Our Crowning Glory:

SIX And The Path Of The Modern Progressive Musical

by
Samantha Eve Marchiony

A thesis submitted to the School of Theatre and Dance,
Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in Theatre Studies

Chair of Committee: Robert Shimko

Committee Member: María C. González

Committee Member: Alison Christy

University of Houston
August 2020

EPIGRAPH

"I'll write it all: everything we were and are and are trying to become. I'll write for the girls who came before, and the girls who come next. For you and for me, for all of us dangerous girls."

—Kai Cheng Thom, *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars: A Dangerous Trans Girl's Confabulous Memoirs*

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the queens I have known in my life and the ones I have yet to meet, femme, butch, trans, nonbinary, and everything in between, who wear no crowns, but reign through their kindness, passion, bravery, and resilience, and inspire others to reclaim their power.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not exist without countless people from both my academic and personal lives, who provided me with the support and resources to transcend odds far greater than initially anticipated.

I would like to thank my friends, especially those in the **online SIX fan groups** for their support in the writing process, and my family, especially my parents, **John and Deborah Marchiony**, for financially supporting my various expeditions to see many of the works discussed in this text.

Thanks to the research teams who bolstered my research: the staff at both the **MD Anderson Library** and the **Music Library** at the University of Houston for providing access, even in the face of a pandemic, and the Original Broadway Recording Cast of the Frock Flicks website, **Kendra Van Cleave, Sarah Lorraine,** and **Trystan L. Bass,** for providing entertaining insight into films and television depicting the lives of the six Queens, and for pointing me towards further resources.

I am endlessly grateful to **Dr. Matthieu Chapman**, for guiding me through the earliest stages of development for this text, and for all the knowledge, both inside and out of the classroom, he has provided that has shaped my research and evolution as a scholar, a theatre artists, and a citizen of the world.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of my committee, **Dr. Robert Shimko, Alison Christy,** and **Dr. María C. González**, for their support in seeing this work finished, and their encouragement for the future of the scholarship contained within.

ABSTRACT

The 2015 Broadway debut of the historical hip-hop musical *Hamilton* stands as the first in a new genre of theatre, the 'modern progressive musical,' which seeks to tell narratives from the past while resonating with modern audiences through the use of modern music, non-traditional casting, and socially progressive subtext. These ambitions have been best realized in *SIX,* the feminist pop musical based on the lives of the six wives of King Henry VIII of England.

This thesis will serve first as a historiography of the 'modern progressive musical,' exploring the applications of the genre's key tenets in the musicals which precede *SIX*. It will then examine *SIX* on its individual merits, using a critical feminist lens to explore the nuances of Marlow and Moss' approach to critiquing the patriarchal biases of both the past and present, and the means by which women can seek empowerment in spite of those biases.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Evolution of the Modern Progressive Musical

Renaissance versions of popular songs by female artists like "Bad Romance" and "Toxic" play over the sound system as the patrons file their way into the theatre and find their seats. The standard pre-show reminder to turn off electronic devices and not disrupt the performance is made. The lights dim. A striking drum riff plays as six female figures slowly strut forward through the opening curtain. A deafening cheer of excitement rises from the audience, one that stops as quickly as it starts when the women, now arranged in a line with their backs turned to the spectators, each intone a single word in turn.

Divorced. Beheaded. Died. Divorced. Beheaded. Survived.

There is not a single French hood, farthingale, or partlet in sight, but the identities of the women onstage are now clear: Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anna of Cleves,[1] Katherine Howard and Catherine Parr, the six wives of King Henry VIII of England,[2] now reborn in the modern era as the pop group SIX.[3] The hyper-adulated response to the opening tableau is the culmination of a three-year journey for Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss' debut musical, originally conceived in the hazy daydreams of Marlow in the midst of preparing for finals at Cambridge University as the Cambridge University Musical Theatre Society's submission to the 2017 Edinburgh Fringe Festival.[4]

Rather than simply depict their history in a conventional narrative format, *SIX* opts for a more experimental approach. Using this performance of their 'Divorced,

[1] Cleves is commonly referred to by the Anglicized version of her name, "Anne." In keeping with the musical, Anna is being used her to help differentiate her from Anne Boleyn.

[2] Hereafter collectively referred to as 'the Queens.'

[3] *SIX*, written by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, dir. Lucy Moss and Jamie Armitage, Brooks Atkinson Theatre, New York, NY, February 21, 2020.

[4] Keren David, "We wrote a musical during our finals...now it's on in the West End," *The Jewish Chronicle* online, September 6, 2018, https://www.thejc.com/culture/theatre/six-the-musical-steps-from-fringe-to-the-west-end-1.469323; Michael Paulson, "How a Half-Dozen Tudor Queens Became Pop Stars on Broadway," New York Times. March 1, 2020, AR22

Beheaded, Live in Concert' tour, the Queens ask the audience's help in determining which of them should be the one to lead the group based on who suffered the most in being married to Henry, with each member of the group performing a song to make her case. Eventually, they come to the conclusion that they have, rather than remixing history as initially promised in their opening number, simply been repeating the habits of those who came before in comparing themselves. Rather than continue the competition, the Queens choose to unite in a final song that celebrates themselves and each other, without the toxic influence of their husband and the patriarchal system he embodies.[5]

With a score designed to emulate the most addictive elements of pop music and a message explicitly promoting female empowerment and agency, *SIX* has cultivated an increasingly fast-growing fandom since its Edinburgh debut. This is thanks in large part to the show's ease at integrating with digital media, the studio cast recording being the second-most streamed musical theatre album after *Hamilton* with over a hundred million streams across Spotify and Apple Music.[6] Further contributing to this surging popularity is the inclusion of the "Megasix," a post-curtain call encore medley that reprises each Queen's signature song and which the audience is generally allowed to film and share on social media,[7] a form of free publicity that has allowed for a greater amount of visibility and accessibility for the show than most professional theatres can boast.

[5] SIX, Marlow and Moss February 21, 2020

[6] BWW News Desk, "SIX Hits 100,000,000 Spotify and Apple Music Streams; Second Only to HAMILTON in Musical Theatre Genre." *BroadwayWorld*, February 21, 2020. https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/SIX-Hits-100000000-Spotify-and-Apple-Music-Streams-Second-Only-to-HAMILTON-in-Musical-Theatre-Genre- 20200221.

[7] Due to Equity rules, the practice is forbidden for the Broadway production, but this has not stopped some determined fans from documenting the moment.

Productions have been running in London's West End and on Broadway,[8] with two tours, one in the United Kingdom and Ireland, and one in Australia and New Zealand, and performances on three Norwegian Cruise vessels, Bliss, Breakaway, and Getaway.[9] There was a definitively planned run for Chicago in July 2020, as well as promises from producer Kenny Wax that the show would be coming to Japan, Germany, South Korea, and Toronto, Canada in the future.[10] The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, which began in mid-March 2020, put a halt on all performances, including the Broadway premiere, scheduled for March 12.[11] Despite the shutdown, *SIX* remained engaged with its fanbase through social media, most notably in a global performance of the opening number, "Ex-Wives," which featured all the performers from every production as well as three thousand fans who recorded and submitted footage of themselves to the show.[12]

For such a small musical to have reached this level of worldwide presence in three years, one needs to understand the context of the greater moment taking place in the theatre being produced, and what audiences are responding to. While the approximately eighty years of Broadway history have provided plenty of musicals that provide some

[8] A transfer that first ran in Chicago, Cambridge, Edmonton, and St. Paul.

[9] Ben, Hewis, "Six the Musical announces further dates for UK tour," *WhatsOnStage*, May 14, 2019. https://www.whatsonstage.com/london- theatre/news/six-musical-uk-tour-dates-venues_49071.html; Andy Lefkowitz, "Six to Make Australian Debut at Sydney Opera House in 2020," *Broadway.Com*, August 5, 2019, https://www.broadway.com/buzz/196582/six-to-make-australian-debut-at-sydney-opera-house-in-2020/; "Norwegian Cruise Line Enhances Award-Winning Entertainment Program with Six: The Musical," *Norwegian Cruise Line*, August 6, 2019, https://www.ncl.com/press-releases/norwegian-cruise-line-enhances- award-winning-entertainment-program-six-musical.

[10] Darel Jevens, "Hit musical 'Six' sets return visit at Broadway Playhouse in 2020." *Chicago Sun Times* online, August 4, 2019, https://chicago.suntimes.com/2019/8/4/20754231/six-musical-chicago-shakespeare-theater-broadway-playhouse; Monique Jessen, "Musical Charting the Lives of Henry VIII's Six Wives Heads to the U.S. — with a Twist!" *People* online, April 12, 2019, https://people.com/royals/six-musical-henry-viii-wives-coming-chicago/

[11] Michael Paulson, "Broadway, Symbol of New York Resilience, Shuts Down Amid Virus Threat," *New York Times,* March 13, 2020, A1.

[12] Ryan McPhee, "Watch Queens and Royal Subjects From Around the World in a Virtual Six Performance," *Playbill* online, April 24, 2020, https://www.playbill.com/article/watch-queens-and-royal-subjects-from-around-the-world-in-a-virtual-six-performance

form of social commentary, *SIX* is part of a greater wave in shifting tastes for musical theatre, and the birth of a new subgenre: 'the modern progressive musical.' These are musicals that seek to resonate with audiences by appealing to modern sensibilities, both in the style of the music and in the means by which they tell the story. The rate of success in achieving these goals has varied by production, but the phenomenon is undeniably present. Therefore, before delving into the nuances of *SIX,* it is therefore necessary to more closely examine the musicals which have come before it, how they have interpreted the four tenets of the modern progressive musical, and how those interpretations impact *SIX.*

I consider the starting point of this trend to be when Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* opened at the Richard Rodgers Theatre on January 20, 2015, codifying the four main tropes of the nascent genre. A modern progressive musical is characterized by a narrative that originates at least two hundred years in the past from the time it is being performed, a cast of actors who represent a diverse range of ethnicities and identities, music rooted in contemporary genres like hip-hop and pop, and ideology that falls in line with twenty-first century social progressivism. In the years following *Hamilton*'s premiere, *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812, Head Over Heels*, and *Hadestown* were sequentially brought to Broadway, to varying degrees of success, each carrying the same underlying commitment to these four tenets.

The four components of the modern progressive musical carry an inherent conflict within them, wherein one aspect exists in direct opposition to the other three. The dominant choices of source materials are set in the past, and the majority of stories that western culture has deemed to have merit are ones that depict cisgender white men who

are presumed to be heterosexual and Christian. While this is not automatically anathema to socially progressive ideology, it is a considerable hurdle due to the inherent privilege of the primary demographic and the intrinsic conservatism that the values of the past hold when compared to the modern era. Reconciling this disparity is then dependent upon the transformative process of the new medium, and the derivative layers of intertextuality and metatextuality inherent in any adaptation.

The theory which best reflects the dynamics upon which the modern progressive musical relies for adaptation is Marvin Carlson's model of the "Haunted Stage," which relies heavily upon the idea of theatre as a recreation of memory influenced by performances besides the ones onstage.[13] Encompassing both broad concepts like stock plots and archetypal characters, and more specific examples like celebrity actor being stunt cast in a stage production, with their performance overshadowed by their star-making role,[14] and the idea that physical theatres themselves can influences a performance based on their location and history, the concept of the Haunted Stage is one grounded in the recognition that theatre does not exist in a vacuum. Thanks to their choice of source material, modern progressive musicals are especially reliant upon the memories of other works of performance in order to translate into the new medium and time period, and this is reflected in the way that their casting and musical construction manifests.

Key to the modern progressive musical's metatext surrounding race is the practice of casting actors as characters originally written as ethnicities other than their own.

---

[13]Carlson, Marvin, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

[14] Carlson highlights Kelsey Grammer (*Frasier)* in the title role of *Macbeth* and Lucy Lawless (*Xena: Warrior Princess*) as Rizzo in *Grease* as particular examples; (Ibid., 9-10, 70).

Generally termed as non-traditional casting, this practice is not without its own complicated history, but the point most relevant for the modern progressive musical is the first symposium of the Non-Traditional Casting Project,[15] hosted in 1987 in Washington DC.[16] It was here that moderator and theatre maker Joni Lee Jones delineated four subcategories of non-traditional casting. These subcategories were "cross-cultural," where the entire play is set in a different culture from the audience it is being performed for; "societal," which casts minority actors in roles similar to the ones they occupy in society; "conceptual," casting minority actors in a role meant to increase its resonance; and "color-blind," where the 'best' actor is cast without regards for their racial and ethnic identity.

Modern progressive musicals explicitly sport a blend of conceptual and color-blind casting, with some minor variations dependent on the needs of the production, and that driving philosophy is crucial in differentiating the genre from apparently similar works. Musicals which could be seen as existing in this genre before 2015, such as *Jesus Christ Superstar, Les Misérables,* and *Miss Saigon,* which arguably fulfill the other criteria for a modern progressive musical, lack the explicit ideological commitment that guides a modern progressive musical. *Miss Saigon*, which translates the plot of Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* to the Vietnam War, faced significant controversy for casting white English actor Jonathan Pryce as the Eurasian character of the Engineer in the original 1990 Broadway production, and has subsequently used societal casting that

[15] Renamed the Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts until its closing in 2017

[16] Joe Brown, "Nontraditional Casting Not Just a Character Issue." *The Washington Post* online, November 23, 1987, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1987/11/23/nontraditional-casting-not-just-a-character-issue/674f076e-3b04-4ffc-8bc9-f597465e5757/

places Asian-descended actors in the roles of Asian characters.[17] *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Les Misérables* are somewhat closer to the mark, as actors of color can and have been cast in productions, but the individual casting of Black actors as Jesus Christ and Judas Iscariot (John Legend and Brandon Victor Dixon) or an Iranian actor as Jean Valjean (Ramin Karimloo) on merit of their talents as a performer lacks the specific conceptualism of a modern progressive musical and the deliberate applications therein.[18]

The conceptual aspect of casting a modern progressive musical exists in the basic premise of 'representation matters,' while the color-blind practices are present in the laissez-faire applications of what representation means.[19] Ethnic assignments to specific roles have been generally flexible, instead allowing actors of Asian, Latinx, and Black ancestry to be cast "based on their essences and what they do well instead of their societal boxes," in keeping with the notion of casting an actor best suited to the particular role.[20] This has resulted in a collective of shared actors for the new genre, as part of a larger goal to prioritize diverse bodies onstage as a means of increasing their visibility and the roles available to these performers.

These casting practices are further bolstered by the presence of music genres that are typically characterized by non-white artists. Though the name might mislead to

---

[17] Angela C. Pao, *No Safe Spaces: Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 55-61; *Miss Saigon,* written by Claude-Michel Schönberg, Richard Maltby, Jr., and Alain Boublil, dir. Laurence Connor, Broadway Theatre, New York, NY, January 10, 2018

[18] *Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert,* directed by David Leveaux and Alex Rudzinski, (2018, New York, NY; NBC Television, 2018); *Les Misérables,* written by Claude-Michel Schönberg, Alain Boublil, and Herbert Kretzmer, dir. Laurence Connor and James Powell, Imperial Theatre, New York, NY, March 25, 2015.

[19] Christopher Jones, *Rise Up! : Broadway and American Society from Angels in America to Hamilton,* (London: Methuen Drama, 2019).

[20] Denée Benton (deneebenton), "Towards the end of Drama School, the question that we continually got asked by faculty and peers was, "what's your type?"…", Instagram, photograph and caption, January 17, 2019, 4:27pm, https://www.instagram.com/p/BswDD9aA-y2/.

connections with progressive rock, there is no one musical genre that encapsulates the modern progressive musical, nor is the modern progressive musical the first attempt to incorporate mainstream genres of music like rock, pop, and hip-hop into theatrical scores; 'rock operas' like *Jesus Christ Superstar* and jukebox musicals like *Mamma Mia* play up this quality as a major appeal to audiences, but both of those works are instances of the musical genres being adjusted only to accommodate the vocal techniques of live theatre, and the reality of performing eight times a week without vocal damage.[21]

What sets this new breed of musical apart from other pop-influenced works is the choice to use the modern music thematically, rather than simply appealing to broader audiences through a familiar sound. In addition to creating further justification for the non-traditional casting, the modern musical styles are specifically meant to evoke associations to the artists and genres it uses, drawing on the familiarity to create a specific reference for the audience. At a point in time when streaming is the dominant means of distributing music and a major resource for a show's potential publicity, using popular musical trends can make a score more accessible to a wider audience and create greater interest.

The modern elements and influences are also a major point in creating the bridge to the distanced source materials, instilling a level of familiarity into works that might otherwise be considered archaic and inaccessible. As previously mentioned, the source materials for modern progressive musicals are typically characterized by the privilege of cisgender white men, and in adapting these narratives for a modern audience, the

[21]*Jesus Christ Superstar,* 2018; *Mamma Mia,* written by Benny Andersson, Björn Ulvaeus, Stig Anderson, and Catherine Johnson, directed by Phyllida Lloyd, Winter Garden Theatre, New York, NY, January 20, 2013.

transformative works have an inherent potential for critique of their source materials' innate privilege and dated views. The lengths to which creators will go to pursue that potential is another matter entirely.

As the world grows increasingly aware of the myriad nuanced ways in which systemic injustices exist, the task of addressing those injustices becomes increasingly daunting, especially when combined with the need to tell a cohesive story within the running time of a stage performance and remain commercially viable. Rather than try to cover all aspects of social progressivism from the modern era, most of these musicals will make a broader acknowledgment towards the issues of race and gender, predominantly through their casting practices, while featuring a specific subject in the text proper, such as queer identity or environmentalism.

In the particular case of *SIX*, this manifests in the central themes of the subject of feminism and female empowerment – the critique of patriarchy, meant to elevate those whom patriarchy disenfranchises, namely women. This is a theme inherently present in all modern progressive musicals, due to the nature of intersection of race and gender present in non-traditional casting practices, and though the prominence of those themes is again dependent upon the creative team's willingness to critique and modify their source material, it is a deeply relevant theme that merits greater examination within this specific study.

Although the success and viability of the modern progressive musical varies greatly on a case-by-case basis, the continuation of the trend itself signals clearly to the greater change within the industry. All of these productions invoking comparisons to one another in the minds of the audience, another instance of the Haunted Stage phenomenon

framing their impressions of the performances. Each production is also marked by attempts to push the boundaries of musical theatre through artistic and philosophical innovation. Though the evolution of the genre is not a straight line, but there is an underlying sense of forward momentum in their attempts to realize the full potential of the genre, culminating with *SIX.*

Hamilton[22]

Although *Hamilton* was the first modern progressive musical to make it to Broadway, and should be considered the codifier of the genre, suggesting that it directly inspired the subsequent musicals is a logical fallacy, since many of them were either in development before *Hamilton* became popular, or else did not take it into account during the creative process. Rather, *Hamilton*'s success demonstrated to producers that it was a financially lucrative concept and made the eventual transitions of these productions to Broadway possible, and even that success was not fully assured when the idea was first conceived.

The first performance of a composition for *Hamilton* was Lin-Manuel Miranda's 2009 performance at the White House's Evening of Poetry, Music and the Spoken Word. He pitched it to the audience as a concept album based on "the life of someone I think embodies hip-hop, Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton," and was met with amused laughter from the assembled audience; the laughter would quickly turn to admiration and applause as he performed a rough draft version of the opening number for them.[23] In the years following, Miranda turned his concept album into a self-proclaimed 'American Musical' based on Ron Chernow's 2004 biography of the Treasury Secretary, and expanded its thesis statement to be "a story about America then, told by America now."[24]

Using a principal cast comprised almost entirely of non-white actors and a score influenced by hip-hop and rap, the musical tracks Hamilton from the year 1776 to his

[22] Large sections of this chapter are converted from a paper written for a seminar entitled "Afro-Pessimism and the Stage." Samantha Marchiony, *The Revolution is Color "Blind": A Case Study of Casting Practice in Hamilton* (In the author's possession, 2019).

[23] "Lin-Manuel Miranda Performs at the White House Poetry Jam," The White House, Washington, DC, May 12 2009.

[24] Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016) 33.

death at the hands of Aaron Burr while offering ruminations on the nature of American identity, narrative, and legacy.[25] Upon its release, the acclaim for the musical was close to universal: it earned a record-breaking sixteen nominations at the 2016 Tony Awards, going on to claim eleven wins, along with the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the Grammy Award for Best Musical Theatre Album, and the Kennedy Center "Trailblazer" Honors, among other accolades.[26]

Values of "An American Musical"

The musical's pedigree as a piece of progressive theatre was bolstered by a continued association with the Obama administration, following the 2009 performance at the White House. The President and First Lady attended performances of the show in New York, invited the cast to perform at the White House, introduced the show at the Tony Awards via satellite, hosted fundraisers on behalf of 2016 Democratic Presidential nominee Hillary Clinton at the Richard Rogers Theatre, and President Obama appeared on a remixed 'Hamildrop' of George Washington's final song, "One Last Time," reading the text of the historical Washington's Farewell Address in 2018.[27] Unfortunately, this alignment makes almost too much sense, since, like the administration, the musical can

[25] *Hamilton,* written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, dir. Thomas Kail, Richard Rodgers Theatre, New York, NY, December 26, 2019.

[26] Kimberly Nordyke, "Tony Awards 2016: Complete List," *Hollywood Reporter* online*,* June 12, 2016, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lists/tony-awards-2016-complete- list-901959/item/best-play-tony-awards-nominations-889966*;* "The 2016 Pulitzer Prize Winner in Drama: *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda," *The Pulitzer Prizes, Columbia University*, April 18, 2016, https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/lin-manuel-miranda.; "Grammy Awards 2016: See the Full Winners List," *Billboard* online, February 15, 2016, https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/grammys/6875260/grammy-awards- 2016-full-winners-list.; "Hamilton Co-Creators | 2018 Kennedy Center "Trailblazer" Honorees," *Kennedy Center*, December 18, 2020, https://www.kennedy- center.org/video/digital-stage/theater/2018/hamilton-co-creators--2018-kennedy- center-trailblazer-honorees/.

[27] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 244.; Obama White House "Hamilton at the White House," YouTube, March 14, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_edbv-LPX9c; Glenn Weiss, "70th Annual Tony Awards," CBS Television, June 12, 2016; Christopher, Barack Obama, and Bebe Winans, vocalists, "One Last Time – 44 Remix," by Lin-Manuel Miranda, recorded December 2018, Atlantic, digital single.

be defined by a centrism that presents as progressive without enacting fundamental change.

Miranda, in short, does not pursue the full potential of critiquing the history he is adapting, and instead opts to reaffirm it. The 'America then by America now' credo is deliberately broad and reassuring about American identity and exceptionalism, most notably in how it addresses the subject of immigration. Hamilton's status as an immigrant is frequently remarked upon, used as an insult by his political rivals, but presented to the audience as a symbol of pride. Among the play's most well-known lines is "Immigrants – we get the job done": a moment which prompts raucous cheers from the audience when performed onstage.[28] The empowerment of the isolated moment, however, loses its potency when considered in the greater context of the play, as Hamilton's character is given an arc that very much reflects the bootstrap narrative; his success and social ascent stems from his brilliance and his ability to make connections with powerful and influential members of established American society.

The idea of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps is a narrative that has becomes increasingly less viable as capitalism advances and the wealth disparity grows, but it prizes individual labor and exceptionalism, which accounts for its broad appeal within the United States across all political modes of thinking.[29] Thus, while the text is ostensibly pro-immigrant, the metatext is flexible enough that it does not take a side beyond that and can serve to reinforce any belief about how the American immigration system that the audience already holds, regardless of political background, without challenging or

[28] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.

[29] Nowile M. Brooks, "The Myth of Bootstrapping," *TIME* online, September 7, 2012, https://ideas.time.com/2012/09/07/the-myth-of-bootstrapping/

interrogating that system. Hamilton faces stigma for his immigrant origins from the Democratic Republicans, embodied by Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Aaron Burr, but those insults are embedded within a larger conflict of their differing politics, rather than being their sole point of antagonism.[30]

The "Immigrants – We Get the Job Done" line was transformed into a full song for *The Hamilton Mixtape*, a concept album which included cut songs and covers of the show's more popular songs by mainstream artists. The track takes a much more definitive liberal stance, including lines like "Racists feed the belly of the beast/With they pitchforks, rich chores/ Done by the people that get ignored" and "Cool, they flee war zones, but the problem ain't ours/Even if our bombs landed on them like the Mayflower," in reaction to xenophobic anti-immigrant rhetoric. [31] Its status as a digitally released piece of media lessens its impact, however, as those who see the show performed onstage and do not align with this viewpoint do not have to know about the video's existence, or can easily ignore it, continuing to perceive Hamilton's experiences in a way that fits their political views on immigration. The choice to play into confirmation biases and the accompanying unwillingness to take a stance that could be seen as potentially alienating undercuts the power of individual moments of solidarity with immigrants.

Women in the Sequel

Similarly conflicted messaging exists in Miranda's approach to feminism and female empowerment through the four female characters played by the three principal actresses: Eliza, Angelica, and Peggy Schuyler, and Maria Reynolds. The Schuyler

[30] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.

[31] Keinan Abdi Warsame, Claudia Alexandra Feliciano, Riz Ahmed, and René Juan Pérez Joglar, vocalists, "Immigrants – We Get the Job Done" by Lin-Manuel Miranda, recorded December 2016, track 11 on *The Hamilton Mixtape,* Atlantic, digital release.

Sisters standing in a triangular formation with their arms raised and declaring "work!" during their eponymous musical number is one of the most iconic images associated with the musical, presented as a tableau of female empowerment meant to be cheered by the audience.[32] It is not, however, reflective of the sisters' function in the musical, as Miranda frames the significance of his featured female characters in direct relation to the fact that they loved Hamilton. This dynamic renders them secondary to the needs of the male protagonist, their importance and characterization defined solely in terms of their relationships to Hamilton, which undercuts any feminist credibility Miranda might have hoped to achieve in the characters' construction.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the contrasts between Eliza and Angelica, both of whom Miranda positions as a form of soulmate to Hamilton. Eliza, the sister whom Hamilton does marry, embodies traditional femininity; her primary character traits are goodness and her devotion to her husband and family, and the role is vocally structured in a way that evokes the archetype of a classic Broadway ingenue, favoring ballads with a higher vocal range and longer phrases. Angelica, conversely, is positioned as Hamilton's intellectual equal, her score packed with witticisms and wordplay which can be delivered quickly and ferociously to equal his, but romantically alienated due to the nature of inhabiting a patriarchal system that requires her to act in the financial interests of her family. Both of these characterizations are in service of propping up the mythic image of Hamilton, communicating his charm and desirability through his wife and sister-in-law's deep-rooted infatuations with him, an action which reinforces patriarchy rather than criticizing it.

[32] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.

This reinforcement is most obvious in the characterization of Eliza, since her greatest purpose within the play is in service to the theme of narrative, specifically that of her husband. The concept, introduced in Act One with "That Would Be Enough" sees her asking to "be a part of the narrative" in a setting that shows her heavily pregnant and imploring her husband to stay with her.[33] The scene prioritizes her status as a wife and mother, and begins a greater trend of her being referred to in possessive terms, even by herself: she is Hamilton's wife, Philip's mother, Angelica's sister before she is Eliza, and when her name is used, it is still in a context that positions her importance relative to her husband. Eliza, despite being the leading female role of the play, exists only because she has value for others.

The ostensible turning point for this arc ought to be her act two solo, "Burn," where she chooses "erasing myself from the narrative" in response to the revelation of her husband's infidelity with Maria Reynolds.[34] The only moment in the play where Eliza stands alone, "Burn" is treated as a moment of defiance and retribution against Hamilton for breaking her heart, but it encounters the same issue as the immigrants line: it is empowering only when removed from its greater context. Within the play, Eliza's rejection of Hamilton amounts only to a brief redirection of her focus from her husband to her son, Philip, while maintaining her position as the moral center of the story as the fallout from Hamilton's affair directly leads to Philip's death. Eliza's needs in grieving the loss of her son are pushed aside in favor of Hamilton seeking and receiving absolution from her in "It's Quiet Uptown," his transgressions forgiven with comparative ease while her emotional journey is overlooked and folded into his.

---

[33] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.
[34] (Ibid.)

