiteindelijk schreven ze 85 essays gedurende zes maanden.
- John Jay werd ziek na vijf geschreven te hebben. James Madison schreef 29 stuks. Hamilton schreef de andere 51.

- B Hoe kan het dat je schrijft alsof je *vecht tegen de tijd*?
- Schrijft dag en nacht alsof je *vecht tegen de tijd*.
- Elke dag die strijd alsof je *vecht tegen de tijd*.
- Alsof je *vecht tegen de tijd*.
- In je gevecht tegen de tijd.

- C Hoe kan het dat je schrijft alsof je morgen nooit meer ziet?
- Hoe kan het dat je schrijft alsof het je nieuw leven biedt?
- Hoe kan het dat je schrijft alsof het leven je ontschiet?
- of het leven je ontschiet? of het leven je ontschiet?

- W Mensen willen mij vooraan,

ik doe alles wat ik kan.

Zonder hulp blijf ik niet staan.

Ik heb jou nodig aan mijn rechterhand.

H Staat of Financiën?

W Ik weet dat het moeilijk is

H Staat of Financiën?

W Om heel je leven om te gooien

H Meneer, wilt u dat ik minister van Staat of Financiën word?

W Financiën.

H Oké.¹³

E Alexander...

H Ik moet weg.

E Alexander —

H Kijk 'ns rond, kijk 'ns rond, hoe gezegend¹⁴ het is dat we hier mogen zijn

E Weerloos..

H Mensen willen mij vooraan.

E Kijk 'ns rond, is dit niet genoeg?

A Deze man is echt nooit voldaan.

E Wat is dan genoeg?

A Hoe word jij voldaan,

E nooit voldaan.

¹³ The right intonation is needed to give this line the same intent as the source text.

¹⁴ This line is originally Eliza's, see note 12.

A,E Nooit voldaan, nooit voldaan!

W De geschiedenis houdt je in het oog.¹⁵

E Kijk eens rond kijk eens rond, is dit niet genoeg? Wat is dan genoeg?

B Hoe denkt deze man dat ie alles beter kan?

Straks wordt dat gedrag zijn ondergang.

En Non-stop!

A Deze man is echt nooit voldaan.

B Hoe kan het dat je strijdt alsof je vecht tegen de tijd?

A, E, B Hoe kan het dat je strijdt

A, E De

C geschiedenis houdt je in het oog.

H Schiet je niet dan schiet je altijd
mis.¹⁶

C Wacht maar af.

Schiet je niet dan schiet je altijd

Wacht maar af.

mis

Ik ben

C Alexander Hamilton!

Hamilton, wacht maar af!

H Schiet je niet dan schiet je altijd mis!

¹⁵ This entire section is sung at the same time.

¹⁶ The Dutch proverb 'niet geschoten altijd mis' seemed a perfect fit for Hamilton's motif. In its original form, it was too short to match the music, so I reworked it to be a better fit.

Wie blijft, wie gaat, wie viert je leven?

W Toen ik nog jong en vol van ijver was
had je me dit advies moeten geven.

Je hebt geen idee.

C Wie blijft, wie gaat, wie viert je leven?¹⁷

B President Jefferson:

J Eerlijk is eerlijk: zijn financiële systeem is geniaal. Ik kon het niet terugdraaien, al had ik mijn best gedaan. En dat deed ik.

C Wie blijft, wie gaat, wie viert je leven?

B President Madison:

M Hij maakte ons land welvarend. Ik geef het niet graag toe, maar hij krijgt niet genoeg waardering voor al het waardevols dat hij ons gaf.

C Wie blijft, wie gaat, wie viert je leven?

A Ieder ander verhaal van de Founders wordt al verteld.

Ieder ander van hen heeft een langer leven gekend.

¹⁷ This line was particularly hard to translate, due to the importance of 'who tells your story' and the lack of synonyms for 'verhaal'. In the end, discussion remained on whether 'wie eert je leven' or 'wie viert je leven' was the better fit. I felt that the second stayed closer to the sense of the source text.

B Maar ben je weg, wie onthoudt dan je naam?

Blijft naast je staan?

Wie viert je leven?

Wie viert je leven?