Following this, Eliza makes only two more appearances, in "Best of Wives, Best of Women," and the show's finale, "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story," both of which see her return to her role as a devoted wife and extension of Hamilton. Despite declaring that she has "put myself back in the narrative," the narrative in question is undeniably her husband's, and she serves as the vessel and custody of his legacy. The last image of the play, her gasping as she breaks the fourth wall and beholds the audience gathered to see the dramatic recreation of her husband's life, is an emotionally powerful one, but the emotions invoked are inherently tied to Eliza's participation in the construction of a patriarchal system and the erasure of her own identity in favor of her husband's.[35] As her personal stakes are inherently tied to her position as a wife and mother, and her narrative is in service of a man's needs, it is therefore impossible for Eliza as a character to effectively critique the patriarchal world which she supports.

Standing in direct contrast to Eliza's constructed complacency is Angelica, positioned by Miranda as "a world-class intellect in a world that does not allow her to flex it," actively chafing at the patriarchal society she inhabits.[36] Taking the lead for "The Schuyler Sisters," the audience's first introduction to Angelica establishes her formidable mind by matching wits with Aaron Burr and invoking the popular revolutionary literature of the day. In addition to name-dropping Thomas Paine, the verse which prompts the declaration of "work" and the iconic pose is "We hold these truths to be self-evident/That all men are created equal/And when I meet Thomas Jefferson/I'm 'a compel him to include women in the sequel," a promise which Miranda was unable to fulfill onstage.[37]

[35] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.
[36] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 83.
[37] (Ibid., 44).

The instance of setup without payoff serves as a microcosm of the larger issue with Angelica, wherein Miranda utilizes her as a means to introduce feminist rhetoric and critiques of patriarchy, but fails to follow through, instead focusing on her intellectual romance with Hamilton, relegating her to the same status as Eliza within the structure of the play.

The romance itself considerably deepens the flaws in what critique there might have been for Angelica because it is partially grounded in a fiction; in "Satisfied," the first obstacle presented to the possibility of a relationship between Angelica and Hamilton is the idea that she is the oldest daughter in a family without sons, and therefore required to marry for financial gain.[38] Miranda's annotations of the song reveal that he fabricated this aspect of Angelica's character for the sake of dramatic convenience;[39] in reality, Angelica had several brothers, lessening the need for her to marry for the family's sake, and she had, against the wishes of her family, eloped with John Barker Church in 1777, three years before Hamilton would marry her sister.[40] Although the historical elopement was a form of defying patriarchal expectations, it did so in a fashion that undermines Miranda's greater goals, which require Angelica to be a foil for Eliza and a viable romantic option for Hamilton, and thus was replaced with the fictionalized circumstances.

There is an attempt to give Angelica agency as she works her way through the realization that she cannot be with Hamilton, and thus pushes the match with Eliza both to make her sister happy and to keep him in her life.[41] Though tempered slightly by the

[38] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.
[39] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 83.
[40] Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton,* (New York: Penguin, 2004). EPUB.
[41] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.

continued importance of her relationship with her sister, this choice repeats the misstep of framing female characters' importance solely in terms of their connections to Hamilton. The remainder of her appearances in the musical involve her either pining for Hamilton in some form or providing emotional support to Eliza, with any personal goals she might have held abandoned. In this respect, her characterization is more damaging to the musical's credibility specifically because she was positioned as the mouthpiece of its feminist messaging.

Held somewhat separate from Angelica and Eliza are the two roles played by the third actress in the principal cast: Peggy Schuyler, the youngest of the three sisters, and Maria Reynolds, the married woman with whom Hamilton would have an affair. Miranda holds Peggy as being of little narrative importance, noting that "she married rich and died young" as his reason both for not giving her a musical motif and dropping her from the plot after Act One.[42] The exclusion is most egregious when Miranda reuses the motif of "Angelica, Eliza" and omits Peggy's name before following up with "the Schuyler Sisters" in "Take a Break."[43] As brief a moment as it is, the greater implication is a grimly anti-feminist one: when Peggy is no longer relevant to Hamilton the man, she is no longer relevant to *Hamilton*, the musical, and can therefore be easily discarded without mention.

Maria Reynolds is less easily overlooked, but her portrayal relies heavily on a negative framing of her sexuality, starting with the way her image is constructed, filtered through the gaze of Hamilton. Clad in a bright red dress with matching lipstick and tousled hair, Maria is presented as a fundamentally sexual character before she sings a

[42]Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 42.
[43] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.

word of "Say No to This," a song constructed around the tropes of Rhythm and Blues (R&B) to make her sound soulful and seductive, and the construction of the musical number onstage makes it unclear how much the audience should be able to trust her word, both when she professes to be the abuse victim of her husband, James, and when she denies knowledge of his subsequent extortion of Hamilton.[44] The interpretation most in keeping with feminist principles is that she is telling the truth and being used by both her husband and Hamilton as a sexual object because she has no other choice, but that is not what is reflected in the performance of the text.

The musical instead presents Maria as a femme fatale, dangerous specifically because of her sexuality. The staging frames the first interaction between her and Hamilton as both a deliberate seduction and an act of destruction, as Maria is the one to seemingly proposition Hamilton for sex.[45] Though, in his annotations of the libretto, Miranda stops short of outright blaming Maria for Hamilton's lack of judgment and restraint, she is still presented as an enabler of his damaging behavior, actively encouraging Hamilton to continue their affair and comply with her husband's demands after the blackmail is initiated.[46] What sympathy there might have been in the text for her character dissipates further, as she next appears in "Hurricane," being the one to place the pen, the instrument of Hamilton's impending self-destruction, into his hands as a symbolic reiteration of her part in that destruction. Immediately afterwards, in "The Reynolds Pamphlets," she is presented as a voiceless phantom, the staging both isolating

[44] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.
[45] (Ibid.)
[46] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 178.

her and shaming her for her part in Hamilton's downfall, without any mention of the consequences it might have for her own life.[47]

The fact that Maria, the only actively sexual woman onstage, is presented in such a negative context speaks to the dominant male perspective shaping the story being told onstage, and the lack of interest in exploring the female experience. She is objectified and reduced to an emotional connection with Hamilton just as much as Eliza and Angelica are, but she lacks the broader gestures towards female empowerment that the Schuyler sisters are given, which exacerbates the greater issue of poorly developed female characters. As with the immigration subtext, there is just enough material present to claim a progressive stance, but not so much that it intrudes on the audience's preconceived notions about gender and sexual politics, keeping the focus on the experience of its title character.

Although *Hamilton* is first and foremost a piece of art dedicated to telling the story of Alexander Hamilton, and there is an argument to be made that the importance of every character is solely in their link to his life, it is only the female characters who are defined so completely by that relationship. Male characters like George Washington, Aaron Burr, and Thomas Jefferson are given defined character arcs that grant them greater narrative agency and allow them to stand independent of their connections to Hamilton. Relegating the female characters to supporting players reiterates the patriarchal structure of American history, lessening the spirit of empowerment that the musical claims to champion.

[47] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.

A Civics Lesson from a Slaver

Most damaging to *Hamilton*'s credibility as a work of progressive theatre is Miranda's handling of the American slave trade. One of the musical's most contentious aspects, the depiction is considered by some to be an outright misrepresentation of the historical Hamilton's relationship to the practice. This is not to say that slavery goes entirely ignored; there is an offhanded mention of the brutality the practice entailed within the first five minutes of the show, and there are a few gestures to the idea of Hamilton as an abolitionist throughout the remainder of the show.[48] The framing of the issue, however, is constantly being skewed by the fact that, in order to make Hamilton seem both revolutionary and sympathetic for a modern audience.

Miranda simplifies and modifies his protagonist's politics into something more easily digested for the audience. *Hamilton* depicts its title character as an unequivocal abolitionist, following the interpretation of Ron Chernow to make the character more likable and morally agreeable for those watching him. This depiction stands in contrast with the research done by Michelle DuRoss, who summarized the historical Hamilton's position as a man out to better himself more than anything else; her research posits that he was ostensibly opposed to slavery, but willing to tolerate it when his social mobility and political ambitions required it, namely in his marriage to Eliza Schuyler, whose family did engage in the slave trade.[49] Rather than tarnish its hero with such associations, the play instead has the industry of slavery represented primarily by Thomas Jefferson and, to a lesser extent, James Madison.

---

[48] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 16.
[49] Michelle DuRoss, "Somewhere in Between: Alexander Hamilton and Slavery," *The Early America Review* 9, no. 4 (2010): 1-8.

Miranda admits that there had, at one point, been an intent to more thoroughly address the issue. An additional Cabinet Battle was originally written, dedicated specifically to the debate around slavery, but since the song "didn't shed new light on the characters— the point, after all, is that none of the Founding Fathers did anything to stop it," it was cut from the production.[50] A demo version was eventually released in the Hamilton Mixtape, but the admission of why the song was cut from the production shows the hypocrisy of Miranda's professed goals, aligning him with the historical version of Hamilton through his willingness to recognize slavery as immoral only as long as it will not inconvenience his personal goals.[51]

What makes *Hamilton'*s mishandlings of slavery even more disappointing is the ghost of its own spiritual predecessor, the musical *1776*. Centered around the creation and signing of the Declaration of Independence, *1776* addressed the subject of slavery in full through the musical number "Molasses to Rum," performed by South Carolina congressional delegate Edward Rutledge.[52] The song and accompanying scene depict Rutledge directly calling out both the participation of the northern colonies in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the specific hypocrisy of Thomas Jefferson blaming the slave trade on George III despite being a practitioner himself, the latter of which poet-playwright and activist Ishmael Reed would invoke in his criticisms of *Hamilton* decades later.[53] Both the scene and the song are appropriately grim to match the subject matter,

[50] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 223.

[51] Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Cabinet Battle 3 – Demo." Recorded December 2016, track 19 on *The Hamilton Mixtape,* Atlantic, digital release.

[52] *1776,* directed by Peter H. Hunt (1972; Burbank, CA; Columbia Pictures, 2002), digital.

[53] Ishmael Reed, ""Hamilton: the Musical:" Black Actors Dress Up like Slave Traders...and It's Not Halloween," *CounterPunch* (Petrolia: CounterPunch, August 21, 2015), https://www.counterpunch.org/2015/08/21/hamilton-the-musical-black-actors-dress-up-like-slave-tradersand-its-not-halloween/

and, more importantly, leaves a lasting impact upon the remainder of the plot, as the anti-slavery clause is eventually struck from the Declaration in order to secure the southern states' votes for independence, tainting the victory.

Miranda's annotations reveal that he was aware of *1776* during his writing process; the majority of Hamilton's tirade against John Adams in "The Adams Administration," was cut, but one allusion lives on in the Broadway production through the exclamation of "sit down, John," and a cover version was included on the Hamilton Mixtape.[54] Having an acknowledgment of a dramatic work which managed to better address an issue as heavy as slavery within the text throws the shortcomings of *Hamilton* into stark contrast, in part because *Hamilton* falls into the traps *1776* wisely avoided, namely assigning the blame of slavery solely to the southern states and ignoring its protagonist's complicity in the practice for the sake of a greater goal.

By America Now

Hamilton has existed long enough now that the novelty of its premise has begun to wear off. As it becomes more normalized, the elements that earned praise as groundbreaking and game-changing when it debuted are now falling into normalized convention, particularly its casting practices.[55] Having an ensemble with a diverse range of ethnicities is increasingly less impressive as more productions normalize the practice, but *Hamilton* itself has become a shorthand for 'color-blind' casting, with harmful repercussions which are slowly becoming visible, even beyond the realm of theatre. Film

[54] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 224; Watsky and Shockwave, vocalists, "An Open Letter (feat. Shockwave) [Interlude]," by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Recorded December 2016, track 5 on *The Hamilton Mixtape,* Atlantic, digital release.

[55] Helen Shaw, "The Book of Mormon and Hamilton Already Feel Like They're From Another Time." *Vulture*, December 16, 2019, https://www.vulture.com/2019/12/re-reviewing-the-book-of-mormon-and-hamilton-in-2019.html

actress Natalie Portman offered "we live in a post-*Hamilton* world where we don't even need to think about what's authentic to the character, like faithful to the character," as a response to a question about the whitewashing of characters in the 2018 film *Annihilation;* she went on to apologize and say that the characters in question were only identified as minorities in the sequels to the novel the film was based upon, and that said sequels had not been taken into account when the film had initially been written and cast, but her invocation of *Hamilton* is a telling one.[56] The mentality espoused in her line of reasoning is in line with the meritocracy of 'color-blind' casting, wherein acting talent was prioritized over any other quality. That mode of thinking overlooks the conceptual elements of the casting and perpetuates the misconception that 'color-blind' casting is a practice than can be applied unilaterally, without taking into consideration the greater implications of the inherent metatextuality of having an actor of a certain race in a certain role.

In the specific case of *Hamilton*, the form of non-traditional casting used is meant to be empowering for the people of color that it casts, allowing them to be present in a narrative from which they have traditionally been excluded. Among other critics of the musical, Ishmael Reed felt that the play had the opposite effect, and accused Miranda of "using the slave's language: Rock and Roll, Rap and Hip Hop to romanticize the careers of kidnappers, and murderers," an assessment that cuts directly to the heart of the problem that *Hamilton*'s brand of diverse casting carries in regards to this specific issue of metatextuality.[57] The bodies onstage and the music being performed are not reflective

[56] Natalie Portman, "Natalie Portman Is The Woke Actor We Need Right Now," interview by Kate Aurthur, *BuzzFeed News*, February 20, 2018, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/kateaurthur/natalie-portman-is-woke.

[57] Reed, "Hamilton the Musical."

of the history and culture they are being used to portray, and the play neglects the reality of the historical experiences and atrocities which those bodies would have endured. It instead extends the harm, further normalizing the erasure of stories about women and people of color from the early days of American history in favor of the white patriarchal history already depicted and venerated within the culture.

The most obvious example of this problem is in the casting of Black men to play men who would have considered them subhuman property. In his annotations of "Cabinet Battle #1," one of two songs dedicated to arguments between Jefferson and Hamilton, Miranda writes of "how cathartic it is to get to express [disdain for slavery] to Jefferson every night" when calling out the south's prosperity as the benefit of the slave trade, but completely ignores the fact that he was also expressing it to Daveed Diggs.[58] Though members of the audience might subconsciously remember that the historical Jefferson and Madison were white, representing them with Black actors onstage creates a subtext that places the blame for Black disenfranchisement onto the victims of that subjugation.

The gesture becomes even more uncomfortable when seen live with a lighter-skinned Latino actor such as Miranda or Ryan Vasquez playing Hamilton opposite a Black actor like Diggs or James Monroe Iglehart as Jefferson; the stage lights wash out the complexion of a Latino performer to the point of making him look white, while the Black actor is afforded no such luxury.[59] This taints all instances of Jefferson, Madison, and Burr interacting with Hamilton with a racial subtext that positions the darker-skinned

[58] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 161.

[59] This washing-out was so noticeable that when I saw the play performed live that I spent the entire first act of *Hamilton* squinting at Vasquez, certain my eyes were deceiving me; *Hamilton*, New York, 2019

characters as antagonistic to the lighter-skinned character in a way that makes them seem villainous and positions the audience against them.

A similar issue of racial dynamics existed within the original casting for the female leads, as the Chinese-descended Phillipa Soo was cast as Eliza, juxtaposed by an Afro-Latina actress, Renée Elise Goldsberry, as Angelica and a Black actress, Jasmine Cephas Jones, as Peggy and Maria.[60] Given Eliza's position as the moral center of the play and the woman whom Hamilton chooses, casting an Asian woman for the part plays into the archetypal image of Asians as a model minority, while her Black co-stars are characterized respectively by a biting wit and treacherous sexuality that make them less worthy of Hamilton.[61] In December 2019, the production's cast changes had created an inverse situation wherein a dark-skinned Black actress, Krystal Joy Brown, played Eliza opposite two Latina actresses, Mandy Gonzalez as Angelica and Elizabeth Judd as Peggy/Maria.[62] While this change meant the model minority metatext was avoided, Gonzalez and Judd were subject to the same issue of being whitewashed in the stage lighting as Ryan Vasquez was, lessening the impact of the empowering image the Schuylers are meant to have as three women of color standing empowered.

Regardless of the dynamics between individual characters, and how they change when the cast changes, there remains the underlying issue that the characters being played, the actions being taken, and the words being spoken or sung are meant to be the words of white people. The narratives and legacies presented as central to the play are

[60] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 78, 107, 172.

[61] Lisa Kiang et. al., "Moving beyond the model minority," *Asian American Journal of Psychology* 8, no. 1 (2017) 1-6.

[62] *Hamilton*, New York, 2019.

white narratives, but the presence of bodies of color onstage creates a level of ambiguity that obscures that whiteness.

Aside from the 'America then by America now' mission statement, the musical influences of the score are the greatest justification for the casting of non-white actors. Casting calls for the musical include character descriptions like "Javert meets Mos Def" for Aaron Burr, "Nicki Minaj meets Desiree Armfeldt" for Angelica, and "John Legend meets Mufasa" for George Washington, highlight artists of color both in terms of persona and musical style.[63] Miranda's background as a rapper with the group Freestyle Love Supreme, combined with his affection for both musical theatre and popular music, make for a score stuffed to the brim with influences and references that span from Rodgers and Hammerstein to DMX.[64] Though the chaotic blend of genres results in a score that is one of the most universally lauded in the musical theatre canon, it also reveals a grim reality of Hamilton's casting methodology.

In creating a musical which specifically calls for actors of color to perform music from genres linked with their ethnicity, it reinforces the idea that this is the only music suited for such performers. The possible alternative for retaining the cast's diversity, to have the actors perform in a style more classically associated with musical theatre, is no better, since that could be an act of forced assimilation. There is no way in which Miranda's goals of creating space for non-white actors do not, in some way, reinforce the status quo of Broadway as a predominantly white space.

[63] "'Hamilton' Casting Call | Baseline Theatrical - Theater Auditions," *Backstage* online, July 10, 2016, https://www.backstage.com/casting/hamilton-122279/

[64] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 27, 104, 287

This issue is one that affects the musical in its entirety. For all that *Hamilton* is touted as a groundbreaking piece of modern American theatre, the ground it supposedly breaks is largely superficial. The text of the play holds too much reverence for both its biographical source, and the history contained within that biography, to provide an effective critique on the less glamorous aspects of America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In his quest to depict Hamilton as a man who embodies the lifestyle of hip-hop, Miranda makes the founding father accessible and relatable in a way that downplays and sanitizes his greater moral failings.

Despite centering its narrative on a revolution and the creation of a new government, *Hamilton* celebrates the political system of the United States rather than challenging it, something which makes for theatre more escapist than anything else as that system grows increasingly hostile and turbulent. No event is more telling of this than when, following the 2016 election, then Vice-President-Elect Mike Pence attended a performance of the musical, and the cast addressed him with a written statement during the curtain call. The statement, written by Miranda and director Thomas Kail with input from the cast, was offered on behalf of "the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us, our planet, our children, our parents or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights," and meant to appeal to the conscience of Pence and the incoming administration at large.[65]

[65] Ashley Lee and Jennifer Konerman, "'Hamilton' Broadway Cast Addresses Mike Pence in Audience: "Work on Behalf of All of Us,"" Culture, *Hollywood Reporter* online, November 18, 2016, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hamilton-broadway-cast-addresses-mike-pence-audience-work-behalf-all-us-949075

The response to this statement was divided along political lines, with conservatives thinking the gesture inappropriate, and liberals thinking it spoke to relevant, justified anxieties. The partisan reactions, as well as the Trump-Pence administration's apparent disregard for the statement, demonstrate how little impact the musical carries as a call to political action, while its continued critical acclaim and commercial success speak to how apolitical the text of the musical itself truly is. For *Hamilton* to be the first modern progressive musical to premiere on Broadway and do well both critically and commercially signals to the limitations of the genre, namely the need to couch central themes within a context both celebratory and superficial. Though Miranda may have ostensibly succeeded in the goals with which he conceived *Hamilton*, a depiction of America's past which speaks to America's present, that success has come at a price, with the technical excellence of the musical and its generally inspirational tone overshadowing the anti-progressive elements within its text. In doing so, *Hamilton* set a precedent for future modern progressive musicals, one which would have deep repercussions.

Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812

The Broadway production of *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* officially opened on November 14, 2016, only five months after *Hamilton* had swept the Tony Awards in June, and the two shows were already connected from having at one point shared a leading lady. Phillipa Soo, Tony-nominated for her portrayal of Eliza Schuyler Hamilton, had been the original Natasha Rostova during the 2013 off-Broadway run of *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812,* where director Thomas Kail had seen her and recommended her to Miranda.[66] Even if there were not this overlapping casting to contribute to the factor of the Haunted Stage, comparisons between the two productions were inevitable thanks to the shared basic concepts inherent in modern progressive musicals.

What set *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* at a disadvantage when compared to *Hamilton* is the choice of source material. In utilizing a piece of history deeply embedded in the American culture which it inhabited, *Hamilton* made itself much more easily accessible to its primarily American audience. For *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812,* composer Dave Malloy and director Rachel Chavkin were adapting Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* a work of fiction set in a different culture from the one performing it, "a complicated Russian novel," by their own tongue-in-cheek admission.[67] Rather than try to encompass the entire novel, as most adaptations of *War and Peace* would, the musical adapts a small passage of the story, following the two title characters in seemingly separate plot threads which eventually converge at the climax.

[66] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton,* 107.

[67] Dave Malloy, Steven Suskin, and Oskar Eustis, *Natasha, Pierre, And the Great Comet of 1812: The Journey of a New Musical to Broadway* (NewYork: Sterling Publishing) 2016, 123.

Natasha's journey sees her awaiting the return of her fiancé, Andrey, when she encounters Anatole Kuragin, who decides to make her his next conquest. Unaware that he is already married, Natasha falls prey to Anatole's seductions, calling off her engagement to Andrey, and making plans to elope with Anatole. Pierre, meanwhile, stumbles through an existential crisis in a state of alcohol-fueled depression and self-loathing, envying Anatole's libertine ways without realizing the greater ramifications. After Natasha's cousin and godmother prevent the elopement with Anatole, they appeal to Pierre for assistance in salvaging her reputation from the impending scandal. He does so, sending Anatole away and regaining Natasha's love letters, though he is unable to bring a reconciliation between her and the returning Andrey. In the aftermath, Pierre visits Natasha, who is recovering from a suicide attempt at the news of Anatole's deception, and the two share a brief moment of connection before Pierre departs, contemplating the future as the eponymous comet finally makes its appearance.[68]

Through the various iterations of its stagings, Malloy, Chavkin, and the rest of the production team embraced the challenge by taking the opportunity to push the limits in the production elements, fusing the aesthetics of the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries wherever possible. Mimi Lien created a set design which transformed the various performances spaces into Russian clubs and tea salons, immersing the audience within the performance space and allowing for maximum interaction with the performers, many of whom doubled as members of the orchestra. Bradley James King created chandeliers specific to the space to work in tandem with more traditional stage lighting. Paloma

[68] Malloy, Suskin, and Eustis, *The Great Comet.*

Young's costumes placed the principal cast in more period accurate costumes, contrasted with a collection of chaotically modern garments for the ensemble members.

Most prominently, Malloy's almost entirely sung-through score is an eclectic blend of "pop/rock/folk/soul/experimental/electronic dance music/traditional Russian folk/classic Broadway" styles, loosely termed as an "electropop opera" for more succinct marketing purposes.[69] All of these choices, with their ambition and modern sense of creativity, serve to highlight a contrastingly meticulous adherence to the source material in one central characteristic of the play: the majority of Malloy's lyrics are effective transcriptions of the translated text, adapted to the meter of his compositions without compromising the heart of Tolstoy's language.

In Nineteenth Century Russia

Malloy's annotations of the libretto for *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* reveal his desire to "not just tell the story, but to put Tolstoy's *novel* on stage," which exposes the play as the modern progressive musical that makes the fewest possible changes to its source.[70] The consequence of this textual adherence is that it quashes nearly all chance of progressive text, instead serving as a reiteration of Tolstoy's inherently dated worldviews and values. One of the weaknesses that stems from this is the lack of a definitive issue to serve as the show's linchpin, no moral meant to target the issues of the modern world. The central themes are all original to Tolstoy's text, ruminations on the nature of love and existentialism which Malloy retroactively fits to the modern era but keeps largely contained to arias for the title characters.

[69] Malloy, Suskin, and Eustis, *The Great Comet*, 1, 123).
[70] (Ibid., 130).

The closest the musical comes to a thesis statement is "They say we are asleep/Until we fall in love/We are children of dust and ashes/But when we fall in love we wake up/And we are a God/And angels weep," from Pierre's soliloquy in the first act, "Dust and Ashes."[71] While the sentiment is one of poignance that fits well with Pierre's character arc and the romantic styles of the musical, it is a message grounded in internal conflict, lacking a unifying goal to that a group could use as a call to action. The 'War' part of *War and Peace* exists in the abstract, relevant only in that it takes Andrey out of the plot, thus leaving Natasha vulnerable to Anatole's predations. There is, moreover, no finite conclusion to the plot; as Pierre ends the play in a cathartic uncertainty about his future as he observes the passing comet, the audience is left inherently wondering what will become of the assorted characters they have been watching. This is undeniably the result of adapting a small segment of a much larger story, and while it works for *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* as an individual piece of theatre, it is a hindrance to the 'progressive' aspect of the modern progressive musical because it remains grounded in the mentality of Tolstoy and his native period.

The translation format is also responsible for the same basic issue as Miranda's approach to the more unsavory elements of history in *Hamilton*, wherein progressive ideals are compromised for the sake of staying faithful to the source material. Malloy's annotations of his libretto attempt to offer justification for this faithfulness at various points throughout the text when this has the potential to be harmful and anti-progressive, with mixed results. The most controversial example of this problem is in Malloy's use of

[71] (Ibid., 159).

the anti-Romani slur *gypsy*, or rather, the Russian word *цыган*[72] which all the versions of *War and Peace* that Malloy referenced translated as *gypsy*, in keeping with the language of the aristocracy in 19th century Russia. Aware of his privilege as a heterosexual cisgender white man and the word's applications as a racial slur, Malloy took the time to do extensive research before eventually deciding to keep the word. When used as part of a drinking song in "The Abduction," Malloy argues that Anatole using the word not with "malevolence or racist connotations" but to pay homage to "a nomadic, sensual, free-spirited philosophy" which the term has come to represent in performance industries.[73] His notes also acknowledge that the potential for the word to be used as a slur still exists, and that his explanation may not satisfy everyone, but he was acting with the best of intentions.

The explanation would have been better supported if Malloy had not also used the word in a derogatory context shortly after the celebratory one, for the song "In My House"; flung out by its speaker, Marya Dmitryevna, as a means of shaming Natasha for the failed attempt to elope "like some gypsy girl," the word is meant to show the character "at her ugliest."[74] The result is that Malloy undoes his own work of trying to be conscientious in his applications of the word by invoking both its uses so close to one another without providing sufficient context. It instead presumes a level of confirmation bias and places trust in the audience to have done the same kind of research he has in

[72] The Russian word is used as a blanket term for the Romani ethnic group, both as a descriptor and a slur, dependent upon context; Dave Malloy, "The Abduction Lyrics," *Genius*. Accessed March 13, 2020, https://genius.com/10095929.

[73] (Ibid.)

[74] Malloy, Suskin, and Eustis, *The Great Comet*, 193.

understanding the history that the word carries, and thus conflates the two meanings for members of the audience who have not done so.

The issue inherent in faithfully moving Tolstoy's novel to the stage has even deeper repercussions in the musical's complicated relationship to feminism and female empowerment. There is a case to be made that *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* empowers women in its metatext. With Rachel Chavkin directing and having significant input into the creative process, the play is able to decentralize its reliance on a male perspective, and present its female characters as complex and empowered, able to affect the plot through their wants, desires, and flaws. In this respect, *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* surpasses *Hamilton* in its ability to present women as characters unto themselves, rather than solely relying on their connections to men to demonstrate their narrative importance.