En Eliza.

E Ik schrijf mezelf terug in je werken.

En Eliza.

E Ik laat nu geen tranen meer,
verjaar zowaar nog vijftig keer.
't is niet genoeg.

En Eliza.

E Ik interview elke soldaat die aan jouw zijde vocht.

Mu, La, L Ze viert ons leven.

E Ik zoek naar de zin in je duizenden bladzijden zinnen,
Je schrijft en het lijkt alsof je vecht tegen de *tijd*.
Ik steun op

E,A Angelica.

E Terwijl zij leeft

E,A vieren wij jouw leven.

E Ze ligt begraven in Trinity Church

E,A vlakbij.

E Toen ik haar nodig had was ze precies op *tijd*.

En ik ben nog niet klaar.

Ik bedenk me wat had jij gedaan met je extra *tijd*.

De Heer, in zijn goedheid, hij geeft me wat jij altijd wilde,
hij geeft me meer *tijd*.

Ik haal geld op in DC voor het Washington Monument.

W Ze viert mijn leven.

E Ik spreek me uit tegen slavernij.

Jij had zoveel kunnen doen met mijn zeeën van *tijd*.

En zit mijn tijd erop, was het waardevol?

Vieren zij ons leven?

En Vieren zij jouw leven?

O. Wil je zien waar ik het trotst op ben?

En Het weeshuis.

E Ik sticht mijn eigen weeshuis hier in New York City.

En Het weeshuis.

E Ik help daar honderden kind'ren.

Ze groeien op met mij erbij.

En Het weeshuis.

E In hun ogen zie ik jou, Alexander. Ik zie je daar *altijd*.

En zit mijn tijd erop, was het waardevol?

Vieren zij mijn leven?

En Vieren zij jouw leven?

O, ik zou je zo graag weer eens zien.

Het is slechts een kwestie van *tijd*.

C Vieren zij jouw leven?

C Tijd.

Wie blijft, wie gaat, wie viert je
leven?

Tijd.

Vieren zij jouw leven?

Tijd.

Wie blijft, wie gaat,
wie viert je leven?

Appendix A: Alexander Hamilton

- B 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?
- L The ten-dollar Founding Father without a father
 got a lot farther by working a lot harder,
 by being a lot smarter,
 by being a self-starter,
 by fourteen, they placed him in charge of a trading charter.
- J And every day while slaves were being slaughtered and carted
 away across the waves, he struggled and kept his guard up.
 Inside, he was longing for something to be a part of,
 the brother was ready to beg, steal, borrow or barter.
- M Then a hurricane came, and devastation reigned,
 our man saw his future drip, dripping down the drain,
 put a pencil to his temple, connected it to his brain,
 and he wrote his refrain, a testament to his pain.
- B Well the word got around, they said “This kid is insane, man”,

Took a collection just to send him to the mainland.

“Get your education, don’t forget from whence you came, and the world’s gonna know your name. What’s your name, man?”

H Alexander Hamilton.

My name is Alexander Hamilton.

And there’s a million things I haven’t done
but just you wait, just you wait...

E When he was ten his father split, full of it, debt-ridden,
two years later see Alex and his mother bed-ridden,
half-dead sittin’ in their own sick,
the scent thick,

C and Alex got better but his mother went quick.

W Moved in with a cousin, the cousin committed suicide.
Left him with nothing but ruined pride, something new inside, a voice saying,

C “Alex,

W *you gotta fend for yourself.”*

He started retreatin’ and readin’ every treatise on the shelf.

B There would have been nothing left to do
for someone less astute,
he woulda been dead or destitute

without a cent or restitution.

Started workin' – clerkin' for his late mother's land lord,
tradin' sugar cane and rum and all the things he can't afford.

Scammin' for every book he can get his hands on,

plannin' for the future,

see him now as he stands on the bow of a ship

headed for a new land.

In New York you can be a new man.

C In New York you can be a new man. H Just you wait!

C In New York you can be a new man. H Just you wait!

C In New York you can be a new man.

H Just you wait!

C 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 the game?

The world will never be the same.

B The ship is in the harbor now, see if you can spot him.

C Just you wait.

Another immigrant, comin' up from the bottom.

Just you wait.

His enemies destroyed his rep,
America forgot him.

Mu, La We fought with him.

L Me? I died for him.

W Me? I trusted him.

E, A Me? I loved him.

B And me? I'm the damn fool that shot him.

C There's a million things I haven't done,
but just you wait!

B What's your name, man?

C Alexander Hamilton!

Appendix B: Non-Stop

B After the war I went back to New York.

H A-After the war I went back to New York.

B I finished up my studies and I practiced law.

H I practiced law, Burr worked next door.

B Even though we started at the very same time

Alexander Hamilton began to climb.

How to account for his rise to the top?

Man, the man is *non-stop!*

H Gentlemen of the jury, I'm curious, bear with me.

Are you aware that we're making hist'ry?

This is the first murder trial of our brand-new nation

The liberty behind deliberation— B, En Non-stop!

I intend to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt

with my assistant counsel —

B Co-counsel, Hamilton, sit down.

Our client Levi Weeks is innocent. Call your first witness.

That's all you had to say!

H Okay! One more thing—

B Why do you assume you're the smartest in the room?
Why do you assume you're the smartest in the room?
Why do you assume you're the smartest in the room?
Soon that attitude may be your doom!

B, En Why do you write like you're running out of time?

B Write day and night like you're running out of time?

B, En Ev'ry day you fight, like you're running out of time.

B Keep on fighting. In the meantime—

En Non-stop!

H Corruption's such an old song that we can sing along in harmony
and nowhere is it stronger than in Albany.

This colony's economy's increasingly stalling and

honestly, that's why public service B, En He's just non-stop!

seems to be calling me

I practiced the law, I practic'ly perfected it.

I've seen injustice in the world and I've corrected it.

Now for a strong central democracy

if not, then I'll be Socrates

throwing verbal rocks at these mediocrities!

B Hamilton, at the Constitutional Convention:

H I was chosen for the Constitutional Convention!

B There as a New York junior delegate:

H Now what I'm going to say may sound indelicate...

B Goes and proposes his own form of government! En What?

His own plan for a new form of government! En What?

Talks for six hours! The convention is listless!

En1 Bright young man...

En2 Yo, who the f is this?

B Why do you always say what you believe?

B, En Why do you always say what you believe?

B Ev'ry proclamation guarantees free ammunition for your enemies!

B Why do you write like it's *going out of style*?
Write day and night like it's *going out of style*?
Ev'ry day you fight like it's going out of style
Do what you do.

B Alexander?

H Aaron Burr, sir.

B It's the middle of the night.

H Can we confer, sir?

B Is this a legal matter?

H Yes, and it's important to me.

B What do you need?

H Burr, you're a better lawyer than me.

B Okay.

H I know I talk too much, I'm abrasive.

You're incredible in court. You're succinct, persuasive.

My client needs a strong defense. You're the solution.

B Who's your client?

H The new U.S. Constitution?

B No.

H Hear me out!

B No way!

H A series of essays, anonymously published
defending the document to the public.

B No one will read it.

H I disagree.

B And if it fails?

H Burr, that's why we need it.

B The constitution's a mess.

H So it needs amendments.

B It's full of contradictions.

H So is independence.

We have to start somewhere.

B No. No way.

H You're making a mistake.

B Good night.

H Hey.

What are you waiting for?

What do you stall for?

B What?

H We won the war.

What was it all for?

Do you support this constitution?

B Of course.

H Then defend it.

B And what if you're backing the wrong horse?

H Burr, we studied and we fought and we killed
for the notion of a nation we now get to build.

For once in your life, take a stand with pride.

I don't understand how you stand to the side.

B I'll keep all my plans close to my chest

En Wait for it, wait for it, wait...

B I'll wait here and see which way the wind will blow.

B, En I'm taking my time watching the afterbirth of a nation,
watching the tension grow.

A I am sailing off to London.
I'm accompanied by someone who always pays.
I have found a wealthy husband
who will keep me in comfort for all my days.
He is not a lot of fun, but there's no one
Who can match you for turn of phrase.
My Alexander.

H Angelica.

A Don't forget to write.