Where the musical falls short and aligns with its spiritual predecessor is in the reinforcement of patriarchal narrative tropes surrounding female identity and sexuality. *Hamilton's* flaws were intensified by Miranda's inclusions of performative feminist gestures that changed the source material, but *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812's* commitment to putting the novel on the stage has the opposite issue, reinforcing the patriarchy it depicts with little room for critique that was not present in the original novel. The primary conflict of Natasha's arc, which takes up the majority of the stage time, hinges around constructed patriarchal expectations surrounding marriage and sexual purity and plays out in such a way that it reaffirms those expectations. The characters of Natasha, Sonya, Marya Dmitryevna, and Mary Bolkonsky,[75] though they might not be

[75] Marya Bolkonskaya in the novel, her name changed in the play to avoid confusion with Marya Dmitryevna

happy with these circumstances, all operate within those expectations with a level of unquestioning acceptance.

This manifests first in Marya Dmitryevna's observation that "it's not nice to enter a family against a father's will," the impetus for Natasha visiting the Bolkonsky family in the following scene.[76] The scene depicting this meeting is constructed in a way that speaks to the absurdity of giving a person as vindictive and unstable as the old Prince Bolkonsky such authority over others simply because of his gender, but it also reiterates the values of the era. His daughter, Mary, feels she can only escape her father's control and find happiness if she finds someone to marry her while simultaneously shaming herself for judging her father for his failings. Natasha's failed attempts to endure the prince's psychological abuses, similarly, are only for the sake of being able to marry Andrey. The absurdity and comedy of the scene is highlighted to the point of overshadowing this internalized misogyny, and the encounter also feeds directly into the vulnerability that allows Anatole's seduction to work on Natasha and bring her to the point of perceived ruination.

This is the second form of patriarchal reinforcement: the primary stakes of the play are directly tied to the idea that if Natasha elopes with the already-married Anatole, it will permanently stain her reputation. Both Marya Dmitryevna and Sonya bring this point up in arguing against the relationship to Natasha, who ignores them until the revelation of Anatole's marriage after the failed elopement. Sonya is given the additional motivation of wanting to protect Natasha emotionally in "Sonya Alone," but that need is predicated upon the understanding that Anatole is not a suitable match for Natasha within

[76] Malloy, Suskin, and Eustis, *The Great Comet*, 132

the patriarchal system they inhabit.[77] At no point does any character ever question why it matters whether or not Natasha has had sex, or whether she should need a formal proposal to enter a relationship with someone. Natasha's defiance of them, moreover, comes across as childish naïveté and willful self-destruction than it does a rational argument against a system that objectifies her and unnecessarily limits her sexual agency.

The narrative flimsiness of Natasha's defiance is dragged down further by the fact that the character who introduced her to such modes of thinking is Hélène Bezukhova, the sexually uninhibited sister of Anatole, wife of Pierre, and the one female character who actively defies the protocols and expectations of the social order depicted throughout the play. Introduced to the audience in the "Prologue" as a "slut," Malloy's annotations say the character has "reclaimed the word with pride, à la *The Ethical Slut* by Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy," but, like his claims regarding the use of the word 'gypsy,' the applications throughout the libretto do not support that interpretation.[78] Perhaps Hélène the character sees herself as ethical and sexually liberated in pursuing extramarital affairs, particularly with Anatole's friend Dolokhov, but there is no attempt in the libretto made to salvage her from the negative framing of her presentation in Tolstoy's original text; she is instead the closest thing the musical has to an unequivocal villain, not only for the actions she takes but for her unrepentant enjoyment of them. Following her introduction in the Prologue, Hélène's first appearance as a character is "The Opera," where she is defined by her glamour, materialism, promiscuity, and conniving, "a woman one should stay far away from," in the words of Maria Dmitryevna.[79] Her pushing

[77] Malloy, Suskin, and Eustis, *The Great Comet*, 180-181.
[78] (Ibid., 125).
[79] (Ibid., 144).

Natasha into Anatole's seduction is presented as an act of destruction for her own amusement, and her interactions with Pierre present her as a toxic figure that contributes greatly to her husband's misery.

Considering the references made to *The Ethical Slut* in his annotations, Malloy's version of the character practically screams for a different world to inhabit, one that will allow her to reach the fully liberated and glamorous potential that the audience is allowed to glimpse in her solo, "Charming." The song, based in part on Prince's "Housequake," allows Hélène to "magically become the only person in the room, or indeed all of existence," as she revels in her part of the greater plot to bring together Natasha and Anatole.[80] Positioning Hélène as the most actively and willfully malicious character would not be an anti-feminist statement if there were greater variety in the other female characters in play, but for that to happen would have required reworking and alteration of Tolstoy's text.

As it stands, Hélène remains an outlier among the female characters, marked by her sexuality and her immorality in a way that presents the two as inherently connected and invalidates the critique of patriarchy which she offers. She is haunted by the archetype of the femme fatale in the same fashion as *Hamilton's* version of Maria Reynolds, subject to the archetypal associations of feminine sexuality being conflated with danger and destruction, and in turn, reiterating those associations.

This method of villainization is limited solely to Hélène; though her brother is more actively involved in the plot, his actions are granted a greater ambiguity. Hints that Anatole's feelings for Natasha might have gone beyond simple lust are dropped

[80] Malloy, Suskin, and Eustis, *The Great Comet*, 163-164

throughout the play, and Natasha outright defends him against accusations of his depravity by Pierre.[81] The moment that displays Anatole at his most truly malevolent is when he smiles "the reflection of that base and cringing smile/Which Pierre knew so well in his wife" directly linking Anatole's worst traits to Hélène's, and reiterating her as the story's baseline for immorality.[82]

Natasha, Pierre, & The Great Comet of 1812 suffers from the same central issue as *Hamilton* does, an overall reverence for its source material that translates onstage to an affirmation of that source material's era and the values inherent in that era. What little opportunity Malloy and Chavkin had to employ their progressive would manifest in the artists they chose to bring the play to life, both in the makeup of their creative team, and in their actors onstage.

With Curiosity to the Stage

The casting practices for *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* were as close to color-blind as possible, with the intent of "totally embracing the idea that people of any race can play any character in a show that is not explicitly about race" at the core of the production's philosophy, making for an ensemble that was evenly balanced in its ethnic makeup.[83] Bolstering this mentality was the manner in which the "Prologue" summarized the cast of characters at the very beginning of the play for the audience's benefit:

> Balaga is fun
> Bolkonsky is crazy
> Mary is plain
> Dolokhov is fierce
> Hélène is a slut
> Anatole is hot

[81] Malloy, Suskin, and Eustis, *The Great Comet*, 206
[82] (Ibid., 201).
[83] (Ibid., 177).

Marya's old-school
Sonya's good
Natasha is young
And Andrey isn't here.[84]

In distilling their characters to more archetypal character traits, Malloy and Chavkin were specifically leaning into the idea of the 'best' actor for the role, while also using the concept of the Haunted Stage to inform the audience's impression of the characters. The principal cast for the Broadway production saw actors of color in the roles of Balaga (Paul Pinto), Dolokhov (Manik Choksi, then going by Nick), Hélène (Amber Gray), while white actors played Bolkonsky[85] (Nicholas Belton), Mary (Gelsey Bell), Anatole (Lucas Steele), Marya Dmitryevna (Grace MacLean), and Sonya (Brittain Ashford), the majority of whom had been with the musical throughout its iterations. The split for principal actresses was more uneven in its distribution, with only Hélène and Natasha consistently being played by women of color.

The role of Hélène was performed primarily by Black actresses, most prominently by Amber Gray, who identifies as mixed-race in both the Off-Broadway and Broadway runs of the play, but Natasha's ethnic makeup changed dramatically from Off-Broadway to Broadway, following Phillipa Soo's departure for *Hamilton.* The role of Natasha for both the run at the American Repertory Theater and Broadway was played by a Black actress, Denée Benton. During an appearance on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, Benton, spoke about how much it meant for her, "a dark-skinned Black woman with natural hair, getting to be the center of this love story" and the reaction of a teenage

[84] Malloy, Suskin, and Eustis, *The Great Comet,* 126.

[85] The actor playing Bolkonsky also played Andrey, using the trick of double casting to deepen the connection between father and son.

audience member who had been similarly moved by her presence onstage.[86] She would later revisit that theme via a post on Instagram shortly after she assumed the role of Eliza in *Hamilton:*

> Towards the end of Drama School, the question that we continually got asked by faculty and peers was, "what's your type?". Meaning, what boxes and stereotypes do you fit into as an actor for casting purposes...
> .
> .
> Who knew my answer should've been 18th/19th century aristocracy? #dontputmeinabox #representationmatters
> Natasha And Eliza I will always love you for giving me space to finally feel free and proud in what I bring to the table .
> .
> Interestingly enough, when i got cast in Hamilton, I told about a dozen friends/colleagues in the business before it was announced publicly. And for some reason they'd all blurt out who they assumed I'd be playing before asking me which role I'd been cast as. Only one of them assumed that I'd be playing Eliza. Even based on the roles in my career and the fact that @hamiltonmusical is known for it's choice to cast actors of color based on their essences and what they do well instead of their societal boxes, it was still hard for people to assume that someone like me would be cast as the ingenue. Why you ask?? I'll give you a hint: #colorism (If you don't know what it is, i encourage you to look it up)
> Many ceilings still to shatter. [87]

Benton's comments are a solid example of how modern progressive musicals are inherently conceptual in their casting practices. To simply call them color-blind is to overlook the specific agenda of making space onstage for actors of color, to capture that described feeling of empowerment at seeing an actor of color in a role not normally given to performers of that ethnicity, and, in the case of actors like Benton, to perform parts suited to their strengths, rather than force them into the stereotypical roles designed for their ethnicity.

---

[86] Denée Benton, interview by Stephen Colbert, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, CBS, December 12, 2016.

[87] Benton performed as Eliza from October 20, 2018 and left the show permanently on December 8, 2019. "Hamilton Cast," *Playbill* online*,* accessed December 10, 2019, http://www.playbill.com/personlistpage/person-list?production=00000150-aea8- d936-a7fd-eefc733e0005&type=op#oc.; Benton, "Towards the end of Drama School, the question that we continually got asked by faculty and peers was, "what's your type?".

This is not to say that Malloy and Chavkin were entirely blind to the change in their female lead's ethnicity. There were some cuts made to the libretto between the off-Broadway run and the Broadway one, most notably a section of "Sonya & Natasha" where Natasha had originally called Anatole her master, and herself his slave.[88] The section, performed when Philippa Soo performed the role, was removed specifically because of Benton's casting, in order to avoid creating connotations of the American slave trade, since Anatole was played in all productions by a white actor, Lucas Steele. This edit is one that reveals additional reason against using the term 'color-blind': the reality that text can have a different meaning when spoken by an actor of a specific ethnicity, and that the audience will not be blind to those allusions. This awareness, unfortunately for the musical, would not be as present in its final days.

The End of the World

The means by which *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* would meet its end rest on two major events. The first was the 71st Tony Awards, where, although the musical received twelve Tony Award nominations for the 2016-2017 theatrical season, it claimed only two, Lighting for Bradley King and Set Design for Mimi Lien.[89] The rest of the musical awards were split primarily between *Dear Evan Hansen*, which claimed six, including Best Musical and Best Score, and the revival of *Hello, Dolly* starring Bette Midler. Both these musicals featured substantially less diverse casts than *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812*, and were far more conventional in the stories they were telling, *Dear Evan Hansen* being a coming-of-age story with a broadly modern and

[88] Malloy, Suskin, and Eustis, *The Great Comet*, 177.

[89] "Tony Awards 2017: Complete Winners List," *Variety* online, June 11, 2017, https://variety.com/2017/legit/awards/tony-awards-2017-winners-list-1202461975/.

inspirational score, and *Hello, Dolly!,* a classic musical from the 1960s based on Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker.*[90] Whether or intentional or not, for these two musicals to claim the majority of awards one year after *Hamilton's* veritable sweep reads as an overcorrection. Tony voters had taken 2016 to reward a work that had promoted itself as revolutionary, and in 2017, they opted to reward comparatively safe works of theatre.

The loss at the Tony Awards was not simply a matter of recognizing the work that had gone into *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812,* it was a financial issue as well. Thanks to its vast technical requirements, the show was extremely expensive to run. A larger number of Tony wins might have helped to promote the show and bolster ticket sales, but it is impossible to say whether or not it would have been enough to weather the second contributing factor to the musical's closing: the controversy surrounding the casting of the male lead, Pierre.

The part was originally performed by Dave Malloy in the Off-Broadway and American Repertory Theater runs, and by Josh Groban on Broadway, both of whom are white. While Groban did have some background in musical theatre, his casting was in part about using the Haunted Stage as marketing: as a popular musician with multiple platinum-selling albums, he was perceived by Malloy, Chavkin, and producers Howard and Janet Kagan as a major draw for ticket sales, a name that would draw new interest and generate additional word of mouth.

[90] Steven Levenson, Benj Pasek, and Justin Paul, *Dear Evan Hansen: Through the Window* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2017); Michael Stewart and Jerry Herman, *Hello, Dolly* (New York: Concord Theatricals, 1964).

Groban's involvement was always going to be a limited one, it was announced in February of 2017 that he would leave the production in July.[91] Okieriete Onaodowan, the Black actor who had played the roles of Hercules Mulligan and James Madison in the original Broadway cast of *Hamilton,* was tapped to replace him, officially assuming the role on July 11, 2017, a month after the Tony Awards. With neither a celebrity nor a Best Musical Tony, however, ticket sales had begun to fall, and hoping to raise their profits and keep the show open, the Kagans turned to stunt casting Pierre once again. Their choice was Broadway and television veteran Mandy Patinkin to perform as Pierre. Patinkin's availability was minimal, due to his filming commitments to the television series *Homeland,* and the Kagans made the executive decision to have Patinkin cover a three-week engagement that would have originally been the end of Onaodowan's contract, and to have Onaodowan take those three weeks off, with pay.

The announcement of Patinkin's casting, and how it would affect Onaodowan, was met with a significant backlash, primarily from Black actors within the Broadway community such as Cynthia Erivo and Adrienne Warren, who pointed out that a Black actor was being asked to step aside for a white actor in the name of profitability. Realizing the amount of negative coverage his casting was receiving, Patinkin issued an apology and withdrew from the production, but the damage was done.[92] The production announced on August 8, 2017 that it would close on September 3 of the same year. Onaodowan chose not to remain with the production, and departed on August 13, as he would have if Patinkin had stepped in as planned. The role was instead filled first by understudy Scott Stangland, and then by a returning Dave Malloy for the final

[91] Michael Paulson, "How 'Great Comet' Burned Out," *New York Times*. August 29, 2017, C1.
[92] Michael Paulson, "Patinkin Bows Out of 'Comet,'" *New York Times*. July 29, 2017, C1.

performances. The licensing was made available from Concord Theatricals on February 12, 2020, almost three years after the Broadway production closed its doors, though no major productions were announced before the theatres were shut down.[93]

For the most immediate successor to *Hamilton* to meet its end because of a race-based casting controversy speaks again to the misconceptions fueled by the new form of non-traditional casting pushed by modern progressive musicals. *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* leaned more heavily on the 'color-blind' elements of the blended mode of inclusive casting used by modern progressive musicals, but that inherent inclusivity championed by Malloy and Chavkin mattered only as long as the show could run. In order for the show to run, the Kagans had determined that a white actor was required. As a result, the controversy overshadowed the ambition and innovation which had brought *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* to Broadway in the first place. Given how much common ground the musical shared with *Hamilton,* it might seem that what kept *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* from attaining similar longevity was its lack of a cause to be prominently featured in its text. The next modern progressive musical to appear on Broadway would go further than either of its predecessors, imbuing its central message into every facet of its libretto.

[93] Logan Cullwell-Block, "*Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* Now Available for Professional Licensing," *Playbill* online*,* February 12, 2020, https://www.playbill.com/article/natasha-pierre-the-great-comet-of-1812-now-available-for-professional-licensing.

.

Head Over Heels[94]

Head Over Heels, based in on Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* and the musical catalogs of both The Go-Go's and Belinda Carlisle made its debut at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2015. After undergoing major rewrites for a San Francisco tryout, the play transferred to Broadway in the summer of 2018. Its arrival marked several turning points for the modern progressive musical, most notably in the level of reverence for the text which inspired it. Where *Hamilton* and *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* both sported source materials well-known to the public, even if that was only by reputation, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* lacked the same level of popularity, enough so that its presence in promotional materials was negligible, especially when compared to the musical catalogue being used.

The downplayed importance of Sidney makes sense when one takes into account the number of textual changes to the plot in service of a progressive theme. Jeff Whitty and James Magruder's libretto uses the basic premise of a man in power taking his wife and daughters away from home in order to prevent the fulfilment of prophecies he fears and inadvertently completing them, as a light suggestion.[95] The revised version of the plot places a deliberate focus on the idea of paradise, also known as utopia, and makes specific attempts to draw on the concept of what Jill Dolan terms a queer[96] utopia, "that boundless "no-place" where the social scourges that currently plague us […] might be

[94] This chapter is based in large part upon my paper for a "Race, Gender, and Culture" seminar, which was subsequently converted into a conference paper submitted to the Mid-America Theatre Conference. Samantha Marchiony, *Queer Arcadia: Racial, Gender, and Sexual Politics in Head Over Heels* (In the author's possession, 2019); Samantha Marchiony, *The Problem with Pythio: Progressive Metatextuality versus Regressive Characterization* (In the author's possession, 2020).

[95] *Head Over Heels,* written by Jeff Whitty and James Magruder, dir. Michael Mayer, Hudson Theatre, New York, NY, January 5, 2019.

[96] For the purposes of this critique, "queer" should be taken to mean "deviating in some way from white cisgender heterosexual male."

ameliorated, cured, redressed, solved, never to haunt us again."[97] The changes made are all in service of subverting the tradition of returning to a heteronormative status quo that defined *Arcadia* and other pastoral narratives of the Elizabethan era by diversifying the characters and their romantic pairings and shifting the primary conflict to focus on a battle between tradition and progress.

The paradise of Arcadia is sustained by the Beat, a force of tradition and normative order introduced via the opening number "We Got the Beat," and the possibility of its loss is the primary stake of the play for the perceived protagonist, King Basilius; acting in opposition to Basilius is Pythio, the new Oracle of Delphi, who identifies as non-binary, uses they/them pronouns, has taken up a personal goal "to foster change whereso'er I see fit."[98] Summoning the King with the warning that Arcadia is at risk of losing the Beat, Pythio issues four prophecies in between verses of the song, "Vision of Nowness":

> "Thy younger daughter brings a liar to bed.
> He thou shalt forbid; she he'll then assume!
> Thy elder daughter will consent to wed;
> She'll consummate her love — but with no groom.
> Thou with thy wife, adult'ry shall commit […]
> This fourth and last prophecy is crucial:
> You will meet and make way for a better King."[99]

The prophecies come with the caveat that a flag will drop as each one is fulfilled, and that preventing even one will thwart their predicted end of Arcadia's beat and the accompanying chaos. Intending to avoid the possibility of seeing the prophecies fulfilled, Basilius opts to take his family, along with much of his court, on a trip through the forest

[97] Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the "Utopian Performative"" *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 3 (2001), 455-479.

[98] *Head Over Heels,* Whitty and Magruder*,* I.i.

[99] (Ibid.*,* I.ii).

on a fabricated hunt for a golden stag, delayed briefly by the attempted proposal of the shepherd, Musidorus, to Basilius' younger daughter, Philoclea. Basilius commands his daughter to refuse and the court sets off.

Undeterred by this rejection, Musidorus follows them into the forest and encounters Pythio, who persuades him to cast aside his previous identity in favor of an Amazonian drag persona, Cleophila. This single action in turn proves the catalyst for completing all four prophecies. Musidorus reveals himself to Philoclea, and the two consummate their love in secret, while elder daughter Pamela realizes her homosexuality thanks to the disguise and pairs off with her handmaiden, Mopsa. The predicted adultery is a bed trick that results from both Basilius and his Queen, Gynecia, become infatuated with Cleophila, the latter having learned the Amazon's masculine secret, though not his identity.

The three couples converge in the second act, with Musidorus' true identity being revealed and provoking Basilius to a murderous rage, as he assumes the shepherd to be the better King of the fourth prophecy. Realizing his mistake only after Musidorus is killed, Basilius relinquishes the crown to his wife, and the Beat is indeed lost. The loss is short lived, as Gynecia's first act as monarch is to create a new, more progressive Beat, one which brings forth the golden stag and revives Musidorus. Pythio then returns to tie up the last few loose ends, revealing their previous identity as Mira, the mother of Mopsa and spouse of Basilius' manservant, Dametas, gone into exile for Dametas' refusal to accept their changing identity. Dametas repents his wrongdoings, and the children all officially come out to their elders, Musidorus now identifying as genderfluid and interested in retaining his Cleophila identity. With all the couples now formed, the cast

returns to Arcadia, where Pythio delivers the final moral of the play, a rumination on the nature of change, and its inevitability.

No True Paradise

The queer utopia of *Head Over Heels* is, when compared to the real world, a very easily attained one. It has been written as a place where systemic prejudices inherent in archaic tradition are not ingrained and can easily be left behind without lasting negative repercussions. There is also no true villain of the play, as Basilius is shown to be a misguided but well-intentioned fool, and the harm he does is quickly undone, while Dametas' rejection of Pythio's new identity, which is treated more as an individual instance than a systemic problem, is forgiven. every coming out moment that the audience sees performed is met with loving acceptance, affirmation, and reciprocation.

Examination of the libretto for *Head Over Heels* gives the impression that, as with *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812*, the writing process skewed towards being 'color-blind' as mentions of skin color and race are omitted from the text, in the interest of casting the 'best' actor. Since it acknowledged members of the marginalized community both in its audience and its cast, it occupies a theoretical middle ground between *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* and *Hamilton,* moving deeper into the concept than a broad assessment that 'representation matters,' but not so explicit as "American then, by America now." Whether or not it should be considered representation is up for debate owing to the fact that it is trying to depict a queer utopia.

The overall tone of both the script and the final production demonstrate more clearly the flaw in that was first highlighted in the casting controversy for *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812*: 'blind' writing allows for privileged creators to

perpetuate the advantages of their ethnography while claiming to be progressive. The issue is not the bodies on stage, but rather the bodies shaping the performance, and that privilege goes as far back as the source material. *Head Over Heels* is based on a text written by a privileged white man for a privileged white woman, all about the romantic entanglements of privileged white people, and its adaptors are similarly privileged white men. In addition to Whitty and Magruder as librettists, the remainder of the creative team is comprised completely of white cisgender men: Michael Mayer directing, Spencer Liff choreographing, and Tom Kitt as music supervisor. Regardless of what their sexualities may be, all of them inherently benefit from the privilege their ethnography affords them, which in turn influences the production. This should not be considered a preventative factor, as all of them have the capability to act as allies, but the homogeny of the group perpetuates dominance of the perspective the text is meant to subvert.

Outside of Sidney's *Arcadia,* the text to which *Head Over Heels* owes its greatest debt is Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, which was instrumental in popularizing the notion of gender as stylized actions which are repeatedly performed rather than inherent biological qualities within feminist theory.[100] With a well-known drag artist in the cast, and a character literally engaging in drag onstage, the aspect of Butler's text most relevant to *Head Over Heels* is in her assessment of how drag interacts with those performed actions by taking them to the most hyperbolic extremes and often crossing the line into parody; this part of her theory drives the majority of the play's gender-related

[100] Judith, Butler *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* (New York: Routledge, 1990). EPUB.

comedy, best embodied in the musical number "This Old Feeling," performed by Basilius and Gynecia about Musidorus as the bed trick is inadvertently arranged.[101]

The staging of this number, which displays the disguised Musidorus engaging in the exaggerated performance of both male and female stereotypes of attractiveness, highlights how arbitrary these stereotypes are, the gestures growing increasingly heightened until Musidorus is forced to switch rapidly between the two extremes in order to accommodate the two different perceptions of his gender. The actions are meant purely for the benefit of the audience as a representation of Basilius and Gynecia's perceptions of Musidorus, rather than how the character literally acts in everyday interactions. Although the number comes relatively late in the play's run time, its inclusion encapsulates the gender norms that begin the play and gives the audience a sense of the progression for the way Arcadia's dynamics have evolved since the beginning of the play.

While the gender and sexual politics of Arcadia is updated to resonate with a modern audience, the plot still adheres to many of the tropes associated with Elizabethan pastoral comedies. Besides the drag plot and the bed trick, *Head Over Heels'* most prominent connection to its source material's genre is the returned to a status quo through the formation of couples.[102] Even if the bodies that comprise these couples are not heteronormative, the act itself is, given how prominently marriage has been used as means of asserting power over the disenfranchised by the most privileged coalitions to

[101] Butler, *Gender Trouble*; *Head Over Heels,* Whitty and Magruder, II.ii.

[102] Though no ceremony takes place, Pamela and Philoclea have a costume change into white gowns for the curtain call, implied to be wedding dresses; *Head Over Heels,* Whitty and Magruder .

the point where it is codified as a happy ending, and the play continues this veneration of marriage as a desirable resolution.[103]

The power in presenting queerness as normal does exist, but it is the broadest possible application of that power. There are plus-size lesbians in interracial relationships in reality, there are non-binary people of color who enjoy drag, and there are those were only just discovering their identities, but the systemic oppression that they face cannot be eradicated simply by handing leadership over to someone else. Removing these real-world dynamics from their context has as much potential to be dangerous as it does to empower.

There are other telling signs of heteronormative influence throughout the play—Spencer Liff's choreography incorporates voguing, which originated in Harlem drag balls during the 1960s, but often reverts to male-female pairings for dances involving couples, a testament just as much to the heteronormativity of musical theatre as an industry. Similarly, three of the four couples featured in the finale could be interpreted as presenting heterosexuality, despite two of those pairings include a partner who expresses a queer identity, since the bodies representing them present as male and female. The one pairing that is irrefutably queer is the same-sex pairing of Pamela and Mopsa, played by Bonnie Milligan and Taylor Iman Jones respectively.

Turn to You

Pamela and Mopsa were featured in the bulk of publicity for the queer elements in *Head Over Heels,* and theirs is the relationship most explicitly aligned with a traditional narrative surrounding a discovery of sexual identity. The discovery is specifically

[103] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980), 631-660.

Pamela's, as Mopsa is presented as having already been aware of her own lesbianism, but even before the two are officially a couple, both characters are marked by a level of queerness in their depictions.

Milligan, a plus-sized white actress, originated the role of Pamela at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and is the only principal cast member to be retained through the play's evolution, making her the definitive performer. Though Pamela's size is not directly mentioned in the text, it is a key aspect of the character, with the comedy built around her personality, most notably her vanity, rather than her physical appearance. This, however, requires that the audience already be 'in on the joke,' as it were, since the majority of the humor surrounding her looks involves juxtaposing her with the 'plain' Philoclea, played by a more conventional ingenue, Alexandra Socha, in the Broadway production. Even if the ending message is that beauty is subjective, the text still creates a situation where it is debatable whether the audience is laughing with Pamela or at her. In his review of the musical for *The New York Times,* theatre critic Ben Brantley opted for the latter, referring to Milligan's casting as "provocative," implicitly highlighting her size.[104] The same review deliberately and flippantly misgendered Pythio, causing a backlash so severe that Brantley had to issue an apology to the transgender and nonbinary communities for his comments, and the online version of review had to be amended to include more respectful language.[105] He did not include Milligan in his proffered apology, nor make any edits to retract his description of her. In response, Milligan chose to turn the

[104] Ben Brantley, "Review: Ye Olde Go-Go's Songs Hit the Renaissance in 'Head Over Heels'" *New York Times*, July 26 2018, C1.

[105] Ben Brantley and New York Times Communications. "Here is Ben Brantley's response to the conversation surrounding his review of "Head Over Heels"..." Twitter, photograph and text with link, July 27, 2018, https://twitter.com/NYTimesPR/status/1022864714525749248.

microaggression into a talking point when discussing the message of "that finding your true authenticity, and embracing it, can lead to such joy" within the show with other news outlets.[106]

Beyond the more caustic assessment of viewers like Brantley, there are some problematic issues surrounding the vocal design of Pamela's part: she is, primarily, a belter, and the role is designed to show off its performer's capability as such. Philoclea receives the opportunity to show off a more classically trained soprano range in "Good Girl"[107], while Pamela's most analogous moment is the pop-influenced riff she shares with Mopsa in "Automatic Rainy Day."[108] The result is that, while Pamela's narrative is a major departure from other narratives featuring plus-sized women because she is already confident in her beauty and needs to learn love for others rather than love for herself, her musical characterization goes largely unchanged for her body type.

The same principles that apply to the jokes surrounding Pamela's body also applied to her sexuality, not helped by the fact that her sexual awakening is seemingly triggered by the appearance of Musidorus in drag. Her being a lesbian was already guaranteed by the prophecy stating that she would not have a groom, but to have the catalyst be a male body undercuts the validity of her identity. The jokes are working in part due to dramatic irony, given that the audience knows Musidorus to be male, but within the world of the play, Pamela does not make this discovery until long after she has been rejected by him and subsequently paired off with Mopsa. This is not an implausible

[106] Bonnie Milligan and Karl Saint Lucy, "Bonnie Milligan Leads Lesbian and Plus-Sized Representation on Broadway as Pamela in 'Head Over Heels,'" *INTO,* August 17, 2018, https://www.intomore.com/culture/bonnie-milligan-leads-lesbian-and-plus-sized-representation-on-broadway-as-pamela-in-head-over-heels.

[107] *Head Over Heels,* Whitty and Magruder*,* I.v.

[108] (Ibid., I.viii).

scenario to imagine in reality, but in a theatrical context, it creates subtext with regards to Pamela's character, prompting the question of whether she truly cares about Mopsa, or simply reciprocated the first person to validate her identity and attraction.

Arcadia at the start of the play is a society entrenched in heterosexuality, though more benignly ignorant then willfully queerphobic, as evidenced by Pamela's exclamation of "O brave New World that has such people in't" at the sight of what she believes to be another lesbian couple kissing.[109] This furthers the implication that she might have thought Mopsa was her only viable partner, an assumption which is dramatically accurate, if not accurate to the world of the play itself. The relatively small size of the principal cast practically mandates that every character has one possible partner with whom they will end up, and Pamela's options are further limited by most of that cast being related to her by blood, or else already married, as revealed by Pythio. Thus, Mopsa and Musidorus are her only possible partners, and Musidorus' relationship with Philoclea rules him out as a possibility before it was even hinted that Pamela might be a lesbian.

Mopsa presents similarly conflicting messaging: as a character unto herself, her primary function is to act as a foil to other characters in most scenes, either through providing the setup for punchlines, or delivering her own witticisms, a riff on the comedically witty servants of the Elizabethan period, but also to the archetype of gay best friends, similarly depicted as prone to verbal barbs. She is also somewhat visually separated from the other principal cast members that make up the Arcadian court. This is due both to Taylor Iman Jones being the only Black cast member of that specific group,

[109] *Head Over Heels,* Whitty and Magruder, II.iii.

and to the visual design of her costume. Comprised of tall black boots, yellow stockings, a short pale blue dress, and a patterned dark blue vest with purple feathered epaulets, the outfit exists somewhere between traditional masculinity and femininity. It is the least historical of the courtiers' costumes and marks her as an 'othered' presence as much as her race does: seeing Iman Jones in such an ensemble signals to the audience that she is somehow divergent from the other principal actors.

When her relationship with Pamela is incorporated, this queer coding becomes increasingly problematic. When her romantic interests are first brought up, she dismisses the possibility of her having time for such things in favor of tending to Pamela's needs. A later scene that incorporates increasingly sapphic and bawdy poetry from Pamela, sees Mopsa attempting to express her feelings, only to be rejected and choosing to leave Pamela's service to sojourn on the island of Lesbos. The revelation of her attraction to Pamela invokes undertones of a predatory lesbian archetype, suggesting that she was only staying in Arcadia specifically because she was seeking a relationship with Pamela, reinforced when she returns from Lesbos to be rewarded with Pamela now reciprocating her feelings.

Whitty and Magruder avoid the worst of the predatory lesbian trope by clearly having Pamela realize her sexuality on her own terms, but their connection is still cheapened by the narrative framing. Once the couple has been formed, Mopsa might as well be attached to Pamela, and their personalities become secondary to their relationship with one another. This is an issue highlighted by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)'s media litmus test, named after queer activist Vito Russo.[110]

[110] "The Vito Russo Test," *Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation* online, August 20, 2013, https://www.glaad.org/sri/2014/vitorusso.

While developed for film criticism, two of the test's key tenants hinge on the idea that queer characters should be both identifiable as queer, while not solely being defined by that queer identity, and the characters of Pamela and Mopsa reflect this issue succinctly. Onstage, the performances of the actresses elevate the material into more nuanced roles, but their sexual orientation remains at the forefront of their characterization, turning their presence into superficial inclusion rather than deeper representation within the written text.

A Vision of Now

If Pamela and Mopsa's characterization suffered from the superficiality of promoting their queerness, the character of Pythio is an infinitely more complicated one to reconcile with such dynamics. First added during the San Francisco tryout, the role plays heavily to the strengths of the performer who first played the role, Peppermint, a Black transgender woman and drag artist best known as a former contestant on *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Peppermint made history as the first openly transgender performer to originate a principal role on Broadway, and the decision to cast her is more in-line either with societal casting, while also making use of Carlson's Haunted Stage to evoke specific associations for the audience.

Having a Black transgender woman, a member of the demographic most likely to be murdered for their queerness onstage, acting as the architect of the change in Arcadia's social order, provided two options for metatextual allusions for this casting choice.[111] The more political interpretation would tie the part to works like *Paris is Burning, Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria,* and *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*,

[111] Jenna Tomei and Robert J. Cramer, "Legal Policies in Conflict: The Gay Panic Defense and Hate Crime Legislation," *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice* 16, no. 4 (2016), 217-235.

all documentations of the queer rights activism movement of the twentieth century that was largely led by transgender women, especially transgender women of color.[112] The catch with such influences is that they all deal heavily with violence, namely protests and marches that were met with responses from the police, elements at odd with the heavily pastoral world of Arcadia and the Go-Go's generally upbeat catalogue of songs. In service of the less serious tone of their source materials, Whitty and Magruder's writing, as well as Mayer's direction, opted instead to draw on the influences of their second option: the modern culture of drag with which Peppermint was already associated from her time on *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

Despite speaking largely in the same blank verse as the rest of the cast, Pythio's speech is marked by specific phrases like "Mister Man," and "thou better workest," often playing to the audience as they say these lines with broad, stylized gesticulations that are evocative of Butler's concepts of drag as parodying gender performance.[113] As with Mopsa, their biological daughter, Pythio's wardrobe signals to their queer identity, setting them apart visually from the Renaissance-inspired costumes of the other characters with dramatic makeup, multiple wigs, silver lamé, and sleeveless gowns with thigh-high slits that would not be out of place at a modern drag ball.

The experience of seeing Peppermint perform the role in person further reinforces this anachronistic influence; her every entrance and witticism would prompt screams of delight and applause from the adoring fans in the audience, briefly transforming the

---

[112] *Paris is Burning*, directed by Jennie Livingston (1990; Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate, 2005), DVD; *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*, directed by Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman (2005; San Francisco, CA: Kanopy Streaming, 2016), digital streaming, https://www.kanopy.com/product/screaming-queens; *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*, directed by David France (2017; Los Gatos, CA: Netflix, 1997), digital streaming, https://www.netflix.com/title/80189623.

[113] *Head Over Heels,* Whitty and Magruder*,* I.ii, II.ii; Butler, *Gender Trouble.*

Hudson Theatre into an atmosphere more reminiscent of a drag ball, or the television program that provided Peppermint with those fans.[114] They understand the importance of the moment they are witnessing, and react vocally at every opportunity, but the minimal amount of inclusion the character is given in the action of the plot, and the way that inclusion is used, make this adoration undeserved.

Pythio's involvement in the narrative come off as a plot device in the service of others, rather than their own desires. Their part in Musidorus' disguising invokes the performativity of a makeover show, and a variation on the archetype of the queer best friend, which infantilizes and objectifies them, using their wisdom and experience in order to prop up the journey of more normative characters while depicting the queer person as sexless.[115] Without Pythio pushing him towards the Cleophila disguise, Musidorus might not have discovered his own level of gender fluidity, but this is rendered somewhat moot by the fact that the character was played by Andrew Durand, a performer who presents as a cisgender male, for the Broadway run. Thus, both his eventual coupling with Philoclea and the bed-trick that revives the marriage of Basilius and Gynecia has the subtextual implication that it is the job of the queer person to assist the formation of couples that present as heterosexual.

The failure to expand Pythio's contribution to the story beyond their facilitation of the prophecies creates a situation where Pythio's actions lean dangerously close to the tropes of the Magical Negro, a Black character whose function it is within the narrative to act as support for leading white characters, rather than seek their own narrative

[114] Butler, *Gender Trouble.*

[115] Hannah Frith, Jayne Raisborough, and Orly Klein, "C'mon girlfriend: Sisterhood, sexuality and the space of the benign in makeover TV," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 5 (2010), 471–89.

fulfillment. Heartwarming as it might be to see Dametas apologize and accept Pythio's identity, it reinforces the importance of a white man's approval for the validity of queer identity and is more about providing Dametas with absolution for his mistakes and offering him a resolution to his character. It also overshadows the only interaction between the characters of color in the play and puts the focus back on a white character. Given the 'color-blind' quality of the libretto, it might have been possible to make an argument that such a faux pas had been unintentional, but the intersection between queerness and race is one that cannot and should not be overlooked.

As previously mentioned, Ben Brantley was criticized for his mocking of Pythio's nonbinary identity, and the fact that he made the error in the first place speaks to a failure on behalf of the show to effectively impart their message and allow Pythio, and by extension, Peppermint, to exist beyond their gender and sexual identity. As the primary conceit of *Head Over Heels* is playing with the tropes and stock characters that comprised its source material, the failure to expand Pythio as a character beyond archetypes is that much more noticeable. Pythio is a more obvious example of the issues raised by the Vito Russo Test, as they are defined entirely by their qualities which influence the plot: their powers and their queerness. They do not exist outside these traits, but in practice, this superficial characterization was eclipsed by the performative metatextual elements that casting Peppermint afforded the production. The result is that directly conflicting characterizations are found in a single performance. The archetypal Oracle, the half-realized Pythio, and Peppermint herself clash in such a way that they cannot be disentangled from each other, doing a disservice to the groups that the character was meant to represent. Without a queer community of color, Pythio is reduced

to a supporting player, propping up the narratives of the white, more privileged people around them rather than leading their own, even as they see their goal of a more tolerant, progressive Arcadia realized, and reunite with Dametas and Mopsa.

What May Endure, We Now Create

Within the context of improving diversity in commercial theatre, *Head Over Heels* can be both recognized as groundbreaking and examined as a failure. For those to consider theatre and entertainment at large to be a form of escapism, a kind of safe space, the queer utopia offered by the play functions a refuge, thought experiment, or indulgence, making it understandable why people with queer identities might be interested in such a work. There is subtextual merit in the actions of clearly displaying explicitly queer characters onstage, and presenting them in a context that acknowledges, validates, celebrates, and normalizes their identities, the overall messages are hampered most by a book that is on the whole, unwilling to have a more concentrated message than 'times change, all identities and orientations matter and should be accepted.' The queer utopia that *Head Over Heels* offers unquestionably commits to Jill Dolan's concept of a utopia as a no-place: it does not reflect the reality of the queer experience in the twenty-first century and opts for a wish fulfillment paradise.

For the purposes of enacting meaningful change, this form of queer utopia which *Head Over Heels* offers has very little substance that could be considered productive. This is due in large part to a lack of intersectionality, due by the homogenous ethnography of the creative team.[116] Without taking into account how race and gender

[116] Kimberlé Crenshaw, (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: vol 1989, no. 1, article 8.

intersect with sexuality to create different experiences, the libretto of *Head Over Heels* becomes an example of what Cathy J. Cohen termed coalition politics, wherein the most privileged members of a disenfranchised group are the ones whose voices become the loudest in representation of that group.[117] The tone and approach to queer identity is too clumsily and inconsistently handled, and the inherent privilege and lack of intersectionality in the creative team shaping the piece prevents it from realizing its full queer potential and making impactful commentary beyond the most obvious goals of any disenfranchised group: acceptance.

Playing its final performance on January 6, 2019, *Head Over Heels*' Broadway closing was not due to any scandal or controversy, but the simple reality of not being financially viable enough to merit a continued run at the Hudson Theatre. It received no Tony nominations, nor has any mention of professional revivals or productions outside of the United States been announced since closing, only the news of the performance rights being made available through Broadway Licensing on January 14, 2019.[118] The licensing agreements allow a greater insight into the conception of characters as seen by its creative team: only Pythio has the explicit listing of "Performer isn't limited to gender identity and ethnicity" on their casting notice, while the seven other principal roles are listed along the normative gender binary of male and female.[119]

The true weakness of *Head Over Heels* is its reliance on a presumably progressive-minded audience supplying their own metatext to bridge that final gap and

---

[117] Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997), 437-465.

[118] Head Over Heels (HOHMusical), "We are saddened our time on Broadway has come to an end, but the beat lives on! Head Over Heels is now available for licensing…" Twitter, text with image and link, January 14, 2019, https://twitter.com/HOHmusical/status/1084928299757944838?s=20.

[119] "Head Over Heels," *Broadway Licensing*, January 14, 2019, https://broadwaylicensing.com/shows/broadway/head- over-heels/#casting.

fill in the blanks of the queer utopia created by Whitty and Magruder's libretto, acting on confirmation biases. While the queer roles created have the potential to be a boon for queer and nonbinary actors, the play as a whole is yet another manifest of broad reassurances, a veneration of its imagined world rather than demonstrating the materials' applications in the reality which created it. Like *Hamilton,* and *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* before it, *Head Over Heels'* greatest failings as a work of progressivism are grounded in a tone that celebrates its central story. It would not be until March of 2019 that Broadway would see a modern progressive musical willing to present a world order that could not be so easily fixed.

Hadestown

Originally conceived by folk songwriter Anaïs Mitchell in 2006, *Hadestown* was built upon a foundation of Greek mythology— namely the myths of the seasons being caused by the marriage of Hades and Persephone and the quest of the musician Orpheus into the Underworld to bring back his beloved, Eurydice— and carry critiques of capitalism and the continuing climate crisis, brought on by the 2004 re-election of George W. Bush.[120] Mitchell debuted a staged version of the musical in Vermont in 2006, then developed it into a concept album released in 2010; the path to Broadway began in 2012 when Mitchell recruited Rachel Chavkin to help her develop and expand the musical, running first at the New York Theatre Workshop in 2016, then in Edmonton and London, before finally making the transfer to Broadway's Walter Kerr Theatre in March 2019.[121] At the time of the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown, *Hadestown* was still running on Broadway, though whether or not it will reopen when it is safe to do so remains to be seen.

Hadestown built on the foundation of *Head Over Heels* in its integration of its message into the text, but it also marked another major turning point for the genre of modern progressive musicals in its willingness to play with the setting of that text. Prior

[120] David Browne, "The Hell With Broadway: The Story of Anais Mitchell's 'Hadestown,'" *Rolling Stone,* June 1, 2019, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/broadway-hadestown-best- musical-tony-anais-mitchell-842447/.

[121] Brent Hallenbeck, "'Hadestown' 2016: Anais Mitchell's 'Hadestown' reborn off- Broadway," *Burlington Free Press* online*,* published May 24, 2016; last modifed April 16, 2019, https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/2019/04/16/anais-mitchells-hadestown-reborn-off-broadway/84198858/; Andrew Gans, "Edmonton's Citadel Theatre Will Stage Broadway-Aimed Hadestown Musical," *Playbill,* Febraury 7, 2017, https://www.playbill.com/article/edmontons-citadel-theatre-will-stage-broadway- aimed-hadestown-musical.; Andy Lefkowitz, "Acclaimed Musical Hadestown to Play Broadway in 2019; London Run Announced," Broadway.Com, April 19, 2018, https://www.broadway.com/buzz/191866/acclaimed-musical-hadestown-to-play- broadway-in-2019-london-run-announced/.

to *Hadestown,* modern progressive musicals were consistently grounded in the native context of their primary sources: the American Revolution, Russia in 1812, and the abstractly pastoral world of Elizabethan comedies. Though all productions of *Hadestown* had borrowed heavily from modern aesthetics, the final production on Broadway is specifically grounded in the imagery of the American Great Depression to create its atmosphere of a post-apocalyptic dystopia. Together with the deliberately anti-capitalist messages of the text, the result deeply invokes the idea of epic theatre pioneered by German theatre artist, Bertolt Brecht.

Brecht's work is dominated by notions of theatre as a medium for activism, bolstered by his growing affinity for Marxism as a political philosophy.[122] Epic theatre, also known as Marxist theatre, is the most commonly used umbrella term for Brecht's signature style in both aesthetics— "the use of a spare stage, white lighting, half curtain, masks, emblematic props, selectively authentic costume, tableaux, and acting style"— and in dramatic content which put social themes at the forefront of the text, with the greater goal of alienating the audience to spur them to greater action by making them actively engage with the events onstage, rather than passively observing.[123] Simply by existing in the heavily commercialized and glamourized environment of Broadway theatre, *Hadestown'*s relationship to Brecht's principles operates at a distance, keeping those themes which would qualify it for full epic theatre status as supporting elements of its story.

[122] Peter Thomson. "Brecht's Lives," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. Peter Thomson and Sacks Glendyr, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 22-39.

[123] Peter Brooker. "Key words in Brecht's theory and practice of theatre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. Peter Thomson and Sacks Glendyr, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 213.

Working on a Song

Somewhat in keeping with its Underworld-centric source material, *Hadestown* is a very literally haunted production, keenly aware of its identity as both a piece of theatre and a familiar story. The primary plot is presented in the style of a story being told by Hermes and the chorus, in the style of oral traditions, and in his capacity as the narrator, Hermes is constantly editorializing to the audience. The song "Road to Hell," which both opens and closes the play, refers to the story as a "song," one which the company is dedicated to telling repeatedly, in the hopes that the story might one day change, while reminding the audience of the story's nature as a fiction.[124] The cyclical nature of the story is also present in the majority of Mitchell's score, with many of the chorus-based numbers having repetitive phrases and leitmotifs, often based in call-and-response as part of the oral tradition presentation. The format, overall, is one that more actively breaks the fourth wall and engages the audiences, but stops short of the full-on alienation that would be in keeping with Brecht's preferred applications of the techniques.[125] Mitchell and Chavkin, along with the rest of their creative team, are effectively using Brecht's tools without following his instructions to create their own style of theatre.

Mitchell's messages about the relationship between capitalism and the climate crisis are designed to be both explicit and notably grim in correspondence to reality. Seasons manifest in the extreme and are thrown out of balance as Persephone's visits to the surface are cut short by Hades, and the Underworld itself becomes an industrialized dictatorship operated and fueled by the souls of the dead as a result of its King's

[124] Anaïs Mitchell, *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*, recorded 2019, Sing It Again, digital release.

[125] Brooker, "Key words in Brecht," (2006).

bitterness. As a character, Hades is not necessarily a true villain, but he is certainly the primary antagonist, and that position is due entirely to his commitment to his destructive and exploitative behaviors.[126] This is most evident in "Why We Build the Wall," a song that serves as his capitalist manifesto: providing the dead with busy work and a false narrative of security that he offers them against poverty and other imagined enemy scapegoats in order to enrich himself.[127] In the administration of Donald Trump, the idea of a wall as a symbol gained greater political meaning, though Mitchell objects to comparisons between Trump and Hades, considering Hades to be a more complex figure than the 45th President.[128]

Contrasting the Underworld's industrialism is the idealism and artistic sensitivity of Orpheus, who is presented as the one character in the story who is able to envision a world other than the nightmarish one that currently exists. His naïveté is crucial in wooing the wandering Eurydice, introduced as a pragmatic survivalist, and though he does win her love, her needs do not change. Her death is altered from the tragic accidental snakebite of the original myth to a choice that she makes when Hades, preying on her hunger and desperation, offers her an escape from poverty in his kingdom. Because of this change, Orpheus' journey into the Underworld, while still a quest for love, also becomes fuel for an Underworld uprising as he questions Hades' exploitation of the world. The attempt to lead Eurydice back to the world of the living thus becomes a rallying point for all the shades of the dead whose labor Hades exploits. His failure to

[126] Mitchell, *Hadestown*.
[127] (Ibid.)
[128] Browne, "The Hell With Broadway."

bring her back to life translates as a failure to liberate those who were following them, and the cycle resumes as Hermes promises that the story will be told again and again.

Hades and Orpheus function not just as the primary opposing ideologies in Mitchell's speculations about whether or not artists might be able to change the world in the face of capitalist corruption, but as subtextual opponents in masculine attitudes. Ruled by toxic, destructive choices, Hades is a character that perceives everything, but especially women, as property, and he objectifies the female characters in such terms throughout the play. Orpheus, by contrast, is defined by a soft-spoken, earnest demeanor, and heavily implied to be neurodivergent, or "touched," as Hermes puts it, but that emotional honesty is what makes him dangerous to the system of power in the Underworld, his bond with Eurydice inspiring others to seek out similar connections and stand united against their oppressor.[129]

It is here that the libretto of *Hadestown* builds on the failures of its predecessors, reflecting upon the reality of the world outside the safe space of the theatre, setting its appeal in the emotion of Mitchell's score to draw viewers further into the story, in contrast with the broadly inspirational style of previous modern progressive musicals. While not alienating, it draws close to the idea of activist engagement inherent in the concepts of epic theatre which Brecht espoused; Through the predatory behavior of its antagonist, the play provides the audience with means to recognize the powers and tactics of corrupted capitalist systems by creating an isolationist environment that sets people against one another. What stops the text from realizing its full potential as a work of

[129] Mitchell, *Hadestown*.

either epic theatre is the lack of a payoff that would see the disenfranchised ensemble reclaiming their power from their oppressor.

Though the characters recognize the mistreatment and subjugation they endure at the hands of Hades, they still accept his conditions and play by his rules, thus failing to break the system. Despite the strong themes about the destructive nature of capitalism within the play, the tragedy of the story is more focused on the doomed romance, and is still subject to a level of idealism, best represented by the toast to "the world we dream about, and the one we live in now" offered by Orpheus in the first act's "Livin' It Up On Top" and in the plea to "show the way the world could be" in the second act's reprise of "Wait For Me," sung by the souls following Orpheus and Eurydice out of the Underworld.[130] The eventual failure of Orpheus and subsequent reset to the start of the story leaves the audience without a conclusion to its political thesis statement, focusing instead on offering closure for the emotional stakes through reassurances of the story continuing. Ending the play with a hopeful sentiment despite the tragic events which form the climax, mirrors the conclusions of both *Hamilton* and *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* in the implicit need to provide an ultimately reassurance to their audiences. It is this need that prevents *Hadestown* from fully realizing its potential as epic theatre, a refusal to take the final step into synthesizing all the elements of its performance into a cohesive message which can serve as a call to action.

The World We Live In Now

In addition to Chavkin as director, the Broadway production of *Hadestown* has additional overlap with *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* in a shared lighting

[130] Mitchell, *Hadestown*.

designer, Bradley James King, and actress Amber Gray in the role of Persephone.[131] Even if the name of their previous Broadway collaboration was not directly invoked, the ghost of *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* certainly was, and in observing *Hadestown*'s journey to Broadway, there are points that appear to be Chavkin attempting to reckon with the circumstances which ended her last show on Broadway, and make improvements where she could.

While all the roles of *Hadestown* are technically written to allow for color-blind casting, the breakdown for Broadway production reads as having a more specifically motivated turn than that of Chavkin's previous foray into modern progressive musicals, *Natasha, Pierre, & The Great Comet of 1812.* Of all the roles available, only two are cast with white actors: Orpheus and Hades, played by Reeve Carney and Patrick Page respectively.[132] These choices create a metatextual commentary on privilege and exploitation: Hermes (André De Shields) and Persephone (Amber Gray), both played by actors with Black ancestry, have little power when compared to Hades, and must exert their influence in softer ways, or else reluctantly comply with him.[133] The casting of Orpheus is more complicated, as his whiteness gives him a privilege of idealism that Eurydice, played by Filipina-Mexican descended Eva Noblezada, cannot afford, but he is also positioned as the one person who has the potential to upset the Underworld's dystopia, giving him the potential to be read as a white savior character.[134]

[131] "Hadestown" *Playbill* online, March 22, 2019 https://playbill.com/production/hadestown-walter-kerr-theatre-2018-2019

[132] (Ibid.)

[133] (Ibid.)

[134] (Ibid.)

Though the libretto of Hadestown is constructed as colorblind, the cast which made it to Broadway has now become definitive, in particular André De Shields. Drawing upon his own experiences as a Black queer man to build the characterization of Hermes, De Shields claimed the character for himself and other queer people, invoking the idea of theatre as a haven for the 'other,' suggesting that the phrase "touched by the gods" had similar applications to other euphemisms for queerness.[135] This interpretation also avoids the issues that *Head Over Heels* faced with a Black queer performer thanks to Hermes' role as the unofficial master of ceremonies— though he does not exert control within the story being told, he commands the attention of both the players and the audience in his position as the person telling the story, placing the power back in his hands. De Shields' portrayal of Hermes earned him a Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical, one of eight wins which *Hadestown* claimed out of fourteen nominations, including Best Musical.[136]

Though the play does not explicitly focus on themes of feminism or female empowerment, Chavkin used her win for Best Direction of a Musical as an opportunity to point out that she was the sole woman in her category, something which had also been true in 2017, and to call out the theatre industry for failing to give women and artists of color the opportunity to succeed.[137] In an interview with *Vanity Fair* following the win, she acknowledged her own relatively high privilege as a cisgender white woman, one that

[135] Naveen Kumar, "Queeroes 2019: André De Shields and Jeremy O. Harris on the Divinity of Otherness," *them,* June 25, 2019, https://www.them.us/story/queeroes-2019-jeremy-o-harris-andre-de-shields.

[136] Peter Libbey, "2019 Tony Award Winners: Full List," *New York Times*, June 9, 2019, C2.

[137] Benjamin Lindsay, "By Calling for Women on Broadway, Rachel Chavkin Isn't Asking for a Favor, She's Offering One," *Vanity Fair* online, June 10, 2019, https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2019/06/women-on-broadway-rachel-chavkin-tonys.; "Tony Awards 2017," *Variety*.

she shares with Mitchell, and one which impacts the performance of femininity within the play.[138]

Although all the principal female characters are played by women of color, none of them redefined their characters and imbued them with their own identity in the manner which De Shield did Hermes. The three Fates, played by Kay Trinidad, Jewelle Blackman, and Yvette Gonzalez-Nacer, are all women in accordance with the original myths, but that gender identity reads as arbitrary in practice. For the purposes of the play-within-a-play, the primary function of the characters is as voices "singing in the back of your mind," an artistic choice which prevents them from developing as characters in their own right as they give voice to the inner monologues and doubts of other characters.[139] Because the trio adapts to whichever character they are interacting with, their gender performativity operates with a level of fluidity, manifested in the way their language changes from character to character. This flexibility aids in reinforcing their position as a more universally applicable experience, an influence felt by all characters within the world of the play regardless of gender, but does little to advance the representation of women, especially women of color.

Eurydice and Persephone, the two female characters who are given clear personalities and arcs, face issues in the limitations of their development being tied to their relationships with Orpheus and Hades. Eurydice, first presented as a pragmatist, is given an arc of overcoming her survivalist tendencies in favor of the more romantic notions of Orpheus' idealism after being deceived and exploited by Hades. Though the text explicitly does not shame her for the initial choice to enter the Underworld on the

[138] Lindsay, "Women on Broadway."
[139] Mitchell, *Hadestown*.

promise of security, observing that that "you can have your principles/when you've got a belly full," it still prominently favors Orpheus by having her adopt his worldview and absolve him of fault when the two are reunited.[140]

The characterization of Persephone, similarly, frames Orpheus as the impetus for her internal change. Mitchell's version of the goddess of spring and queen of the Underworld is a woman who embraces various forms of hedonism as a means of coping in her unstable marriage and existence. When above ground, her more raucous expressions of this indulgence are reflected in the joyfully liberated composition of "Livin' It Up On Top," while "Our Lady of the Underground" is marked by a more subdued styling that shows her as a dejected, barely functioning alcoholic.[141] Although she is aware of the damage her husband's behavior causes, she is as resigned to her fate as the rest of his subjects, only displaying compassion and attempting to sway him when Orpheus enters the Underworld looking for Eurydice.