E Look at where you are.
Look at where you started.
The fact that you're alive is a miracle.
Just stay alive, that would be enough.
And if your wife could share a fraction of your time.
If I could grant you peace of mind
would that be enough?

B Alexander joins forces with James Madison and John Jay to write a series of essays
defending the new United States Constitution, entitled The Federalist Papers.

The plan was to write a total of twenty-five essays, the work divided evenly among the three men.

In the end, they wrote eighty-five essays, in the span of six months.

John Jay got sick after writing five. James Madison wrote twenty-nine. Hamilton wrote the other fifty-one!

B How do you write like you're *running out of time*?

Write day and night like you're *running out of time*?

Ev'ry day you fight like you're *running out of time*

Like you're *running out of time*

Are you running out of time?

C How do you write like tomorrow won't arrive?

How do you write like you need it to survive?

How do you write ev'ry second you're alive?

Ev'ry second you're alive? Ev'ry second you're alive?

W They are asking me to lead.

I am doing the best I can

to get the people that I need.

I'm asking you to be my right hand man.

H Treasury or State?

W I know it's a lot to ask

H Treasury or State?

W To leave behind the world you know.

H Sir, do you want me to run the Treasury or State department?

W Treasury.

H Let's go.

E Alexander...

H I have to leave.

E Alexander—

H Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now.

E Helpless...

H They are asking me to lead.

E Look around, isn't this enough?

A He will never be satisfied.

E What would be enough?

A He will never be satisfied, E to be satisfied?

A,E Satisfied, satisfied.

W History has its eyes on you.

E Look around, look around! Isn't this enough? What would be enough?

B Why do you assume you're the smartest in the room?

Soon that attitude's gonna be your doom.

En Non-Stop!

A He will never be satisfied.

B Why do you fight like you're running out of time?

A,E,B Why do you fight

A,E like

C History has its eyes on you!

H I am not throwin' away my shot!

C Just you wait!

I am not throwin' away my shot!

Just you wait!

H I am

C Alexander Hamilton!

Hamilton, just you wait!

H I am not throwin' away my shot!

Appendix C: Who Lives Who Dies Who Tells Your Story?

W Let me tell you what I wish I'd known

When I was young and dreamed of glory.

You have no control:

C Who lives who dies who tells your story?

B President Jefferson:

J I'll give him this: His financial system is a work of genius. I couldn't undo it if I tried.

And I tried.

C Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?

B President Madison:

M He took our country from bankruptcy to prosperity. I hate to admit it, but he doesn't

get enough credit for all the credit he gave us.

C Who lives who dies who tells dies your story?

A Every other Founding Father story gets told.

Every other Founding Father gets to grow old.

B And when you're gone, who remembers your name?

Who keeps your flame?

Who tells your story?

Who tells your story?

En Eliza.

E I put myself back in the narrative.

En Eliza.

E I stop wasting time on tears.

I live another fifty years.

It's not enough.

En Eliza.

E I interview every soldier who fought by your side.

Mu, La, L She tells our story.

E I try to make sense of your thousands of pages of writings.

You really do write like you're running out of time.

E I rely on

E,A Angelica.

While she's alive

E,A we tell your story.

E She is buried in Trinity Church

E,A near you.

E When I needed her most she was right on time.

And I'm still not through.

I ask myself 'What would you do if you had more time?'

The Lord in his kindness, he gives me what you always wanted.

He gives me more time.

I raise funds in DC for the Washington Monument.

W She tells my story.

E I speak out against slavery.

You could have done so much more if you only had time.

And when my time is up, have I done enough?

Will they tell our story? En Will they tell your story?

Oh. Can I show you what I'm proudest of?

En The orphanage.

E I establish the first private orphanage in New York City.

En The orphanage.

E I help to raise hundreds of children. I get to see them growing up.

En The orphanage.

E In their eyes I see you Alexander. I see you every time.

And when my time is up?

Have I done enough?

Will they tell my story? En Will they tell your story?

Oh, can't wait to see you again.

It's only a matter of time.

C Will they tell your story? C Time.

Who lives who dies who tells your
story? Time.

Will they tell your story? Time.

Who lives, who dies,
who tells your story?