Her relationship with Hades is complicated further by a power dynamic plays as textually dysfunctional and at times borders on abusive within its subtext. Their interactions are adversarial for the majority of the play, and though the text does not explicitly follow the mythological precedent of Hades abducting her, Persephone's time in the Underworld is treated as something she endures out of obligation. When the two deities reconcile as Orpheus' pleas remind them of their lost love, it treats the pair as having equal blame for the state of the marriage, which runs contrary to the previous scenes which consistently placed the root of the problem as being with Hades and his toxic tendencies.

---

[140] Mitchell, *Hadestown,* 2019.
[141] (Ibid.)

Since *Hadestown* uses the two romances as the primary conceit of the story, with the themes of justice and corruption serving as secondary elements that result from the romances, keeping the character development linked to romantic relationships is a logical progression. That is, however, only true from a storytelling perspective. From a feminist perspective, it offers little in terms of critiquing the effects of patriarchy through its female characters, focusing more heavily on examining the gender performativity of its masculine characters. Mitchell and Chavkin's failure to make the connection between patriarchy and capitalism explicit reads as a perpetuation of a cycle as much as the story they brought to the stage, and another instance of the modern progressive musical's primary failure up to this point: ultimately reiterating and venerating the story it is adapting, in spite of smaller moments of critique within the text.

Time to Rise Above: The Apotheosis of the Modern Progressive Musical

SIX does fulfill all four criteria needed to be considered a modern progressive musical, but it possesses a distinct advantage when compared to its peers: its ability to effectively balance irreverence with respect for its source material, and thus critique it consistently. The primary reason for this is the specific Six-Point Plan that Marlow and Moss constructed to encompass the primary aims of the play, transcribed as follows in the authors' notes of the program:

> 1. We want to provide a different perspective on the six queens separate from their status as wives
> 2. We will give female historical figures a voice to tell their own experiences - experiences that have, in the past, predominantly been told by men
> 3. We aim to show that even 500 years later, there are still parallels to be found in the female experience
> 4. We will show that women can tell stories together that are interesting, engaging, clever, and *funny* stories told by women do not have to be about or include men in order to be entertaining
> 5. We plan to use the pop concert genre to enable this fun, silly, comic, and powerful story to be told exclusively by women - but not just 'for' women - and in order to facilitate our third aim
> 6. All of the above needs to be done whilst above all acknowledging the silliness and campness of its own genre and being self-aware of its own message; it should never be earnest or too sincere.[142]

The existence of this plan allows for a greater level of focus for the material, and a clear set of limitations upon the production's intended goals. The concert format also permits a greater distance to exist between the play and its source material, in contrast to the conventional format of a linear narrative employed by previous modern progressive musicals, which calls for greater immersion in the world of the story. The commitment to this form of storytelling is absolute, and the result of *SIX* taking this route is that the play goes beyond the pretension of a concert, and effectively becomes one in full.[143] Though

[142] Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, "SIX on Broadway - Authors' Notes," *SIX: Divorced, Beheaded, Broadway* (New York: Platypus Productions, February 13, 2020).

[143] Ira S. Murfin, "SIX Pre-Amble: Battle of the Sixes," *Chicago Shakespeare Theater on Navy Pier*, June 23, 2019, https://www.chicagoshakes.com/plays_and_events/six/six_preamble.

the fourth wall does not exist for a concert the way it does for a play, the performers onstage never drop character, even during the curtain call. This behavior also extends to the four-piece all-female band backing the Queens, referred to as the 'Ladies in Waiting,' and performing under stage names that allude to historical attendants of the Queens, with the guitarist being called Maggie, the bassist Bessie, the keyboardist Joan, and the drummer Maria.[144]

By embracing the modernity of the genre with the concert format and owning the reality of the Queens being displaced from their original setting, Marlow and Moss create a text that is able to actively critique the history which provides its basis. In acknowledging that any actions they take will not change what happened in the past, the text also engages in its own metatextuality simply by being performed, and reinforce its own message of elevating female experiences, voices, and performances.

As feminism is at the core of its conception, *SIX* presents an interesting case in how it honors its commitment to the casting practices that characterize the modern progressive musical. Like its predecessors, it sports a blend of conceptual and color-blind casting in theory, requiring the audience to simply suspend disbelief and accept at face value that the women onstage are meant to be the Tudor Queens, regardless of any lack of resemblance to what historical portraiture is available. The roles, therefore, are open to "all self-identifying female and non-binary performers, as long as they are comfortable playing female roles," leaving the door open for transgender performers in theory, but the casts chosen up to this point have consisted primarily of cisgender women.[145]

[144] While never explicitly stated in the show, the general consensus among fans of the show is that these are meant to be Margaret Lee, Elizabeth Blount, Jane Meutas, and María de Salinas respectively.

[145] "Six the Musial" *Pearson Casting*, February 2020, https://www.pearsoncasting.com/six.

There are two major exceptions to this predominant demographic, the first being Tilda Wickham, a non-binary performer who played Anna of Cleves during the student run at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.[146] The second was an emergency substitution towards the end of July in 2019, at the Arts Theatre in London.[147] With several members of the cast were unable to perform, including the usual understudies and alternates, composer Toby Marlow stepped in to play the role of Catherine Parr for two shows. Online videos of these performances' Megasixes imply that, beyond adjustments for Marlow's vocal range, the text of the role went unaltered, and that Marlow performed without indulging the parodic irony of a male-presenting body performing a female-presenting role.[148] Considering that the Six-Point Plan's final tenet is one that openly acknowledges camp as a major factor of the play, Butler's principles of gender as performed behavior are still present throughout the melodramatically heightened femininity of the Queens' characters.

Where it comes to the intersection of gender and race, there are certain patterns that cross the line from modern progressive musicals' blend of conceptual and color-blind into societal casting. Productions have generally adhered to some level of compliance with the race and ethnicities of those musical artists Marlow and Moss chose as the primary point of reference for each queen, nicknamed 'Queenspirations' by the creative team. These artists represent a broad range of races, ethnicities, and nationalities, and the reality of Marlow and Moss both being white and British comes with a privilege that

[146] "Tilda Wickham," *InterTalent Rights Group,* 2020, https://intertalentgroup.com/profiles/matilda-wickham

[147] Naomi Ackerman, "Six the musical composer steps in to save the show after cast member falls ill," *Evening Standard* online*,* London, July 29, 2019, https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/toby-marlow-six-musical- composer-understudy-a4200126.html.

[148] Kat Davies, "Megasix London 28 July including composer Toby Marlow," YouTube, July 28, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czsfslKOPIs

means their work inherently carries the potential to cross the line into cultural appropriation. What balances out this potential is the open acknowledgment of the Queenspirations, explicitly making the influences an open homage instead of borderline plagiarism, connecting back to the idea of archetypal shorthand being used to classify women rather than considering them as complex individuals.

This label-based conceptualism is that third factor allows the 'color-blind' element of casting works for *SIX* in a way that it did not for previous musicals, in addition to the deliberately modern framing and the setting of a universal standard. As the musical was constructed in a way that is meant to appeal to various aspects of the female experience and puts its characters on inherently equal footing, the text serves as a baseline. Though allusions are made to their past lives in sixteenth-century England, the world they inhabit onstage is unquestionably a modern one and adapted to modern sensibilities. The historical whiteness of the Queens is not inherently disregarded, as a white actress could feasibly play any of the six roles, but the casting of a performer of color readjusts the text, making their eventual defiance of Henry an act of assertion not only against a patriarchal system, but a white supremacist patriarchal system. Alternates and understudies, generally expected to cover the majority of the roles, if not all of them, can add further diversity to the cast, depending on which role they are called to fill at a given performance. The effectiveness of this varies from role to role, but there remains an underlying sense of unity in the idea that these are experiences felt by women from all backgrounds and identities.

The Haunting of SIX

As *SIX* made its journey across the Atlantic and began performing for North American audiences, many critics took it upon themselves to deliberately invoke the concept of the Haunted Stage by making comparisons between *SIX* and the still-running *Hamilton.* David Gordon called the musical "Britain's homegrown answer to *Hamilton*" in an interview with Marlow and Moss for the website TheaterMania, Chris Jones, writing for the *Chicago Tribune,* suggested that Marlow and Moss "often nods directly in the lyrical and melodic direction of" Miranda's work, and Lisa Trifone's piece for *Third Coast Review* opened with the phrase "*Hamilton* has spoiled us."[149] As the modern progressive musical has not yet entered the public lexicon as a widely used term, referencing *Hamilton* serves as a means of communicating the characteristics of the genre, but, as pointed out by Bob Verini in his critique for the New York Stage Review, the comparisons "may be inevitable but aren't especially apt," as *Hamilton*'s approach to history is fundamentally different from the approach of *SIX.*[150] Both musicals have a vested interest in history, but the goals of *Hamilton* are in seeing the story told, while *SIX* is more interested in the interrogation of how history is told, and from what lens.

Like other modern progressive musicals, *SIX* relies upon pre-established narratives and iconography to draw its audience into the story being told, but it does so in

[149] David Gordon, Toby Marlow, and Lucy Moss, "Listen Up, Queens! Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss Tell Us the Story of Their Hit Musical Six" *TheaterMania* online, May 30, 2019, https://www.theatermania.com/chicago-theater/news/interview-six-lucy-moss-toby-marlow_88893.html; Chris Jones, "Now at Chicago Shakes, 'Six' gives these Tudor wives a voice and could be a huge hit," *Chicago Tribune* online, May 23, 2019, https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/theater/ct-ent-six-chicago-shakes-review-ttd-0524-story.html; Lisa Trifone, "Review: Six at Chicago Shakes Boasts a Show-Stopping Cast," *Third Coast Review* online, May 29, 2019, https://thirdcoastreview.com/2019/05/29/theater-review-six-chicago-shakes/.

[150] Bob Verini, "From Massachusetts: The Joy of Six," *New York Stage Review* online, August 25 2019, http://nystagereview.com/2019/08/25/from-massachusetts-the-joy-of-six/.

a way that actively invites and acknowledges the Haunted Stage openly in service of an impending confrontation. As the concept of *SIX* moves onto the stage, the dedication to the Six-Point Plan continues to dominate the material but becomes increasingly elaborate with the way in which Marlow and Moss' creative process embraced the phenomenon of the Haunted Stage. On a metatextual level, the libretto goes so far as to mimic the conventional depiction of history it seeks to upend, as part of the setup for the final greater subversion. The airing of the Queens' grievances progresses in chronological order, and mimics the historiographical discourse surrounding them.

Aragon, Boleyn, and Seymour, the three Queens whose relationships with Henry all produced children and definitively overlapped with one another, command the most attention onstage. They also have the greatest amount of preconceptions to overcome from the audience, as their tenures have been more likely to be the subject of dramatizations as early as 1613, when William Shakespeare and John Fletcher's *Henry VIII* was first staged in London, depicting Aragon's displacement and Boleyn's ascension.[151] Disentangling the lives of these three women is similarly difficult, as Henry's interests in Boleyn and Seymour each track as reactionary overcorrections for flaws than Henry perceived in their respective predecessors.

His marriages to Cleves, Howard, and Parr, conversely, are less often dramatized individually, and instead tend to be featured in works which concentrate on the full span of Henry's life. With the issue of securing the succession somewhat resolved thanks to the birth of his son by Jane Seymour, the second half of Henry's marriages are generally

[151] William Shakespeare and David Bevington, "The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth," in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980), 913.

positioned as more of a testament to his increasingly volatile temperament than his desperation to prove his virility and secure a male heir. His egotism and insecurities remained intact, and that reflects in the way history and popular consciousness has interpreted his later wives.

The opening number, "Ex-Wives," is an extended promise from the Queens that the performance is to be spent setting the record straight and airing their grievances against the constructed historical narrative, while also establishing the queens and their archetypal associations.[152] The bridge of the song serves to establish their initial presentations in history, taking the most simplistic views possible to set up the later subversion. Aragon is defined by the longevity of her marriage and devotion to the Catholic church, Boleyn and Howard are both presented as promiscuous wantons brought down by their own sexuality, Seymour is Henry's one true love, Cleves is reduced to Henry's reaction to her looks not matching his expectations, and Parr's only featured quality is being the wife who outlived Henry.

There are also a few direct call outs to other dramatizations of the history within the song, as Aragon quips "Remember us from PBS?" before the group begins their introductions, and Boleyn calls herself "*that* Boleyn girl," as a reference to the Philippa Gregory novel, *The Other Boleyn Girl,* which was adapted to screen in 2003 and 2008, and focused on a fictionalized history from the perspective of Mary Boleyn.[153] In willingly bringing attention to these past interpretations of the Queens, Marlow and Moss embrace the power of the Haunted Stage, using the phenomenon to strengthen their goals

[152] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).

[153] (Ibid.); *The Other Boleyn Girl*, directed by Justin Chadwick (2008; Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 2008), DVD; *The Other Boleyn Girl,* directed by Philippa Lowthorpe (2003; London, England: British Broadcasting Corporation, 2003), DVD.

in relation to the reclaiming of historical narrative, or "histo-remix," as the Queens call it.[154]

It takes five Queens' solo numbers before the promise of a "histo-remix" is fulfilled, as the majority of the 'plot' hinges around the dramatic device of the competition meant to choose the band's lead singer, operating with the following rules:

> PARR: The queen who was dealt the worst hand,
> SEYMOUR: The queen with most hardships to withstand,
> CLEVES: The queen for who it didn't really go as planned.
> ALL: Shall be the one to lead the band![155]

The competition, although it quickly descends into personal swipes and attempts at one-upping each other, still serves a crucial purpose in the feminist message of the play: highlighting the various forms of abuse that can be inflicted on women and how pervasive they are throughout history. The construction of Marlow and Moss' libretto allows for an effective critique of patriarchy in the Tudor era, while maintaining a level of relatability with modern audiences in a way that is less jarring than if they had committed to greater historical accuracy.

The thesis statement that "grouping us is an inherently comparative act, and as such, unnecessarily elevates a historical approach engrained in patriarchal structures" is espoused in a posed realization by Boleyn before leading into a greater reveal: the competition was always mean to be a ruse, the Queens having been in on the joke the entire time with the express intention of leading to this very conclusion.[156] In the moment, the statement incites laughter, but it is also designed to prompt consideration from the audience to consider both how much they have inherently accepted the caustic

[154] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).
[155] (Ibid.)
[156] (Ibid.)

bickering onstage as reality, and their complicity in perpetuating the inherent anti-feminism that comes from such a mentality, though Marlow and Moss themselves demur from comparisons to Brecht and epic theatre in their notes from the 2018 version of the script.[157]

The other two of the three collaborative group numbers[158] plays a role in reinforcing Marlow and Moss' guiding principles of feminism, though they manifest in very different ways. The mid-show "Haus of Holbein," set during the two-year period between Jane Seymour's death and the marriage to Anna of Cleves, briefly redirects attention to the ideas of how women are perceived and objectified. The song itself is a frenetic techno arrangement with exaggerated German accents, ultraviolet lights, and neon green ruffs and sunglasses, while the lyrics describe various beauty trends of the sixteenth century. The beauty trends, which range from lead-based face paint and tightly laced corsets to urine as hair bleach and potentially crippling high-heeled shoes, are delivered with a deadpan tone that makes the song border on macabre, while the manic energy of the song reiterates the absurdity of such excessive efforts. To emphasize the contrived artificiality of the entire situation, there is a brief instance where all instrumentation except the accordion cuts out and the stage lights go to the most simplistic setting, while the queens continue to jerkily dance before resuming the full neon aesthetic for the last few measures of the songs.

The number also features an extended riff on online dating that puts the audience in the perspective of Henry while the actresses playing Parr and Howard stand in for

[157] Their exact words: "Very meta, we know. Call us Brecht. Actually please don't." Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, *SIX*, (Norwich, Norwich Playhouse, July 11, 2018).

[158] Four, if one includes the "I Don't Need Your Love Remix," consolidated with "I Don't Need Your Love" on the studio cast recording, and five if one also counts the Megasix.

portraits of Christina of Denmark and Amalia of Cleves while Cleves plays herself. The first two pose with fingers raised in peace signs and overly puckered lips while the other queens describe them with pithy biographies that include winking emoticons and hashtags, only to be swiped to the left before Anna is ultimately swiped to the right. Despite being a very brief and predominantly comedic sequence, the use of this dramatic device reinvents the "Haus of Holbein" as a commentary on the rigorous yet superficial standards of beauty, subsequently tying back into the greater theme of ingrained patriarchal perspectives that dominate the lives of women.

The finale, "Six" is the final deconstruction and feminist reclaiming of the narrative, where they "do a cheeky little histo-rewrite" and imagine what their lives would have been like if they had ended happily, celebrating their unity and their unique qualities simultaneously. At a preliminary glance, this ending seems in keeping with other modern progressive musicals' endings, wiping away the faults of history for a more reassuring narrative. What keeps it from this complacency is the lack of reality: none of the imagined lives are historically plausible, and the refrain of "for five more minutes"[159] makes it clear that the Queens understand that as soon as they finish performing, they will return to their historical identities as Henry's wives in the popular consciousness, rather than women in their own right. That they choose to defy this by continuing to stand, fists raised defiantly in the air as they belt out the final "six" of the performance, is emblematic of the hope couched within the original Six-Point Plan of the writing team, showing the potential of stories told outside the dominant male perspective.

[159]Repeated as five on the studio cast recording, but counted down in live performance.

Beyond the connections to the historical era which provides its story, and past interpretations of that history, the play has a vested interest in both paying homage to and subverting the iconography of the modern era's prominent female figures, specifically pop stars. The means by which Marlow and Moss developed the storytelling concept was through the viewing of *Live At Roseland: Elements of 4*, a 2011 video album by Beyoncé which utilized a blended form of music and storytelling in its performance.[160] In doing so, the concept of the Haunted Stage in *SIX* is expanded to exist outside dramatic performance and reaches a new level of accessibility for potential audiences.

Taking the theme of musicians as modern royalty are the Queenspirations, whose styles and iconography correlate with the image history has constructed for each Queen. These influences of these artists are present in the construction of the solo numbers, the characterization of the Queens, and in Gabriella Slade's costume design. Rather than use the fashions of the sixteenth century, exposed midriffs, fishnet stockings, spiked hairpieces, and crystal covered boots reign supreme, accented with a few touches of a Renaissance aesthetic to signify the blending of history and modernity that dominates the play.[161] The result is an additional layer of commentary and critique being added to the performance, one which creates a parallel between how women are framed and portrayed in the past and the practices of the present. This works in service of the third point of the Six-Point Plan, and prompts the audience to ask what, if anything, has changed for women in the time which has passed.

[160] Paulson, "How Queens Became Pop Stars."

[161] Leigh Nordstrom, "Pop Princesses Meet Tudor Queens Onstage for 'Six,'" *Women's Wear Daily* online, March 12, 2020, https://wwd.com/eye/lifestyle/six-broadway- costumes-tudor-fashion-1203536473/.

The use of allusions to individual artists is not the only point of reference Marlow and Moss include from the pop music world; as the framing device is a concert for a single pop group, homages and invocations of female pop groups are occasionally present. Catherine Parr invokes Destiny's Child twice, first to declare "I'm the survivor" during "Ex-Wives," and then briefly invokes the melody of "Independent Woman" as she sings "all my women could independently study scripture" in her solo, "I Don't Need Your Love,"[162] Boleyn drops a similar reference to the Spice Girls' "Wannabe" towards the top of the show as she promises to "tell you what you want, what you really, really want" in the preamble to the competition.[163] In addition to prompting a laugh or a cheer from the audience, these moments also exist as nods to the greater themes of how women are portrayed in the music industry. Both Destiny's Child and the Spice Girls rose to prominence in the 1990s and were marketed on the professed strength of their friendship and messages of female empowerment, loosely termed as girl power, making them natural analogues.[164]

Drawing primarily from Antonia Fraser's *The Wives of Henry VIII* and Lucy Worsley's "Six Wives" documentary series for the historical elements, Marlow and Moss sought the moments of iconography that would connect the historical royalty to the pop royalty.[165] They would eventually settle on two primary artists for each individual queen,

---

[162] Marlow Lucy Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020); Destiny's Child, "Survivor," 2000, Sony, track 2 on *Survivor*, 2001, compact disc; Destiny's Child, "Independent Women, Pt. 1," 2000, Sony, track 1 on *Survivor*, 2001, compact disc.

[163] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020); Spice Girls, "Wannabe," 1996, Virgin, track 1 on *Spice*, 1996, compact disc.

[164] Rebecca Boone, "Britney and the Back-lash." *Off Our Backs* 32, no. 1 (2002), 48-49.

[165] In keeping with Marlow and Moss' research design, Fraser will be used as the primary source of information regarding the historical queens in the subsequent sections, supplemented in places by Karen Lindsey's *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived: A Feminist Reinterpretation of the Wives of Henry VIII*; Paulson, "How Queens Became Pop Stars."

finding a common archetypal branding to relate the Queenspirations to the Queens. With the first hints of those models established in “Ex-Wives,” the only thing left to do is enter the competition and explore the full depths of these individual connections, and how Marlow and Moss used them in service of the goals outlined in the Six-Point Plan.

Catherine of Aragon

In "Ex-Wives," Catherine of Aragon introduces herself as "a paragon of royalty," an epithet that reflects the reality of her historical counterpart. Born on December 16, 1485, Catherine, then called Catalina, was the youngest child of Spanish co-monarchs, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. Both of her parents were sovereigns in their own right, and together, they had created a formidable reputation as devoutly Catholic crusaders who had driven out Moorish occupation in the *Reconquista* of Spain. Catherine, along with her siblings, Isabella, Juana, Juan, and Maria, were the tools of expanding their parents' power further across Europe. Isabella married twice into the royal family of Portugal before passing away without issue; Maria would subsequently marry her sister's widowed second husband, Manuel I of Portugal. Juana was given to the Habsburgs, marrying the Archduke Philip 'the Handsome,' and Juan, the only son and presumed heir to both Castile and Aragon, was matched with the Archduchess Margaret of Austria.

Catherine was betrothed to Arthur, the Prince of Wales, and first son of the House of Tudor, which was still in its nascency following the generations-long War of the Roses. The Tudors needed the match to legitimize their house on the world stage and address the issue of the claim Catherine and her family held to the English crown through Isabella's ancestor, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. The marriage would reconcile the claims and cement both houses as greater powers on the European political stage. As the betrothal had been made when Catherine was three years old, she was raised and educated with the knowledge that she would one day be Queen of England. She was first married to Arthur by proxy in 1499, and again in 1500 before she would make the journey across the English Channel to marry him in person in 1501.

The marriage lasted only five months, as Arthur died on April 2, 1502 from an illness believed to have been the sweating sickness, throwing Catherine's fate into question. There were pre-arranged measures for what would happen financially in the case that she be widowed, a dowry of two hundred thousand crowns balanced against one-third of the revenues from her husband's lands, but that dowry had not been paid in full at the time of Arthur's death. The proposed solution was to continue the alliance by betrothing the widowed Catherine to the new Prince of Wales, eleven-year old Henry.

This proposal was one that created a religious difficulty— text from Leviticus said that it was a sin for a man to marry his brother's wife, while a passage from Deuteronomy claimed that it was an obligation. The issue was somewhat put to rest when Catherine insisted that she was still a virgin, her marriage to Arthur having gone unconsummated, eliminating the issue of consanguinity which would have deemed her Henry's sister, and thus unfit to marry. A dispensation from the Pope was secured as additional insurance, and the agreement moved forward, with Catherine remaining in England to prepare for her second marriage.

While Henry VII did technically agree to this proposal, he did not handle Catherine well in the interim. The Spanish Infanta turned Dowager Princess of Wales lived in a state of uncertainty, as other nations attempted to block her remarriage by offering alternative brides for Henry. Following the death of Elizabeth of York, it was briefly suggested that Catherine ought to marry the now-widowed Henry VII, rather than wait for his son to reach an appropriate age; the proposition was shot down by Catherine's mother, Isabella of Castile, who knew that such a match would be an ephemeral one, while the younger Henry was a long-term investment. The new betrothal

agreements were officially signed in 1503, but were thrown into question again in 1504, with the passing of Isabella. This left Spain once again divided as the Castilian crown passed to Catherine's sister, Juana, and diminished Catherine's value in securing an alliance. To that end, Henry VII had his son repudiate the betrothal in 1505, effectively relegating Catherine to a hostage in her father-in-law's court.

Though she was no longer officially his son's fiancée, Henry VII had a vested financial interest in keeping Catherine in his control: the money he believed he was owed for her dowry. He used this as leverage at every point possible, depriving her of the funds she needed to run her household, forcing her into near-poverty, and keeping her largely isolated from the court. At the same time, he was also continuing his engagements with Ferdinand, trying to negotiate a new deal that would better suit him. Catherine was still largely unable to speak English and having difficulty keeping her house in order. Her ladies-in-waiting were not keen to stay with a mistress who could not provide their promised dowries and marriages, and authority figures like her governess, her confessor, and her parents' ambassador, were all attempting to use her for their own political agendas. Her only hope was in her family's hands, and those hopes would not soon be fulfilled.

In 1506, Juana and her husband, Philip the Handsome, made an impromptu visit to England, offering Henry VII the opportunity for a new alliance, one that would have provided matches for father, son, and the unmarried Princess Mary Tudor, and set the Tudors against Aragon in favor of the Habsburgs. Complicating the situation further was Juana's mental and emotional instability, exacerbated by her husband's extensive infidelities and death six months later. Ferdinand took advantage of his elder daughter's

grief to reassume control of Castile on behalf of both her and her young son, Charles. In 1507, Catherine was appointed her father's ambassador in the continuing negotiations between England and Spain, the first woman in Europe to be given such a position. Though her betrothal to the Prince of Wales had not officially been reaffirmed since the repudiation, her new position gave her a brief reprieve, allowing her to return to court and ask both her father and father-in-law for the means to pay the debts she had amassed during their years-long stand-off. The rift resumed as Henry, frustrated by Ferdinand's refusal to let him marry Juana, resumed negotiations with the Habsburgs, seeking a marriage with Eleanor of Austria on behalf of his son.

Henry VII passed away from tuberculosis on April 21, 1509, and after seven years of uncertainty, Catherine's patience and constancy were at last rewarded. Despite his father's efforts to the contrary, the newly made Henry VIII, now eighteen and long infatuated with the beautiful older princess he had grown up knowing. Now free of his father's control and advised by his council to honor the original treaty, Henry asked Catherine to become his wife. They were married in June of the same year, and Henry's coronation was one he shared with his wife, making Catherine the anointed Queen of England, rather than simply Queen Consort.

The early days of the twenty-four-year marriage were idyllic ones; both the King and Queen were beloved by the people, deeply in love with one another, and their court was a hub of culture and luxury. The one blemish was their lack of an heir, as Catherine's first pregnancy resulted in a stillbirth in January of 1510. She conceived again in the spring of the same year, but the stress of pregnancy was already beginning to take a physical toll on her, and Henry's eyes began to wander.

The first of Henry's historically confirmed mistresses was Elizabeth FitzWalter, whom he pursued during Catherine's second pregnancy, and the only one of his lovers about whom she would directly confront him. Her attempts to do so were chastised not only by her husband, but by her father's ambassador, Luis Caroz, who reminded her that extramarital affairs were the privilege of royal husbands and the burden of royal wives. The couple was somewhat reconciled by the birth of their son Henry, on New Year's Day of 1511, but the baby Prince of Wales died less than two months later. Her third pregnancy, in 1513, intersected with a military campaign into Scotland, one which she led herself as Henry was leading a campaign of his own in France. Catherine's efforts saw a massive victory for the English with the Battle of Flodden on September 9, in which the King of Scots, James IV, was killed. The victory was tainted by Catherine miscarrying a month later. She conceived again in 1514, only to deliver a stillborn baby boy the following year.

Her fifth pregnancy would produce the only one of Catherine's children to live past infancy was the future Mary I, born in February of 1516. Her birth was taken as a signal that future children, namely sons, were possible, and the royal couple was reconciled for a time, though Catherine had now fully lost her looks. She became pregnant in the spring of 1518 but lost the child in November, and in that time, Henry had sired a child with one of her ladies, Bessie Blount, who bore a son in June of 1519. Catherine tolerated this publicly, and continued in her role as Queen, going with her husband to France in the summer of 1520 to seal a betrothal agreement between their daughter and the Dauphin of France.

Mary's engagement was a constantly changing one, as two years later, she was engaged to Charles V of Spain, the Holy Roman Emperor and Catherine's nephew by her sister, Juana, only for him to break the treaty in 1525 to marry his cousin, Isabella of Portugal. Henry took another mistress sometime in the early part of the 1520s. Mary Boleyn, who had also been the lover of the French King, François I, during her time at his court, already had a reputation across Europe for her sexual promiscuity, one that would soon be outstripped by her sister, Anne. Adding further insult to Catherine, Henry ennobled his bastard son, Henry Fitzroy, as the Duke of Richmond and Somerset in 1525, something she objected to publicly, seeing it as a snub of her personally.

By 1527, the possibility of Catherine bearing another child had grown increasingly small, as she was now effectively menopausal, and her importance in cementing an alliance with Spain had decreased significantly, with Henry having re-entered an alliance with François I. With Anne Boleyn, who refused to give up her chastity without marriage, now within his sights, Henry had both a reason to end the marriage and a replacement already in mind. Catherine herself was kept in the dark about her husband's intentions until June of 1527, learning of it first from the Spanish Ambassador, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, then from Henry himself, who claimed his only interest was in ensuring that their marriage was legitimate.

Catherine appealed to Charles for aid, asking him to exert pressure on the Pope in her favor on the 'Great Matter,' as it was being called. Charles obliged his aunt, exerting the power he had over Clement VII from his occupation of Rome to delay Henry's dispatched envoys. When they finally returned to England, it was only with a dispensation for Henry to marry again, regardless of consanguinity *if* his first marriage

was declared invalid. Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, the English papal legate, was also given permission to try Henry's case, but not judge it.

Catherine gained further ground in 1528, first when Clement disclosed that he had learned of Henry's interests in Anne Boleyn, and second when he dispatched the elderly and often gout-stricken Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio to aid Wolsey in the investigations. When he arrived in the autumn, Campeggio, on Clement's behalf, broached the subject of Catherine entering a nunnery, something the Queen rejected outright. She insisted to Campeggio within the privacy of confession that her marriage was a true one, despite his efforts to persuade her. She would not yield to either legate, seeing them as already biased in her husband's favor. Only the Pope had the right to judge her, and she lodged an appeal in January of 1529 against the legatine court that was currently trying the matter. In October of the same year, she declared she had a copy of the dispensation given to her mother, Queen Isabella, for the initial marriage, one which had different wording from the one in England: specifically, it contained the modifier 'perhaps' in regards to the consummation of her marriage to Arthur.

Henry and his councilors demanded the original be brought from Spain, to prove it was not a forgery. Catherine, distrustful of Henry's agents, seemingly complied while still trying to buy time. Charles sent another copy, along with signatures of Spanish bishops confirm its authenticity, rather than allow the original out of his possession, and put enough pressure on Clement to not have it declared a forgery outright. In spite of this, the envoys sent by Henry and Wolsey declared it a forgery, and the legatine court proceeded in April of 1529.

Catherine was given the choice of the best lawyers in England to represent her, eventually selecting four: John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, the Bishops of St. Asaph and Ely, and Archbishop Warham. She objected to the legal proceedings again in June, still hoping that the Pope might hear the case personally in Rome, but her pleas went unanswered, and the court was convened on June 18 in the monastery of the Black Friars. Catherine made only a brief appearance, insisting again that the matter be judged only by the Pope before leaving. When she was initially summoned to appear three days later, she argued that if she was not Henry's wife, then she was not English, and therefore not subject to his commands. She did put in an appearance on the date of the summons but did so more for an act of public spectacle than compliance.

When called to appear, she moved in front of her husband, sinking to her knees and begging to know what she had done to make him want her dismissed, and insisting that she had been a virgin when they married. She said she would gladly accept the rulings of the court if they found true wrongdoing on her part but alluded heavily to the corrupted motivations that were actually driving the court. Having said her piece, she rose and left the great hall of the cathedral, despite attempts to call her back. The legatine court proceeded without her without reaching any new conclusions, and on July 23, Campeggio said he would bring his findings back to the Pope in Rome, rather than render a verdict on his own.

Catherine had won the round, but Henry now looked to change the game completely, as he met Thomas Cranmer, a cleric who argued that the matter was an issue of divine law, rather than canon. In Cranmer's line of thinking, if the religions universities considered the marriage invalid, then it was so, and the Pope's ruling was

unnecessary. It was another blow to Henry's faith in the Catholic Church, while Catherine's remained steady. In the early months of 1531, both the Convocations of the clergy of Canterbury and York and Parliament had endorsed Henry's move to become supreme head of the Church of England. Catherine refused to recognize this break, and continued to appeal to Rome, sure that once the Pope ruled in her favor, Henry would see reason and return to her.

In October 1531, after having left her at Windsor Palace in July without a word of goodbye, Henry had Catherine sent to the More in Hertfordshire, and subsequently kept her out of court as much as possible as he moved ahead with his plans to marry Anne. On the occasions that Catherine did hear from him, it was in the form of demands: to relinquish the jewels of the Queen of England to Anne, or to appear for further court hearings, the latter of which she continued to refuse. Thomas Cromwell, another reformer and associate of Cranmer, entered Henry's inner circle in 1532, crafting the legislation that would push for the people and clergy of England to recognize Henry's new authority. On May 23, 1533, Catherine's marriage to Henry was officially declared null and void by Cranmer, now Archbishop of Canterbury, and she was retitled Princess Dowager. When informed of this, she refused to accept it, stating that she would be Queen until she died.

Removed first to Buckden Palace, and then to Kimbolton Castle in 1534, Catherine was kept in isolation, forbidden to communicate with her daughter or anyone who might have been a friend to her, namely the new Spanish Ambassador, Eustace Chapuys. Pope Clement eventually ruled in her favor, declaring the marriage lawful in March 1534, threatening Henry with excommunication if he did not set Anne aside and resume his marriage to Catherine. Henry ignored this command, continuing to insist that

Catherine yield to his will, even using it as leverage when she asked to see her fever-stricken daughter in the spring of 1535.

In spite of this, Catherine remained steadfast in her insistence that she was the rightful Queen of England. She continued to appeal to Rome and the new Pope, Paul III, hoping that England might still return to Catholicism, but her health grew increasingly worse. At the age of fifty, she died on January 7, 1536, from what historians now believe to have been a tumor of the heart. Her will and last letter to Henry both included the signature of 'Catherine, the Queen,' her final defiant stance. Henry had her buried in Peterborough Castle as the Dowager Princess of Wales.

The version of Catherine most commonly seen in popular culture does not adhere with her contemporary portraiture, which depicts her as pale skinned with red-blonde hair and light eyes, traits inherited from her English ancestor, John of Gaunt, a beauty for the period. Some modern depictions of her will choose to ignore this and show her with dark hair, dark eyes, and a sallow complexion in an attempt to both make her look stereotypically 'Spanish' and unattractive, while also highlighting her perceived infertility and sickliness in contrast with Anne Boleyn's comparative youth, beauty, and potency.[166] These portrayals also tend to cover only the seven year period of the Great Matter, overlooking the circumstances which brought Henry to the breaking point of annulment beyond the failure to him with provide a son and making her "the Betrayed Wife," in the summation of Antonia Fraser.

While the moniker fits her primary state of being during those final years of her life, reducing her simply to Henry's rejection and its outcome erases the full picture of

[166] *Anne of a Thousand Days*, directed by Charles Jarrott (1969; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2007), DVD; *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Justin Chadwick (2008); *The Other Boleyn Girl,* Lowthorpe (2003).

her life. She had been the beloved Queen of England, not just to her husband, but to the English people for over twenty years. She had served as Regent during Henry's campaigns abroad, led the country to victory in battle, and been a patron of artisans and scholars throughout her reign. The people were overwhelmingly on her side throughout the seven years of the King's great matter. In 1995, Karen Lindsey's *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived* was published as a re-examination of the six queens from a feminist perspective, framing Catherine's life to consider how it had played for the people: the early years of her marriage had carried all the grand romanticism of a fairy-tale, and that romanticism heightened when threatened by the dark sexuality of Anne Boleyn.[167] This interpretation is supported thanks to the belief Catherine held until the end of her life that Henry might recognize his mistakes and return to her.

Queenspirations

The common ground in Aragon's primary influences, Shakira and Beyoncé, is a shared narrative of taking the music industry by storm after breaking out of a different sphere, running parallel to the historical Aragon's transition from a Spanish Infanta to a beloved English Queen. Aragon's character is based in the grandeur of her queenspirations, women with careers that span over twenty years, with large fanbases accumulated in that time.

The presence of Shakira is the subtler and more metatextual of the two, the most obvious reasoning for her presence being a means by which Marlow and Moss can signify to the historical Aragon's Spanish heritage. The instrumentation of "No Way"

[167] Karen Lindsey, *Divorced, beheaded, survived : a feminist reinterpretation of the wives of Henry VIII.* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1995).

features touches of Latin pop musical stylings, most noticeably the upbeat orchestrations of drums and horns in the chorus and dance break, and Aragon's dialogue includes occasional exclamations in Spanish.[168] Beyond the aesthetic touches, however, Shakira's biography shares some parallels with the historical Aragon, particularly through her trans-national rise to stardom.

Though born on the Caribbean coast of Colombia, Shakira was raised in an environment which, thanks to the Lebanese heritage of her father, included significant influence from Middle Eastern and Arabic culture, similar to the influences of Islamic culture that remained in the Alhambra Palace at Granada where Aragon spent her formative years.[169] As her music gained more attention, Shakira emigrated from Colombia to the United States in the late 1990s, her rise to stardom prompting her to embrace the broader identity of a Latina within the general public, rather than the more specific Lebanese-Colombiana label she had previously used. She similarly eschewed the idea of limiting herself to genres that were based in Latinidad and Caribbean culture in favor of pop and rock, which made her easier to market to non-Spanish-speaking audiences and helped her become a global sensation.

The transformation of Shakira to an artist with widespread appeal meant that she had to leave much of her identity as a Colombian behind, and the same is true for the historical Catherine of Aragon assimilating to English culture. This is not to say that these identities were erased entirely: there are documented instances of Shakira proudly

---

[168] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020)

[169] María Elena Cepeda, "Shakira as the Idealized Transnational Citizen: Media Perspectives on Colombianidad in Transition," in *Musical ImagiNation: U. S- Colombian Identity and the Latin Music Boom* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 61-86.

proclaiming "Viva Colombia," along with other Spanish exclamations in various performances, and Aragon maintained a level of loyalty to Spain throughout her life, as evidenced by the favor shown to her nephew Charles.[170] This sense of unrepentant pride is the greatest contribution that Shakira lends to the stage version of Aragon as a character. Significantly more dominant in creating the character's behavior and messaging is the one of Toby Marlow's self-professed "mums," Beyoncé.[171]

Originally a member of Destiny's Child, Beyoncé's first solo album, *Dangerously in Love,* was released in 2003, and continued with the image of female empowerment that had allowed Destiny's Child to rise to prominence in the 1990s.[172] She would continue marketing herself on this self-actualized iconography, releasing tracks like "Diva," "Run the World (Girls)," and "Flawless" as evolutions of her image as the ideal empowered woman, but the album and iteration of Beyoncé most relevant to *SIX*'s interpretation of Catherine of Aragon is the 2016 visual album, *Lemonade*.[173] The two driving forces behind the narrative of *Lemonade* were Beyoncé's explicit embrace of Black culture and a public confrontation of her husband, mogul and rapper Jay-Z Carter, for cheating on her.[174]

As *SIX* was first written and performed in January of 2017, this reinvented image of Beyoncé as a woman unleashing righteous fury upon those who had wronged her was the one most prominent in the public consciousness, and Marlow and Moss adapted the cheating aspect of the album to suit the similarly betrayed Aragon. One of the album's

---

[170] Cepeda, "Shakira as the Idealized Transnational Citizen," (2010).
[171] Paulson, "How Queens Became Pop Stars."
[172] Emily J. Lordi, "Surviving the Hustle: Beyoncé's Performance of Work," *Black Camera* 9, no. 1 (2017), 131-145.
[173] (Ibid.); *Beyoncé: Lemonade.* Directed by Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, et. al., (2016; New York, NY: Home Box Office, 2016), digital streaming.
[174] *Lemonade,* Knowles-Carter et. al., 2016.

singles, “Hold Up,” which deals directly with the affair, is named outright in the first chorus of “No Way,” and the aesthetics of *Lemonade* are noticeably prominent in the design of Aragon’s costume.

Aragon’s signature color is gold, which is also used to signify her royal heritage and longer reign, but also evokes the dress worn by Beyoncé in the “Hold Up” segment of *Lemonade*.[175] The costume itself is a one-piece dress with a triangular panel on the stomach, and two layered skirts that split at the front in an inverted triangle and expose a bodysuit underneath, leaving the thighs of the actress exposed, a design choice present in many of Beyoncé’s costumes for the benefit of dancing. The silhouette is expanded further by a pair of broadly flared shoulders covered in golden studs over skintight sleeves lacing up her arms, and her accessories are comprised of several gold chains around her neck and beneath her skirts, and a crown of golden spikes in her hair. Aside from the shoulders and the lack of a floor-length skirt, the design makes her costume the one most in line with traditional Tudor fashion, an acknowledgement of Aragon’s longer tenure, and how she embodied the ideal Renaissance queen in the early days of her marriage. The luxury of so much gold and the wider design of the costume also tie into Beyoncé’s image as a queen of the music industry, turning Aragon into a dramatically commanding presence who takes up more space and demands more attention.

Despite the prevalence of the ‘woman scorned’ wrath of the *Lemonade* era influencing Aragon, there is lack of acknowledgment within the text for the visual album’s other key factor, Beyoncé’s elevated focus of her identity as a Black woman. Beyoncé is not alone in this, as the nuances of Shakira’s specific background as a

[175] *Lemonade,* Knowles-Carter et. al., 2016.

Lebanese-Colombian are similarly omitted from the text, in favor of the casting choices informing the race of the character onstage. With the exceptions of Megan Gilbert in the original 2017 Cambridge cast and Lauren Drew in the 2019 UK tour, productions of *SIX* have honored the reality of two women of color being Aragon's primary influences and cast actresses of color in the role. With Beyoncé as the dominant inspiration, Actresses with Black or African ancestry are the most frequently cast, including Adrianna Hicks in the North American cast.[176]

What make this practice work for *SIX* as a dramatic device is that Marlow and Moss are working first and foremost with the idea of the constructed iconography for these artists as the point of inspiration. Both Beyoncé and Shakira are women of color whose careers have either always or evolved to feature their heritage proudly, but their experiences are reflective of radically different cultures, and their mainstream success stems in part from being accessible to audiences outside their own demographic, specifically white audiences. Rather than attempt to fuse the details of two very different narratives about real life women, Marlow and Moss use these narratives and imagery to make their version of Catherine of Aragon relatable to the modern age.

Onstage

The version of Aragon created by Marlow and Moss is less of a fairy-tale princess and, in tribute to her more prominent Queenspiration, more of a queen bee, being the member of the group who most clearly asserts her authority and often takes the lead, both when playing to the audience and interacting with the other Queens. When performed by

[176] Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, *SIX*, (Norwich, 2018); "Lauren Drew." *Global Artists.* October 24, 2019, https://www.globalartists.co.uk/artists/details/lauren-drew/; *SIX*, written by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, dir. Lucy Moss and Jamie Armitage, American Repertory Theater, New Cambridge, MA, September 7, 2019.; Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).

Adrianna Hicks, Aragon is bombastic, defiantly proud, and constant in the confidence she holds for both herself and her faith. This behavior also feeds into the dominant narrative presented as her argument for the competition: a righteous indignation that stems from seeing her position as something she was not only born to but earned though her years of dedication to Henry and the kingdom.

In the interests of keeping the focus on her perceived entitlement, Aragon is given a monologue heavily condenses her history and reshapes the narrative as her faith being increasingly tested through Henry's transgressions. The monologue mentions how she came to England as Arthur's wife, his untimely death, and her subsequent time in her father-in-law's power before her marriage to Henry, before skipping over the majority of that marriage in order to move straight to Henry's mounting infidelities and the introduction of the Great Matter as Aragon's breaking point. The monologue is played for comedy, with Aragon cycling through the events of her life with "okay," with variations on the word's inflection before drawing the line at annulment and saying, "no way," as a segue into her eponymous solo.[177]

The emphasis on hardships and deliberate omission of the higher points of Aragon's tenure, such as the Battle of Flodden, is in keeping with the parameters of the competition, and the details it includes, while accurate in their essence, are modified to suit the argument and get the audience on her side. The seven years between her marriages are reframed as an outright imprisonment, and her marriage to Henry is presented as being one that was arranged without her participation, while the failure to produce a living male heir and her toleration of Henry's affairs goes unchanged. All of

[177] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).

this is in service of presenting Aragon as a woman who accepted the rule of patriarchy, to further deepen her eventual outrage as it manifests in "No Way."

Although the exact term is not used within the song, "No Way" relies heavily on the reality of Aragon performing emotional labor for Henry's benefit, and the growing anger within that emotional labor. The bridge of the song takes her into a reenactment of the speech made at the legatine court by the historical Catherine, putting her on her knees while the lighting design switches to display a set of crosses as a representation of the Black Friars cathedral. As Aragon plays directly to the audience throughout the performance, she places them in the role of Henry, one of many instances to do so, and a greater signaling towards the eventual reveal of the patriarchal lens the show is meant to confront.

The underlying anger also feeds into the primary comedic device of Aragon's character, the translation of her Catholic faith into an exaggerated martyr complex when interacting with the other Queens.[178] The joke works primarily on a rule of three set up, with Aragon attempting to gain sympathy from the audience, only to be reminded by another Queen that the experience she is mentioning one they also endured, or else try to one up her with a worse instance from their own lives. In keeping with history, her relationship with Boleyn is the most overtly confrontational, but she has similarly charged moments with Seymour, Cleves, and Howard. Although the reveal of the competition make these interactions doubly-staged and thus negates the need for a traditional narrative arc by which Aragon might overcome this self-centered mentality, the persona is a reflection of the greater message of female solidarity, demonstrating the

[178] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (Norwich, 2018).

isolating effects of patriarchy that make women compete for their trauma to be acknowledged.

In her chosen revisions to her life story, Aragon imagines rejecting Henry's proposal, instead entering a convent and singing in their choir, gaining fame through the music as a result. It is an inversion of the historical moment when Aragon was faced with this choice, turning the decision one that she made of her own volition, rather than the prompting of men who wished her compliance. It is, in essence, utilizing the same realization which Marlow and Moss created as the crux of "No Way," the refusal to bow to the will of a man, but instead seeking fulfillment on her own terms while retaining her religious dedication.

Of all the Queens, Aragon's adaptation to the stage is the most straightforward and carries the least amount of thematic changes from history. Reality already shows a woman striving and succeeding in patriarchy beyond the expectations of her gender for the time period while still complying with the system of power, but ultimately spurned for her one perceived failure and refusal to bow out gracefully. The omission by Marlow and Moss of events outside of the divorce are meant to heighten the injustice of her treatment at Henry's hands to a reckoning with her complacency and participation in a system which disenfranchised her when she resisted. The interpretation in *SIX* thus stands as a vindication for the historical figure, providing a version of the story that examines the issue of the Great Matter solely through its impact on Aragon, rather than greater political ramifications or Henry's feelings. In doing so, it shifts the center of the conflict to rest with her and grants her back a measure of power and agency in her own narrative instead of making her the obstacle for someone else.

Anne Boleyn

In the dialogue leading up to Anne Boleyn's solo, "Don't Lose Ur Head," she is described by Cleves as "the really famous controversial one that people actually care about," and it is a summation both succinct and accurate. Her influence on history cannot be overstated, as both Henry VIII's initial obsession with her and the reign of their daughter, Elizabeth I, have had long and lasting consequences for England and the Western world as a whole. The image of Anne is therefore distorted not by a lack of historical accounts, but by a lack of accounts that are objective. The majority of surviving sources about her come from biased viewpoints, determined to paint her in as extreme a light as possible to suit various political needs.[179]

Despite the numerous conflicting accounts regarding Anne's intentions and actions where her relationship with Henry is concerned, there is enough information to create a basic picture of her life up until that point. Her parents were Sir Thomas Boleyn and Lady Elizabeth Howard, and she had two siblings, George and Mary. Though the order of the siblings' birth is still contested, Anne's birth is typically placed around 1501. Portraiture and historical accounts of her appearance demonstrate that she had dark hair and eyes, and an olive complexion, qualities which deviated from a standard of beauty which favored blond hair, blue eyes, and pale skin. Whether to compensate for her appearance, or simply because of natural talent, Anne was also recognized as having developed a formidable intellect, manifested in a wit and political savvy cultivated by the unique circumstances of her upbringing.

[179] Susan Bordo, *The Creation of Anne Boleyn: A New Look at England's Most Notorious Queen* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), EPUB.

Since Thomas Boleyn served Henry VIII as an overseas diplomat, Anne's formative years were spent abroad in the courts of the Netherlands and France, granting her experiences that created a very different worldview from the other women of Henry's court when she returned to England.[180] The difference was further accentuated by her own choices to signal to her French upbringing in the fashions that she wore. Having served both the Archduchess Margaret of Austria and two Queens of France, she was appointed to Catherine of Aragon's household as a maid-of-honor while negotiations were being worked out for her potential marriage to James Lord Butler. The marriage, meant as a resolution to a land inheritance being disputed between the Butler and Boleyn families, would eventually fall through. After the failure of this initial betrothal, Anne is generally linked in some context to two other men: Henry Percy, the fifth Earl of Northumberland, and the poet Sir Thomas Wyatt.

Henry Percy was of a significantly higher rank and means than Anne, and had an unresolved betrothal of his own, to the daughter of the Earl of Shrewsbury, Lady Mary Talbot. Despite this, contemporary accounts depict his interest in Anne as both genuinely romantic and reciprocated by her, suggesting that the two went so far as to promise marriage to one another, in defiance of social expectations. They were subsequently forced to end their association by Cardinal Wolsey, at the King's command, and Percy would honor his betrothal with Mary Talbot in 1524. Anne's involvement with Wyatt is believed to have been more one-sided, as the poet was already married at the time of Anne's arrival in England. She instead functioned as the object of Wyatt's courtly love,

[180] Fraser places her return in 1521, but Marlow and Moss push the date back within the play, presumably for the internal rhyme of "Fifteen-twenty-two, came straight to the U.K."; Antonia Fraser, *The Wives of Henry VIII.* (New York: Random House, 1992) 121; Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (Norwich, 2018)

his admiration expressed through his poetry, and never going farther than pining or respectful flirtation. Both cases serve to indicate that, regardless of whether or not she conformed to the commonly held standard of beauty, there was a quality to Anne that made her attractive to men, regardless of whether or not they were appropriate matches for her, and that the King's eventual interest in her was not an isolated incident.

Henry's pursuit of Anne is posited to have started at some point in 1526, since he officially petitioned the Vatican for an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon in May of 1527, and there are seventeen letters he sent to Anne before that point, entreating her to acknowledge his love and become his mistress. What replies Anne might have written to him were seized and destroyed by agents of the Vatican, but she had every reason to be wary of his pursuits. Thanks to her sister Mary, Anne had seen firsthand what being a King's lover could entail, how fleeting a monarch's affection could be, and how little support there would be for her when that affection ended, if she were to acquiesce. Thus, her reluctance makes sense, even if the documentation of it has been lost.

As Henry continued his attempts to bring Anne into his bed, his fixation became public knowledge, driving away potential suitors who had no wish to be cuckolded by the King, or to take his castoffs. This mentality was most famously featured in a poem of Thomas Wyatt's which depicted Anne as a deer with a collar reading "*noli me tangere,*[181] for Caesar's I am," in reference to the unofficial claim Henry had staked on her. Some of the letters which Henry sent to Anne were delivered to her family home at Hever, as she

[181] Translation: Do not touch me.

had left her post at court in the hopes that the distance would help his desire cool and find a new paramour. This was not to be.

The commonly held conception among historians is that Henry's interest in Anne remained as long as it did specifically because she continually rebuffed his advances, something which rarely happened to him, and thus made his desire for her even stronger. When Anne made it clear that the only way that she would give up her virginity was to her husband, it created a personal reason for Henry to consider setting aside Catherine. This did not stop him pressing her to become his official mistress while waiting for an answer from the Pope, an offer which Anne refused. It was at this point that Anne's father became deeply involved in the situation, along with her maternal uncle, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk. Where Anne's involvement with Henry had previously been a matter of preserving her personal reputation, it was now an opportunity for the Boleyn and Howard families to climb the social ladder at court and replace Cardinal Wolsey's influence on the King with their own.

Thus, in 1527, Anne agreed to marry Henry, on the condition that he be free to do so, and the Great Matter started in earnest. She returned to Hever for a time, continuing the survivalist tactic of keeping his interest in her, while placing enough distance between them that he could not act on it. When she returned to court, her main priority was in working behind the scenes, rather than be directly involved in the attempts to secure Henry's separation from Catherine and be subjected to further scrutiny while her future was still in question.

The primary manifestation of this influence was in Anne's introducing Henry to reformist texts. Though she did not fully side with the radical Martin Luther, she did

favor reform within the Church, and used the ideas of reformists to appeal to Henry's ego, planting the seeds for his eventual break with Rome. Before he encountered Thomas Cranmer, or Thomas Cromwell, Anne placed in his hands *The Obedience of a Christian Man and how Christian Kings ought to Govern,* a reformist text written by the English-born William Tynedale, the first inkling of the idea that a King should not be subject to the will of the Pope.

Anne's position as Henry's intended second wife became public knowledge in 1528, though she was still playing coy as much as Henry was. The King still sent her favors and love letters, but it was Anne who had begun to grow tired. With the legatine court dragging on, and the possibility of Henry having to return to Catherine, Anne mourned the time that she had spent waiting, rather than finding a new marriage for herself, saying as much to Henry's face, and began lashing out verbally and frequently. These outbursts, most famous among them a declaration that she would rather see Catherine hanged than recognize her as her mistress, did little to endear her to the common people or the courtiers who were not already aligned with her for personal gain.

When Henry was declared supreme head of the Church of England in 1529, it was undeniably a vindication for Anne, and for her family. Her father was raised to the Earl of Wiltshire, her brother to Viscount Rochford, and in 1532, Anne herself was created Marquess of Pembroke in her own right, endowed with five estates to go along with the title. In October, she accompanied Henry on a visit to Calais in order to meet François I and be recognized by another monarch as the future Queen of England. This visit is also believed to have been when Anne finally consented to sex with Henry, as she was pregnant by the time of their secret wedding on January 25, 1533.

The news of the marriage was made public in April, and Anne was formally crowned as Queen on June 1, noticeably pregnant during the ceremony. She was crowned and anointed by Henry himself, in part to recognize her and to acknowledge her child, whom both she and Henry assumed would be the next Prince of Wales. The baby was born on September 7, 1533, a baby girl named Elizabeth for both of her grandmothers. Though both parents were disappointed that she was not the longed-for male heir, the baby's christening was celebrated in splendor, the expectation of a little brother to follow her soon. That expectation proved correct as Anne's second pregnancy was announced in January of 1534, but that pregnancy was lost before the end of the year. In February 1535, Henry took Anne's paternal cousin, Madge Shelton, as his mistress while Anne was in the midst of her third pregnancy, another lost one. Later that year, he would set his sights on Jane Seymour. Anne did not tolerate his infidelities as gracefully as Catherine had, but she did announce her fourth pregnancy in October 1535. With Catherine on her deathbed, her position seemed secure at last.

Though she and Henry marked the occasion by dressing in yellow, supposedly in accordance with Spanish mourning customs, but more likely a celebration of their triumph, the death of Catherine of Aragon was the worst possible thing that could have happened to Anne. The stability of her marriage rested both upon her potential to give Henry a son and the fact that he could not leave her without having to return to Catherine. One of those obstacles was already gone, and the pregnancy she had put so much stock in did prove a male one, but she miscarried the baby at the end of January 1536, quite possibly from catching her husband in the arms of Jane Seymour.

Three years into the marriage and with no son to show for it, Henry now had more to gain from getting rid of her than he did from staying with her. Anne's own disposition was also against her, marriage having done little to alter her sharp wit and short temper. He had scolded her at multiple points for trying to be actively involved in politics and religious reforms, attempting to pushing him deeper into reforming the Church of England, and her habits in court engagements had not changed either. She still engaged in the courtly rituals of flirting with noblemen and her speech remained acerbic, at one point remarking to her brother's wife, Jane Parker, that the King could not please a woman, as he lacked both the skill and the virility to do so. Even her fellow reformer, Thomas Cromwell, had grown to dislike her enough that he aligned with Eustace Chapuys and the Seymour family in order to oust her in favor of Jane.

In April, Cromwell received Henry's approval to investigate Anne's family, among other nobles, for evidence of unspecified crimes, possibly treason. Among those arrested were Mark Smeaton, a musician Anne had favored, who, when subjected to torture, confessed to an affair with the Queen. Shortly after, Anne's brother, George, Henry Norris, Francis Weston, William Brereton, and Anne herself were all arrested and tried in a single day on May 15, 1536. In addition to the charges of treason, Anne was also accused of adultery with all five of the men, incest in the case of her brother, and witchcraft, and found guilty on all counts by a jury that included her uncle, Norfolk, and her former betrothed, Henry Percy, sentenced to burning or execution. Her marriage to Henry was nullified on May 17, and on May 19, she was beheaded by a French swordsman from Calais in a single stroke. Her body was interred in the Tower of

London's Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula without ceremony, Henry preoccupied with arranging his third marriage.

Anne's unique position in history has yielded a multitude of interpretations of her character, erasing the woman who lived and replacing her with an almost legendary figure.[182] She has been the ultimate homewrecker and femme fatale, a savvy political player and religious reformer, the victim of sexual harassment, a witch, a martyr, and every other possible archetype that can be assigned to a woman whose place in history is so closely linked with her sexuality.[183] Karen Lindsey's interpretation of Anne leans heavily upon the angle of workplace sexual harassment, going into detail about how the King's interest effectively eliminated all possible alternatives for Anne until she had no other choice but to acquiesce to his wishes.[184] The parallel holds a degree of accuracy, as Anne was a member of Henry's court, and thus his employee, but the logic at times crosses the line into removing Anne's participation in the events of her life, making her a passive reactionary rather than active contributor. This is the difficulty of any interpretation of Anne Boleyn, regardless of the context: finding the middle ground in the space between villain and victim that gives her both agency and accountability for the events of her life.

Queenspirations

Musically and aesthetically, Boleyn has nearly as many inspirations as history has interpretations of her character. Official *SIX* merchandise and Playbills cite her primary Queenspirations as being Lily Allen and Avril Lavigne, but Marlow and Moss have also

[182] Bordo, *The Creation of Anne Boleyn.*
[183] (Ibid.); Lindsey, *Divorced, beheaded, survived.*
[184] Lindsey, *Divorced, beheaded, survived.*

made references to Miley Cyrus, Katy Perry, and Billie Eilish as influences upon the character, as has Gabriella Slade in discussing Boleyn's costume design.[185] The running themes between all these influences is the iconography of the bad girl, their performed and perceived transgressions making them well suited for the permanently infamous Boleyn.

The amalgamation of influences manifests primarily in the costume design. In addition to the fishnet stockings and crystal-covered boots all the Queens wear, the costume for Boleyn consists of a two-piece green checkered dress with a high-necked midriff-baring top connected to a black 'B' choker and a structured skirt. A black mesh top and a pair of shiny green shorts are worn underneath the dress, and green vambraces are wrapped around her forearms. The front section of her hair is done up in twin buns,[186] held in place by spike-covered leather bands, while the lower half flows freely. The resultant image is a mix of modesty and promiscuity, and nothing is without a specific allusion, either to an artist or to the historical Boleyn.

The checkered pattern evokes plaid, a pattern commonly worn in the punk music scene from which Avril Lavigne drew inspiration, while the dress itself is meant as homage to Katy Perry.[187] The buns have been sported by a number of artists, including the previously cited Miley Cyrus and Billie Eilish. The most famous instance of Cyrus wearing the hairstyle is the 2013 MTV Video Music Awards, where she generated

[185] "Divorced. Beheaded. Live From Facebook HQ," *SIX on Broadway,* Facebook, Video, March 11, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/SIXBroadway/videos/852738735225865/; Nordstrom, "Pop Princesses Meet Tudor Queens," 2020; Sarah Crompton, "With SIX, Playwrights Lucy Moss and Toby Marlow Dramatize the Tudor Dynasty—One Power Ballad at a Time," *Vogue* online, January 16, 2020, https://www.vogue.com/article/six-playwrights-lucy-moss-toby-marlow.

[186] Nicknamed 'space buns'

[187]Divorced. Beheaded. Live From Facebook HQ," *SIX on Broadway*; Avril Lavigne, "Avril Lavigne - Girlfriend (Official Music Video)" YouTube, October 2, 2009, https://youtu.be/Bg59q4puhmg.

controversy for a highly sexual performance during the ceremony, breaking from the sanitized image she had maintained during her tenure as a Disney Channel starlet.[188] Eilish, best known for 'Bad Guy,' a song that actively puts the singer in the role of transgressor, wore the hairstyle during her *Saturday Night Live* performance of the song.[189] The vambraces are meant as a reference to the long-held myth of the song "Greensleeves"[190] being a composition from Henry to her, while the 'B' necklace serves both as an acknowledgement of a similar accessory worn by the historical Anne Boleyn, and a reminder of her final fate. The multitude of influences on her visual presentation also means that Boleyn's two main Queenspirations lean more heavily towards the creation of her persona than her image.

Lily Allen speaks to the controversial aspects of Boleyn's history. A British singer-songwriter who dropped her first album in 2006, Allen's public persona comes as much from her personal life as it does from her music. Her career is one marked by appearances in tabloids, including an unrepentantly political attitude, an arrest in 2007 for the alleged assault of a paparazzo, and a controversy in 2013 over the use of Black dancers in the music video for her single "Hard Out Here," in a context some viewed as exploitative and appropriative.[191] Allen's adversarial relationship to the public eye, expressed through songs like 2009's "The Fear," her willingness to express her left-leaning political views and her interactions with the press, mirrors Boleyn's increasingly

[188] Pepper Schwartz, "Miley Cyrus is sexual -- get over it," *CNN* online, August 27, 2013, https://www.cnn.com/2013/08/26/opinion/schwartz-miley-cyrus/index.html.

[189] Billie Eilish, "Billie Eilish - bad guy (Live From Saturday Night Live)" YouTube, September 29, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn1Uwsg3eRQ.

[190] The song also appears as a synthetic orchestration in 'Ex-Wives,' used to evoke the general feeling of the English Renaissance, regardless of historical accuracy.

[191] Dorian Lynskey, "Lily Allen: the pop rebel who refuses to stay silent." *Guardian* online, October 15, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/oct/15/lily-allen-profile-refugees-criticised-social-media-speak-mind.

divisive presence in court during the long years waiting for Henry to leave Aragon and pushing towards religious reformation.

This alienation of the people whose support they require in order to survive in their respective fields, regardless of intentionality, imbues both women with a sense of tragically self-destructive tendencies, reflected onstage. Historical comments made by Boleyn are translated into public gaffes made in the heat of the moment with far-reaching consequences for her life. Allen's influence is also present in the instrumentation of the initial choruses for Boleyn's solo, "Don't Lose Ur Head," specifically the song "Fuck You" from the 2009 album *It's Not Me, It's You.*[192] The first two iterations of the chorus for "Don't Lose Ur Head" are arranged in a simplistic, mincing orchestration that echoes "Fuck You," mimicking the use of a piano in tandem with Allen's mocking tone of singing to create the same rebellious persona for Boleyn.

French-Canadian singer Avril Lavigne's presence in the creation of Anne Boleyn is a more artificially constructed image than Allen's brutally honest and confrontational persona. Although devoutly Christian in her personal life, Lavigne's public image was built on the fusion of punk and alternative elements into mainstream pop, her discography resting primarily on two different kinds of songs: ones which spoke to disaffected teenagers with their emotional authenticity, and ones that projected the image of her as a rebellious punk spirit, often in juxtaposition to another more conventional girl.[193] It is this second form of song that influences Boleyn's character, both in the checkered pattern of

[192] Lily Allen, "Fuck You," recorded 2008, track 8 on *It's Not Me, It's You,* 2009, Parlophone, 2009, compact disc.

[193] Snapes, Laura, "Still complicated: Avril Lavigne: 'I've had to fight people on this journey'," *Guardian* online, January 14, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jan/14/still-complicated-avril-lavigne-ive-had-to-fight-people-on-this-journey.

her dress, and in the musical cues of heavy guitar riffs and accented percussion. Similar instrumentation was displayed in "Girlfriend," a single from 2007's *The Best Damn Thing,* and addresses a boy being targeted by the singer to leave his current girlfriend for the singer.[194] Carrie-Anne Ingrouille's choreography for the final chorus also mimics the 2009 music video for "Girlfriend," with more aggressive motions that resemble kicking and punching.[195]

All of Boleyn's primary and supplementary Queenspirations are white women, and the character was originally cast accordingly with Millie O'Connell for the first tour of the United Kingdom, which later transferred to the Arts Theatre in London.[196] The original North American production was the first cast to break from this tradition, placing Filipina-Canadian actress Andrea Macasaet in the role.[197] Having Boleyn, "the biggest sinner" who is marked by her unabashed refusal to apologize or comply with the expectations of men, portrayed by a member of the supposed 'model minority' directly contradicts that model, and elevates the idea of the character as a transgressive bad girl. At its core, Boleyn's true 'crime' was in rejecting her objectification and refusing to bow to Henry's will. Casting an Asian woman in this role is a break from the roles more commonly seen for this demographic, most notably the collection of exoticized stereotypes that make up the female ensembles of works like *Miss Saigon, South Pacific,* and *The King and I*.[198] Unlike these women, Boleyn is not a submissive martyr, she is not

[194] Avril Lavigne, "Girlfriend," recorded 2006, track 1 on *The Best Damn Thing,* RCA, 2007, compact disc.

[195] Avril Lavigne, "Girlfriend (Official Music Video)."

[196] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (Norwich, 2018)

[197] Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, "A conversation with the creators*," American Repertory Theater presents SIX*, (Cambridge: American Repertory Theater, 2019).

[198] Frances Henry, Winston Matthis, and Carol Tator, "Miss Saigon" in *Challenging Racism in the Arts: Case Studies of Controversy and Conflict* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 141-158.

sexualized to the point of objectification, and she has no desire to be saved by the love of a man, but, by her own admission is "just tryin' to have some fun."

Onstage

The interpretation of Boleyn Marlow and Moss chose to employ is one shaped by "let them grumble, that is how it's going to be," the personal motto she adopted in 1530; the saying is modernized to become the sing-song refrain of "sorry, not sorry," making her a bad girl while acknowledging that she was forced into that image by the men around her.[199] Although the interpretation as a whole diverges from her more explicitly sexualized image, the text does acknowledge the reputation twice before ultimately reframing it for her solo. When introducing herself in "Ex-Wives," she blatantly says "yeah, I'm that sexy," after explaining that she was responsible for England breaking from the Catholic Church, and in the prelude to "Don't Lose Ur Head," her fellow Queens refer to her as "the temptress" and "the one with the plan, the plan to steal the man," putting the focus on her image as a schemer and seductress.[200] This image is then immediately subverted by the prelude ending in reveal of Boleyn lounging on the steps of the stage and snickering at a cellphone, oblivious to the melodrama around her. The moment with the cellphone is a microcosm of the overall concept driving Boleyn's character: mocking the grandiose exaggerations of her historical role.

The role is written as an inherently glib one, with quips to the other Queens that cross the line into cruelty, most notably in constant reminders to her fellow Queens of the fact that she was beheaded as a means of dismissing their own traumas. Her callousness makes her the most maliciously antagonistic of the group, but Macasaet shapes the role

[199] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (Cambridge, 2019)
[200] (Ibid.)

into a specific form of childishness that softens that harshness; the most distinctive element of her performance is her voice, pitched in a high, coy deadpan borders on baby-talk in both her singing and her dialogue. Her mode of speaking is part of the act meant to present her as irreverently rebellious and juvenile, turning the melodramatic events of her life into a farce, while also giving her the appearance of an apparently flaky airhead.

This overall lack of reverence in translating Boleyn to the stage is the most likely out of all the Queens' interpretations, from the perspective of those who cling to historical accuracy. Just as "No Way" left out the majority of Aragon's life, "Don't Lose Ur Head" omits and condenses vast amounts of the approximate ten years between Boleyn's arrival in England and her marriage to Henry, as well as the three years of the marriage itself, including the birth of their daughter, Elizabeth. Unlike Aragon, however, the Boleyn of *SIX* does not have a uniformly sympathetic portrayal, and her more questionable behaviors are elevated to become the most prominent aspects of her character. The means by which she attempts to gain the audience's sympathy for the sake of winning the competition is in reframing her actions with the repeated question of "what was I meant to do?"[201] Though the line seems coy on the surface, it demonstrates the lack of full agency within Boleyn's situation, presenting a carefully crafted, selective version of her history that serves to highlight the lack of power she had within the patriarchy of her world.

Within the first verse, she claims to have been uninterested in politics until meeting the King, at which point she was informed by her father that she "should try and get ahead" by utilizing Henry's interest for political gain. The verse is built around a

[201] Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, *SIX*, (Norwich, 2018)

combination of historical truths and the mystery afforded by the missing letters Boleyn might have sent to Henry in return. It recognizes her continental education, but also acknowledges that her intelligence did not inherently mean that she had greater political ambitions, instead placing the responsibility for her eventual political involvement with the men in her life, her father and Henry, who sought to use her for their own gain. The first time it is said, "what was I meant to do" highlights that the situation was not one of her own making: she accepted the initial flirtation with Henry because filial piety required it of her. The choreography of the first chorus also reflects this lack of control, having all six women performing jerky, simplistic movements with rigid limbs, evoking the imagery of marionettes subject to the control of another.

The second verse, covering the mounting pressure for the annulment and the comment about Boleyn preferring to see Aragon hanged, turn "what was I meant to do" into damage control after the public backlash to her outburst. Again, the blame implicitly lies with Henry for putting her in an unwinnable position, as was the case in history—holding out against his advances was necessary to protect her reputation, but she was still obligated to side with him to preserve her position. The rigidity remains in the blocking second chorus, but the motions grow more complex, indicating Boleyn's growth into a participating member of the political system. As they transition into the third verse, the official break from the Catholic Church and her subsequent marriage cuts directly to the end of the marriage.

This is the part of Boleyn's story in which Marlow and Moss take the most creative liberties with the history, making her flirtations with other men a deliberate choice meant as a retaliation for Henry's own marital infidelities and turning her

comment about his virility into one made straight to his face, thus framing it as the impetus for his decision to have her executed. In spite of these changes, there is still an undercurrent of truth to the 'why' of the situation: the fact that Boleyn did not meekly put up with affairs and behaved in ways that undermined and belittled Henry, when that same boldness had been the primary cause for his initial attraction to her. That contrast is encapsulated as she yells at the other Queens in a panic that he actually intends to chop her head off, but then immediately follows up with the line "I mean, I guess he just really liked my head," pantomiming fellatio of her microphone before launching into the final chorus of the song with the "Girlfriend" homage choreography.[202]

After "Don't Lose Ur Head," she resumes her antagonizing behavior, first with attempting to perform a second solo, "Wearing Yellow to a Funeral," before settling into trading further barbs with the other Queens, primarily Aragon and Seymour, while maintaining the narcissistic fixation on her beheading. She is not unique in this self-obsession, but it is a more prominently displayed feature of her character than the other Queens, in large part because of the omission of Elizabeth. Aragon and Seymour are both given multiple references to their children, but Boleyn makes only one mention of having a daughter before returning to the theme of her execution. Within the context of the competition, neglecting Elizabeth makes dramaturgical sense; her reign is now widely considered a golden age, and to bring her up in greater detail would undermine Boleyn's hardships by transforming her into a martyr whose sacrifice was eventually validated with the triumphant ascension of her daughter. Recognizing that the focus needs to

[202] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (Cambridge, 2019); Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020)

remain with Boleyn, Marlow and Moss opt for this omission, letting her stand as an individual, rather than the precursor to her child.

For Boleyn's altered future, she prioritizes her intellect, putting a spin on the "Greensleeves" myth— after receiving the poem, she turns it into her own song and becomes a famous performer who eventually worked with Shakespeare.[203] This revision, along with giving her the line that exposes the competition as a reinforcement of patriarchal biases, reveals the seemingly unintelligent persona used for the majority of the play, is a calculated exaggeration of her position as the seductress, taking it to the logical extreme of an unintelligent sex kitten. Her revisions to her life story allow her to invert the way she was used by men for their successes, and instead use them for her own success, and eventually surpassing them.

As a figure of both history and popular culture, no interpretation of Boleyn can accurately capture the reality of the woman who lived without the influence of biased perspectives infringing upon the work. The similar temptation for holistic villainization or victimization, dependent upon the perspective of the creator, does little to effectively critique the patriarchal world which the historical Boleyn inhabited. The approach of Marlow and Moss affords Boleyn culpability in her life's trajectory without crossing the line into blaming her, recognizing the limitations of that culpability. The Anne Boleyn presented in *SIX* is noticeably flawed but empowered because she still confronts the fabricated misogynist images that shape perceptions her historical counterpart.

[203] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (Cambridge, 2019); Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020)

Jane Seymour

From a feminist perspective, the historical Jane Seymour is a complicated figure to reckon with, simply by virtue of how short her tenure was, and how little information exists about her beyond her relationship with Henry. Her birth is estimated to have been roughly around 1509, a middle child among ten born to Sir John Seymour and Lady Margery Wentworth, meaning that she would have been approximately twenty-six when Henry expressed his interest in the autumn of 1535. She had remained in England all her life, raised at Wolf Hall, the Seymour family estate, before being dispatched to court as a lady-in-waiting. Her education, compared to her predecessors, was a simple one, but there were few who dispute that she was pleasant, easily kept company. Even by the standards of the day, she was not considered especially beautiful, her primary physical descriptor being that she was fair-skinned, something reflected in the one portrait confirmed to be of her, painted by Hans Holbein.

She is also known to have served both Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn at different points during their reigns, possibly even attending Catherine during her exile before being brought back to serve Anne. Regardless of when her service to her predecessors took place, her loyalties were decidedly closer to Catherine, part of what made her an appealing replacement to those who wanted Anne gone. The more commonly held conceptions of Seymour tend to position her as a calming presence to contrast the chaotic storm of Anne's more tempestuous and ambitious nature and elevate her as a pinnacle of morality and modesty. In reality, there is historical evidence that demonstrates her following a very similar path to her predecessor in securing her place at

Henry's side. Like Anne, Jane came from an ambitious family, and Anne's unpopularity provided the Seymours with the opportunity to attempt the same gambit on Jane's behalf.

Just as Anne's primary allure for Henry had been the fertility she promised in contrast to Catherine, historical evidence suggest that the quality Jane highlighted in comparison was her comparatively demure and constant nature, even as she employed many of the same tactics Anne had used. She made a similar show of refusing the larger tokens of Henry's affections, notably sending back an offered purse of gold with the protestation that she prized her honor too highly, while simultaneously flaunting the affair to Anne's face: among the more famous accounts of her time as Anne's lady-in-waiting is a story of Jane opening and closing a locket Henry had given her with his portrait inside it while in Anne's presence, prompting Anne to tear it from Jane's neck so quickly that her fingers bled. While Cromwell and his aides were arresting, interrogating, trying, and executing Anne and her supposed accomplices, Henry was constantly in Jane's company, though always chaperoned by a member of her family.

The two were betrothed on May 20, 1536, a day after Anne's execution, and ten days later, Jane became Henry's third wife, though he would continue to insist that the first two marriages were invalid, making her the first. Jane was not politically savvy in the way her predecessors had been and thus less able to exert her influence on affairs of the realm. As she adopted the motto 'bound to serve and obey' after her marriage, this was almost certainly in compliance with the expectations Henry held for her. After two consorts who questioned him and tried to shape the course of his reign, her security was in standing by his side without question.

Further reinforcing this image of acquiescence are the few occasions that historians credit as being the result of her interceding with her husband. Her successes, in general, were limited to the domestic sphere, though she had not yet fulfilled what everyone saw as her primary purpose, the deliverance of a son. The return of Mary, Henry's daughter by Catherine of Aragon to court in the summer of 1536 is generally credited to Seymour's influence on Henry, as her affection for her elder stepdaughter was documented. Though she is not reported to have had the same affinity for Elizabeth, who was officially struck from the line of succession in June in favor of Jane's future children, at the very least, she tolerated the three-year-old when it was required.

Her attempts to push her husband back towards the ways of the Catholic Church were less successful. Despite the removal of Anne Boleyn, Thomas Cromwell's presence remained, and Henry continued the dissolution of the monasteries as part of his reforms for the Church of England. When Jane attempted to advocate on behalf of restoring the monasteries in order to prevent the northern insurrection forming in the autumn of 1536, she was met with a warning not to meddle in her husband's affairs, and to remember the fate of the last woman who had tried to do so. Since Jane was not yet pregnant, her position was unsteady enough that she complied.

In March 1537, Jane's pregnancy was announced, and despite a scare when plague spread throughout the summer, she remained healthy. On October 12, after three nights and two days of labor, she delivered the Prince of Wales that had so desperately been awaited, named Edward. Later accounts would misattribute Jane's death to the results of caesarean section, some even claiming that Henry had ordered it despite the risk to her life in order to save the baby. Jane was well enough to receive guests after

Edward's christening, and her death was most likely caused by puerperal fever, then commonly called child-bed fever. She died twelve days after Edward's birth, and was buried in Windsor on November 12, 1537, with plans for Henry to one day be entombed beside her.

The lack of information about Jane's life pre-Henry makes it difficult to distance her from him and thus define her as her own person. In conflating her with his joy at finally having a son, Henry certainly idealized his view of her and of their relationship, elevating her to the status of the only woman he truly loved. The part she and her family played in the downfall of Anne Boleyn likewise colors interpretations of her part in history, dependent upon the writer's opinion of her predecessor. Despite her professed feminist objectives, Karen Lindsey is particularly vicious to Seymour in this regard, entitling the sole chapter of her book dedicated to Seymour "The Vessel," alluding to her supposedly singular importance as the mother of Henry's only son.[204] She also returns to the theme of fairy-tale princesses she had previously used for Catherine of Aragon, positioning Jane as a bastion of idealized passive femininity and condemning her for that position. After her more vehement defense of Anne Boleyn, Lindsey's approach to Jane reads as an overcorrection for the heavily sanitized image of Jane that exists in history thanks to Henry's romanticism of their marriage, crossing the line into an outright villainization, rather than attempting to liberate her from that romanticized image and reframe her as a woman in her own right.

[204] Lindsey, *Divorced, beheaded, survived,* 116.

Queenspirations

The two artists used as the template for Seymour are Sia and Adele, singer-songwriters with reputations as powerful vocalists, and whose compositions are based heavily in emotional catharsis. The two are also known for diverging from conventional expectations when it comes to the shaping of their respective images and marketing, and this feeds further into their connections to Seymour, though it manifests in very different ways for each individual performer.

The influence of the Australian-born Sia is an ideological one, stemming directly from the constructed ideas of anonymity and a lack of identity. After a decade as a singer without much success in the independent circuit, Sia gained ground in the mainstream pop community writing songs for other artists, something which she would continue to do even after she began releasing her own albums.[205] Her experience working with other public figures led her to realize that she was not comfortable with such a lifestyle, just as her own songs were beginning to chart. In order to circumvent her growing fame, Sia took measures to ensure that she had no public identity and was allowed to retain a level of privacy. She made a show of deliberately concealing her face through oversized wigs during public appearances and opted not to appear as the focus of her music videos. Seymour reflects that anonymity in her own historical treatment, rather than choosing it for herself. The image of the perfectly obedient, docile wife who was meant to help continue the Tudor line is as artificial as the oversized wigs Sia employs to conceal her face, but it is an image that has gained recognition and acceptance by the public.

[205] Kristin J. Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry,* 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2018).

The lack of specificity within the lyrics of "Heart of Stone," most notably in the broad strokes of the chorus, is also very in keeping with Sia's body of work; a substantial amount of her income is derived from the licensing of her songs for film and television, their frequency being a testament to her music's ability to adapt to any given situation or persona, rather than being associated specifically with the original artist.[206] When applied to Seymour, the vague quality of the lyrics serves as a means of reinforcing the concept of her lack of identity outside of her relationships, the dominant influence therefore resting with her second Queenspiration, Adele.

A white singer-songwriter from the United Kingdom, Adele rose to prominence in 2009 with her debut album, *19,* which had been written in response to the end of a six-month relationship.[207] Because of Sia's deliberate lack of a public image, Adele is the only influence on Seymour's physical appearance. The role is the only one to have been unilaterally represented by one ethnicity throughout the various productions of *SIX:* since the Cambridge student run cast Holly Musgrave, Seymour has been played by white actresses, and since Natalie May Paris assumed the role, these actress have also tended to sport long blonde hair when onstage. This includes Abby Mueller for the original North American cast, and the only principal actress of the six to be white.[208] What an actress of color might be able to bring to the role has only been seen by the general public in released Megasix videos that feature alternates, which offer little in the ways of clarity on characterization within the play itself. As long as this uniformity in principal casting

[206] Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry,* 59.

[207] Nicole Frehsée, "Meet Adele, the U.K.'s Newest Soul Star," *Rolling Stone*, January 22, 2009, 26.

[208] This briefly changed when Courtney Mack was brought in to replace Samantha Pauly as Katherine Howard; Marlow and Moss, *SIX,* (Cambridge, 2019).

remains true, however, Seymour's consistent whiteness connects to her position as the wife Henry claimed to have truly loved, making her the idealized, submissive white woman who fulfills her duty to continue the patriarchy and then dies before that view of her can be tarnished.

Beyond having this ethnography in common with her Queenspirations, the whiteness of Seymour also contributes to a greater affinity of appearance with Adele in how unassuming she is when compared to the other Queens. Adele was considered noteworthy when her career began for refusing to glamorize herself, instead utilizing the image of her as an ordinary person to make her seem more relatable and accessible to the general public.[209] Seymour's costume, a deceptively simple silver-black frock with a high-to-low skirt, mimics this minimization of glamour, being the most unassuming of the six Queens. Her signature color, white, is present in the bodice of the dress through a white corset designed to mimic the lattices of Tudor architecture, and in the white spiked headband that blends into her hair far more than her bandmates' hairpieces do. It is an outfit that adheres to more conservative ideas of femininity and downplays her sexuality— though there are plenty of moments in the libretto that allow her to display it—in a way that reads as marginally more demure than her fellow Queens' ensembles, a nod to the supposed docile demeanor that made her Henry's favorite, in addition to giving birth to Edward. The subdued nature of the costume also puts the focus back on Seymour's performance as the point of connection with the audience.

Rather than recount her courtship with Henry, or the details of the events that made up her tenure as Queen, such as the northern rebellion, the verses of "Heart of

[209] Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry,* 138–139.

Stone" emphasize Seymour's emotional state during the marriage, another reflection of Adele's influence. *19,* as well as Adele's subsequent albums, *21,* and *25,* all heavily feature songs about the singer's relationships, with deeply intimate details of emotion embedded in the lyrics.[210] The song also has the most simplistic orchestrations of the Queens' individual songs: in keeping with Adele's minimalist style, the piano takes the lead, with the other instruments being used for accentuation more than embellishment and letting Seymour's vocal grandeur and the underlying romanticism of the ballad be the focus.

Onstage

For a first-time viewer, unaware of the competition's true nature as a ruse, Seymour's approach is a difficult one to reconcile with the play's feminist trappings, something acknowledged when she steps forward to perform following Boleyn's attempt at a second solo. She is immediately ridiculed by the other for being the wife that Henry claimed to truly love, and she admits to loving him in return, making the argument that her suffering comes from being denied the chance to live happily with him following the birth of their child. The text actively acknowledges and engages with this paradox, the 2018 version of the script including a stage direction for the other queens to "chuckle at Jane's first world problems" when she wonders about the permanence of Henry's love, had she given birth to a daughter rather than a son.[211]

Despite the mockery, Seymour continues with "Heart of Stone," reiterating her unwavering commitment to her husband and son, even in death. The emotional performance of the song direct conflict with the text that surrounds being alienated by the

[210] Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry,* 138–139.
[211] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (Norwich, 2018).

declaration of love for someone as objectively abusive as Henry was to his wives, but the dissonance is deliberate. In a show that inherently positions Henry as a toxic force of destruction, Seymour's dedication to him has more in common with the gaslit rationalizations of an abuse victim refusing to acknowledge their abuse, including her pre-song insistence that she was not frightened of Henry and the statement that "I know, without my son/ Your love could disappear," while continuing to insist that she loves him and will remain faithful to him.[212]

When the competition's true intentions of exposing the patriarchal approaches of history are revealed, Marlow and Moss' choice of interpretation gains a greater clarity: highlighting the lack of sources that give a full view of Seymour beyond her marriage and her son and making that the tragedy of her life. The shifted perspective makes her aware of her abuse and reinvents "Heart of Stone" as a means of catharsis, grappling with the realities of what such an existence means. Subtle hints are laid before the reveal, with her dialogue following "Heart of Stone" fixating more heavily on her not being able to raise her child, rather than her supposed grand romance with Henry.

With the work of addressing her historical interpretation being done in song form, Seymour is among allowed to be defined outside of her relationships to her husband and son. Her most prominent trait is an awkwardness with performance that walks the line between endearing and painful, apparently shyer and less at ease when performing than her fellow Queens. In keeping with a late assessment from Boleyn that she "can't dance," Seymour is often at the back of the group when dancing, comparatively out of sight, and the humor built around her character is more often likely to have her as the butt of the

[212] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).

joke.[213] As the greatest indication of this dynamic, Marlow and Moss' notes on the 2018 version of the libretto specify that "bad jokes almost always belong to Seymour," a dramatic choice that sets her apart from her bandmates' more succinctly witty comebacks.[214] Seymour is also prone to emotional outbursts, which she then clumsily tries to cover up for comedic effect. These traits dispel the sanitized image of the historical Seymour in favor of a flawed woman who is still relatable to the audience.

Her ideal future in "Six" sees her raising a large family of singers, one she unabashedly first calls the "Tudor Von Trapps," and then "The Royalling Stones," as she throws up a rock and roll hand signal and happily sticks out her tongue.[215] Though the names of the band imply that Henry would still be her partner and the father of her imagined children, the ambiguity of the lyrics makes it clear that he is not the focus of the fantasy. The change in Seymour's demeanor, her awkwardness and shame falling away as she embraces herself fully, highlights the prioritization of her needs, standing in stark contrast to the self-conscious persona used for the majority of the performance. This switch is an efficient means of reconciling the perception of Seymour as a woman whose primary function was as breeding stock with a feminist perspective. Rather than shame her for the desire to have a romance and children, it places those desires within her hands, removing them from the patriarchal context of history to celebrate her choice. The inclusion of the band as part of the future also helps to subvert the concept of compulsory heterosexuality, as Seymour is not required to give up anything in order to have her family within the fantasy.

[213] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).
[214] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (Norwich, 2018).
[215] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).

The approach to Seymour for *SIX* is an exercise in re-examining not only of how depictions of Seymour reduce her solely to her part as a wife and mother, but the place of such archetypes within feminist works of art. In the greater spirit of inclusivity and solidarity that shape the goals of *SIX,* the conclusion Marlow and Moss reach is that the presence of these roles are a matter of framing and agency, not a unilateral contradiction to feminist goals. By allowing Seymour to exist with her desires validated while also acknowledging her privilege, both textual and metatextual, the scope of the play expands to encompass a greater breadth of female experiences without judgement.

Anna of Cleves

Like Catherine of Aragon, the match between Henry and Anna of Cleves was arranged for political reasons, and as a member of a prominent political family, there is a larger amount of information available about her early life. Anna, born September 22, 1515, was the second of three daughters to John III, Duke of Cleves, and his wife, Mary of Jülich-Berg-Ravensberg. Both Anna and her younger sister, Amalia, were suggested to Henry as potential brides by their father in 1537, who was eager to make the match. Nicholas Wotton and Robert Barnes were dispatched to Cleves in 1539, only to find John dead and succeeded by his son, William, who was less automatically eager than his father had been to offer up one of his sisters freely. When Wotton and Barnes asked to see the two young women, William had them arrive in heavy veils and gowns, concealing their appearances. Thomas Cromwell, desperate to cement England's position in the religious reformation, continued to push for the match, sending Christopher Mont and painter Hans Holbein to Germany to further negotiate and paint portraits of the two Princesses.

After getting reports that Anna was considered the more beautiful of the two sisters, Cromwell pushed for her to Henry, stoking the King's excitement enough that he offered to marry her without a dowry when Duke William claimed that he was too poor to furnish one. Holbein immediately began work on the portrait, which was received by Henry with substantial delight and the negotiations were begun in earnest. The one obstacle of some discussion was a previous betrothal between Anna and Francis of Lorraine, made in 1527, when neither was of an age to consent, and which William's representatives assured the English had ended. The marriage treaty between Henry and Anna was signed on September 4, 1539, with Anna being brought to England in

December of the same year. Eager to see her for himself, Henry decided that he would surprise his new bride, riding from Greenwich to Rochester in disguise to meet her ahead of schedule. When he entered her chambers, he embraced her, much to the shock of the young princess, who spoke no English and had no knowledge of her bridegroom's appearance. Already irritated, Henry went out and removed his disguise, returning for a brief conversation with his intended as himself before retreating and vehemently declaring his dislike of her to Cromwell.

Henry's newfound distaste for his fiancée mattered little, for though he attempted to revisit the issue of her previous betrothal with Lorraine, he remained bound by the marriage agreement, and the wedding went forward on January 6, 1540. The marriage went unconsummated that night, and all following nights, with Henry claiming that his new wife was so repulsive to him that he could not bring himself to lie with her. He made claims about the state of her body, insisting that she could not have been a virgin, and already seeking a means of ending this fourth marriage. He avoided Anna's bed for the next five months, especially as one of her ladies-in-waiting, the teenaged Katherine Howard caught his eye. Anna had few objections to the lack of consummation and may not have even been fully aware of what consummation entailed, from the estimation of those ladies-in-waiting who pressed her on the subject. Her other duties as Queen consort were largely ceremonial, as Henry wanted as little to do with her as possible.

On June 10, 1540, Thomas Cromwell, the architect of the marriage, was arrested and taken to the Tower of London, sentenced to death without trial on the charges of high treason and heresy. Henry then set about building the case for annulling the union, presenting the argument that because a precontract had existed between Cleves and

Lorraine and he himself had not consummated the marriage, it was void. Cromwell was used as a further scapegoat, accused of pressuring the King into the match under duress. The only remaining obstacle to finalizing the annulment was the Queen herself.

Presumably aware of the fate that awaited women who stood against her husband when he wanted something, Anna took the rejection and humiliation with as much grace as possible. She agreed to his demands while claiming she had been content in the marriage, and in return for her compliance, Henry conditionally naturalized her as an English citizen, making her his adopted sister and furnishing her with a generous settlement of estates and an annual allowance of approximately three thousand pounds, so long as she remained in England. The marriage was officially dissolved on July 9, roughly six months after it had begun. Her brother, upon hearing of the annulment, requested his sister's return, but Anna chose to take her alimony, never again returning to Cleves in her lifetime.

Ironically, after the annulment, Anna and Henry's relationship improved substantially, becoming a close friendship that led to many speculating that they might re-marry after the execution of Katherine Howard in 1542, but nothing ever came of it. These rumors were most likely fueled by the change that occurred in Anna following the annulment. After her sheltered and restrained life in Germany, her time in England as the King's 'sister' saw her enjoying drinks freely, and spending her generous allowance freely on gowns, jewels, and other luxuries, unimpeded by a male authority figure. In doing so, it is plausible that the two of them might have reevaluated their opinions of one another, but there is no record indicating that Henry ever considered marrying her a second time. Some evidence suggest that Anna might have regretted this, as she is said to

have remarked at Henry's wedding to Catherine Parr that she considered herself better-looking than the bride, among other somewhat disparaging remarks about the prospects the new Queen had to anticipate.

Regardless of whatever romantic feelings she might have held towards him, Anna remained a part of Henry's court until his death, having become a steadier, friendlier presence for all three of his children. She left behind the Lutheran faith she had known in her home, adapting easily to the splendor of the more Catholic-influenced Church of England, and was a fixture in the courts of Edward and Mary, still enjoying a generous pension, though not as lavish as the one she had received during Henry's lifetime. She passed away during Mary's reign on July 16, 1557, at the age of forty-two, having managed to outlive all of Henry's other wives.

The nature of Anna's beauty is subjective, especially by modern standards, but accounts not outwardly influenced by Henry suggest that she was not as unattractive as her short-term husband claimed. Her complexion might have been tanner than the general standard considered beautiful, but she was generally held as attractive, though somewhat severe, with a high forehead, heavy-lidded eyes, and a more prominent nose. This last quality might have been what prompted Henry's unfortunate nickname for her as a 'Flanders Mare,' forever marking her as the supposedly ugly wife. Historical reality, however, offers a portrait of Anna that goes beyond the superficiality of her looks, one that makes her the closest thing to a liberated woman that the English Renaissance would have until the ascension of Elizabeth I.

Queenspirations

The central conceit of Cleves for *SIX* is driven by the idea of the post-annulment libertine, with her solo, "Get Down," serving as a raucous, celebratory anthem for her way of life, in repudiation of the aspersions cast by Henry about her looks. For Queenspirations that fit this mold, Marlow and Moss chose Rihanna and Nicki Minaj, Afro-Caribbean artists with but similar modes of confidence and empowerment tied directly into their identities as Black women. In keeping with her Queenspirations, actresses cast to play Cleves have generally been Black women, but as more productions have opened, there has been a greater diversity of actresses being chosen. Most notable in this is the rise of plus-sized actresses such as Shekinah McFarlane in the UK tour and Sophie Golden in the first run of the musical on the Norwegian Cruise Line vessel Bliss.[216]

Although Henry's criticisms of Cleves' appearance probably had more to do with his wounded ego than the reality of her looks, casting Black women and plus sized women in the role creates subtext on standards of beauty which favor thin, cisgender white women, and to repudiate them by casting performers who diverge from the normative in a role that focuses so heavily on celebrating the performer's appearance. The North American production cast a dark-skinned Black actress, Brittney Mack, considered a standout in the cast to the point of receiving a nomination for the Drama League's Distinguished Performance Award for 2020.[217] Mack's performance deeply

[216] "Shekinah McFarlane," Six the Musical, October 24,2019, https://www.sixthemusical.com/uk-tour/company/shekinah-mcfarlane; "Sophie Golden," *Global Artists.* August 9, 2019, https://www.spotlight.com/0294-8978-9200

[217] "The 2020 Drama League Awards," Drama League, May 30, 2020, http://dramaleague.org/events/awards/nominees20.

embraces the concept of a Black woman onstage unapologetically owning her femininity, beauty, and empowerment, while honoring the camp nature of the text.

Cleves is, as a whole, the character aligned with the concept of camp as the performance of artifice, through multiple definitions of the word. 'Get Down' is the song that could most easily be adapted for drag performances, thanks to a costume reveal within the song and its attitude of rejecting the opinions of others in favor of self-adulation.[218] The reveal itself is the moment most in keeping with the heightened performativity that codifies queer drag culture, but more relevant to Cleves is the camp of Nicki Minaj. A Black-Trinidadian rapper with a reputation for producing sexually explicit content and an assertive personality, Minaj's public image is one characterized by exaggerated and eccentric fashion choices that draw attention to her femininity and sexuality, and thus is the artist more prominent in the design of Cleves' costume.[219]

The outfit, which uses red as the dominant color, always includes a pair of shorts, black bedazzled arm warmers, and a fur-trimmed red-and-black vest to be removed mid-performance. What lay beneath changed for the Broadway production; originally, only the vest was removed to reveal a red crop top with crisscrossed straps. With Marlow and Moss' approval, the shorts and vest were converted to tearaway pieces to facilitate the full-body reveal of a red leotard decorated in rhinestones and chains, which echoes of the golden outfit worn by Minaj at the 2018 Video Music Awards.[220] The unrepentantly

[218] The number was performed and recorded at Penn State School of Theatre's 2019 Gay Prom. Austin Eyer, "Get Down - Six the Musical," YouTube, March 24, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wT6s0l8BHFM.

[219] Uri McMillan, "Nicki-aesthetics: the camp performance of Nicki Minaj," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 24 (2014), 79–87.

[220] Paulson, "How Queens Became Pop Stars"; Peggy Truong, "Nicki Minaj Just Delivered a 'Queen' Medley While Decked Out in ~Gold~ at the 2018 VMAs," *Cosmopolitan* online, August 21, 2018, https://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/music/a22690500/nicki-minaj-performance-vma-2018/

confrontational nature of Minaj's body of work sets the tone of Cleves' physical performance; the choreography for 'Get Down' provides Cleves with ample opportunities to display her body to the audience as a repudiation of Henry's accusations and expression of her unrestricted lifestyle.

The same defiant attitude exists in the line "okay, ladies, let's get in Reformation," a sampled and modified version of the hook from "Formation," off Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, originally presented as an anthem calling for Black empowerment, particularly the empowerment of Black women.[221] The use of the lyric for "Get Down" is an acknowledgment of the role the historical Cleves was supposed to play in advancing England's religious separation from the Catholic Church and positions the Cleves onstage as the member of the group most openly in touch with her empowerment. The Beyoncé tribute also invokes the Haunted Stage for the 2014 remix of her song "Flawless," on which Minaj appeared, and centered around the same materialistic splendor and empowered confidence which defines Cleves' post-annulment life.[222]

The form of empowerment and influence which Rihanna brings to Cleves' character is subtler in its manifestations. Originally from Barbados, Rihanna has maintained a greater level of privacy in her interactions with the public, preferring to let her music be the focal point of her career; the two major exceptions to this reclusive persona were her early-career relationship with rapper Chris Brown, and the 2017 launch of Fenty Beauty by Rihanna, a makeup brand designed to accommodate all ethnicities

[221] *Lemonade,* Knowles-Carter et. al., 2016; Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry,* 206–207.

[222] Beyoncé Knowles and Nicki Minaj, "Flawless Remix (feat. Nicki Minaj)," recorded 2014, track 16 on *BEYONCÉ [Platinum Edition],* Columbia, 2014, compact disc.

and skin tones.[223] Her relationship with Brown, first occurring in 2009, ended after he beat her to the point that she required hospitalization, though neither performer's career was negatively impacted by the altercation, and they would briefly rekindle their relationship in 2013.[224] While it is never suggested within the text of *SIX* that Henry exerted the level of violence against Cleves which Brown did to Rihanna, there is a broader parallel between the two relationships in outgrowing the abuser.

Rihanna's discography following Brown's assault and their separation shifted from the upbeat dance pop that had let her break into the mainstream to include more songs driven by negative emotions, in order to process the aftermath of her abuse and regain control of the narrative. "Love the Way You Lie I and II" were used to depict the emotional baggage of victimhood, while "Man Down" and "Bitch Better Have My Money," were accompanied by music videos which included heavily sexualized imagery and depictions of violent revenge being taken against male perpetrators.[225] Cleves' revenge is more tailored to fit her situation, promising to hang up the supposedly deceptive portrait while mocking Henry's inability to impede her actions in her new context as a liberated woman.

Despite the differing contexts, the underlying message of a woman refusing to let her past trauma with a man define her, and enjoying life on her own terms remains constant, and also serves as the unifying point for the two Queenspirations. Marlow and Moss take the mutual constructed narratives of resilience and empowerment and translate

[223] Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry*, 142.

[224] (Ibid.), 250; Justin Ravitz, "Chris Brown Confirms Rihanna Breakup: "I Can't Focus on Wife-ing" Her." *US Weekly* online, May 6 2013, https://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/chris-brown-confirms-rihanna-breakup-i-cant-focus-on-wife-ing-her-201365/.

[225] Debra Ferreday, "'Only the Bad Gyal could do this': Rihanna, rape-revenge narratives and the cultural politics of white feminism," *Feminist Theory* 18, no. 3 (2017), 263–280.

them to the stage for Cleves, creating a fiery reclamation of independence and personal integrity that bucks the system and renders her, in her own words, “the Queen of the castle.”

Onstage

The means by which Marlow and Moss translated Cleves to the modern age extend beyond her Queenspirations: even before the “Haus of Holbein” sequence, allusions to online dating were present as early as her introduction from “Ex-Wives,” stating that “I didn’t look as good as I did in my pic,” and “Get Down” serves as the conclusion of the comparisons. The extended metaphor serves a dual purpose, making the business of an arranged marriage more relatable to the audience, and robbing Henry of his dignity as the supposedly offended party by making the dynamic increasingly shallow, while placing the power in Cleves’ hands.

When presenting herself during the original pitch of the competition, Cleves uses the argument that “who was most chaste shall be first place,” a thinly veiled reference to the lack of consummation in her marriage and the fact that she never remarried. All her subsequent actions, however, repudiate the idea that chastity implicitly confirms her as ugly and prudish. Throughout “Get Down,” Cleves easily commands attention as she basks in the adoration of the audience, and flaunts her glamour, particularly after the reveal of her second costume. In keeping with the camp tone of “Get Down,” Cleves makes only a token effort to describe her marriage to Henry, receiving a speech in the same vein as Aragon and Seymour before she sings. The speech, describing her arrival in England only to become “the savvy educated young princess deemed repulsive by the

wheezing, wrinkled, ulcer riddled man twenty-four years her senior" is delivered with a feigned melancholy that grows more obvious in its irony with every sentence.[226]

In doing so, Cleves is also the first Queen to provide textual hints implying that the stakes are not as high as the audience has been led to believe, switching from melodramatically feigned tears to outright revelry in the splendor of her life after the annulment for the performance of "Get Down." Outside her solo piece, the character takes a more relaxed approach to the competition, furthering the hints that it does not actually matter. When it is pointed out that her life was markedly better than her fellow Queens, she brushes off the predictions that she will therefore not win with a flippant "oh, well, back to the palace," and when her fellow Queens are arguing about their trauma in the immediate aftermath of "Get Down," she briefly gains their attention by claiming to have the plague before admitting that she has little need to complain about the state of her life, considering how well it turned out.[227]

The text also finds means of acknowledging the negative aspects of Cleves' live, despite this unspoken acknowledgment of the competition's true intentions. The most notable of these is the common ground she shares with Aragon, having been brought into England without learning the language to marry a stranger. The humiliation of being rejected on an international stage is addressed as well, though only as part of a backhanded compliment given by Howard in order to boast about her own looks. The comedic approach notwithstanding, these acknowledgments of the implicit injustice in her treatment by patriarchal systems, act as part of the eventual recognition that all traumas are valid, regardless of the form they take. Cleves may be celebrating, but the

[226] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).
[227] One has to wonder if the line will survive in a post Covid-19 world; (Ibid.).

centralization of Henry's rejection within "Get Down" indicates that she has internalized those accusations and feels the need to disprove them and validate herself: she is liberated from the marriage, but not from him.

The alternate future Cleves imagines in "Six" is one that stems from a choice not made by her: rejected by Henry as a bride from the start, she joins the Haus of Holbein as one of his muses, performing and partying her way across Europe. It is the least altered future of the six fantasies, a continuation of the play's overall repudiation of her status as the supposedly 'ugly' member of the six Queens. While still presenting her as inherently glamorous and engaging, her fantasy omits the humiliation of her looks being insulted on an international stage, living without that additional stigma and truly free from Henry.

Through their interpretation of Cleves, Marlow and Moss expand their exploration of feminism to more completely address issues of women who manage to live comfortably within a patriarchal system. They recognize her privilege, but neither frame that privilege as complacency nor attempt to dismiss the validity of her experiences, instead returning to Henry as the abstract embodiment of patriarchal oppression and the focus of what anger Cleves still holds. Her fiery onstage persona carries with it echoes of her Queenspirations and other women who exist within systems which deem them aberrations and thrive despite that implicit rejection.

Katherine Howard

There is no means by which the circumstances of Katherine Howard's life, both before and including her marriage to Henry, can be interpreted in a way that does not reflect poorly through a modern lens. She has been marked permanently as a figure defined by sexuality for circumstances that were beyond her control, starting from a very young age. Her life also stands out for its parallels to the other Queen who faced decapitation, Anne Boleyn. Beyond their mutual fates, the two were related by blood, nieces of the third Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Howard, and subject to the ambitions of the Howard family.

The primary difference is in their upbringings: where Anne had been educated abroad and experienced the world in relative luxury, Katherine, the daughter of Edmund Howard and Joyce Culpeper, was raised in England in a much more simplistic lifestyle. Though she was small and considered very pretty by the standards of the period, her father lacked wealth or position, and could not afford to maintain his ten children across multiple marriages. Catherine, consequently, her formative years spent in the Lambeth home of her step-grandmother, Agnes, the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, living in dormitories amidst a collection of her numerous Howard cousins.

It was in Lambeth that Katherine would encounter two of the men who would be instrumental in her later fall from grace. Though Katherine was not important enough for records of her date of birth to have survived, it is estimated that she was between the ages of twelve and fifteen when she began music lessons with Henry Manox in 1536.[228] Those lessons also involved some kind of sexual interaction between the teacher and student,

[228] Marlow and Moss put her at the age of thirteen; Marlow and Moss, *SIX* (New York, 2020).

though Katherine would later attest that they had not gone as far as penetrative sex. When news of the relationship became known within the household, Howard broke it off, and shortly thereafter became the informal office assistant of her step-grandmother's secretary, Francis Dereham.

As with Manox, Dereham made advances on Katherine, and contemporary accounts suggest that she might have reciprocated those advances. In the time from 1537 to Katherine's appointment as a lady-in-waiting in 1539, the two were said to have referred to each other as husband and wife in the presence of others, Dereham paid her visits in the chambers she shared with the Dowager Duchess's other wards, and it is believed that intercourse did happen between the two, though Howard would later say it was an act of rape, rather than consensual. The revelation of Dereham's involvement with Katherine is credited to Manox, acting out of jealousy.

Regardless of what consent was given, the relationship was ended by its exposure, as Dereham subsequently went to Ireland and Katherine, now somewhere between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, was dispatched to court as a lady-in-waiting for Anna of Cleves. She arrived before the German Princess did, and maybe have caught Henry's eye almost immediately thereafter, though his interest was not openly known until April of 1540, before he was officially pursuing his annulment. Although he had not summoned her with the explicit intent of seducing the King, Thomas Howard, the Duke of Norfolk, saw in Katherine another chance to raise his family to power, and certainly pushed her to consider Henry. The speed with which the King sought his annulment and subsequently married Katherine on July 28 suggests that the two engaged in pre-marital intercourse, the speedy nuptials being necessary in case of a pregnancy.

Henry's behavior towards Katherine suggests that, rather than drawing comparisons to Anne Boleyn, he saw her as a second Jane Seymour. She was young and beautiful, with a sweet disposition that prompted Henry, then nearly fifty, to call her his 'rose without a thorn,' and chose "no other wish save his," as her official motto, echoing Jane's "Bound to serve and obey." Katherine, for her part, left no recordings of how she felt about being pursued by a man old enough to be her father, but accounts from contemporary sources suggest that she enjoyed the way he showered her with gowns, jewels, and other extravagant shows of his affection. As with his previous English wives, her family benefited greatly, and Dereham was even placed in Katherine's household as a secretary, though he kept quiet about their past relationship.

In spite of her newly raised station, Katherine was still very much a young woman, and her behavior reflected that. She enjoyed the company of Anna of Cleves on several occasions, as the former Queen treated her warmly, but dismissed two of Mary's maids after her eldest stepdaughter failed to show Katherine the respect which the new Queen felt she was owed. Most importantly, though she was performing her marital duties to Henry, the King's increasingly poor health meant that she was not called upon to do them often, and there was another man more than willing to fill the vacated space.

The last of the men in Katherine's life, Thomas Culpeper, was a gentleman of the King's privy chamber, and her distant maternal cousin. The two had known each other before her marriage, and it had been rumored she had wanted to marry before Henry expressed his interest in her. When the King did begin his courtship of Katherine, Culpeper, being one of Henry's favored courtiers at the time, may well have been the representative used to deliver the messages sent between the two. Culpeper also had a

history of sexual violence, having been arrested in 1540 for the violent rape of a park-keeper's wife, and the murder of a villager who tried to prevent the crime. He was subsequently pardoned by Henry, and no evidence of his relationship with Katherine suggests that he did used similar force on her, but the story puts the nature of their affair into question.

Culpeper was in the company that joined the King and Queen on progress through the north during the autumn of 1540, and the one surviving letter of Katherine's has been dated to April 1541, suggesting this is when the two began their relationship, aided in keeping it secret by the long-widowed Jane Boleyn. On November 1, 1541, Archbishop Cranmer was informed of Katherine's lack of pre-marital purity from John Lascelles, who had heard of the relationship between Katherine and Dereham from a sister working in the employ of the Dowager Duchess. Cranmer passed along the information to Henry, who ordered Dereham's arrest. Under torture, Dereham admitted a precontract and exposed Culpeper as Katherine's latest lover, condemning him to be similarly arrested and tortured until he too confessed.

Henry was both outraged and devastated by this news and determined to see Katherine punished for what he considered the ultimate betrayal. Cranmer attempted to extract a confession from Katherine personally, hoping that if she simply admitted to a precontracted engagement with Dereham, she might be spared greater humiliation. Katherine instead said that Dereham had taken her against her will, and she was arrested on November 12, forcibly removed to Syon Abbey. On November 24, having already been stripped of her title as Queen, she was indicted not only for having led an unchaste

life, but for having deceived the King into thinking otherwise, and for her adultery with Culpeper.

Katherine's household was interrogated for further information, with Jane Boleyn eventually being arrested for her part in the affair with Culpeper. Katherine and Culpeper both attempted to pass her off as the mastermind of the liaisons, in the hopes of saving their own lives, but all three were eventually found guilty. Both Culpeper and Dereham were executed on December 10, 1541, with Culpeper's sentence being commuted to beheading while Dereham was hung, drawn, and quartered. Members of the Howard family, including the Dowager Duchess, were also taken to the Tower of London and executed for their part in facilitating Katherine's crimes. Katherine herself was moved from Syon to the Tower on February 10, 1542, to be beheaded three days later, followed by Jane Boleyn. Both of their corpses were taken to be buried in the Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula, the same resting place as Anne Boleyn.

Were her sexual history removed from the discussion of her life, accounts of Katherine would be reduced to the depiction of a frivolous and shallow girl, only interested in material splendor and pleasures; compounded with the reality of her relationships, her place in history becomes one defined by contradiction, damned for both the mature act of sex and the immaturity of her youth. Unlike her cousin, whose adulteries are now widely considered fabrications for the benefit of appearances, there is enough historical evidence to say that Katherine's encounters with Manox, Dereham, and Culpeper did happen, and so she cannot be posthumously venerated as Anne was. Whether she was telling the truth when she testified that Dereham had raped her or was saying what she thought would save her life, a modern viewpoint would say that she was

not old enough to give true consent to any partner, and thus the act was rape regardless. Within the context of her own era, however, Katherine would have been regarded as being closer to adulthood than childhood in her early teens, so her relationships with Manox and Dereham are generally framed as having some level of consent and require her to share the blame for not knowing better.

The response by historians with a more feminist viewpoint, Karen Lindsey among them, has been to work with the sexual politics of the period, and consider Katherine as mature enough to be sexually empowered, choosing her partners without a regard for the sixteenth century's patriarchal expectations of female sexual purity. The majority of her portrayals in popular culture, however, fall on the side of patriarchy in their interpretations, exploiting her sexuality for titillation while ultimately positioning her as transgressive and deserving her fate. Among other examples, Lucy Worlsey cited the 2010 Showtime drama, *The Tudors,* as a prominent example of this patriarchal gaze in her foreword for *SIX's* official Broadway program, highlighting a scene in which Katherine practices putting her head on the executioner's scaffold while naked.[229] With the image of Katherine so deeply entwined with sex, and favoring the idea that these interactions were consensual, an untapped opportunity lay waiting.

Queenspirations

Carrying the interpretation of a sexualized minor further, the Queenspirations for Howard's aesthetics and sound are performers associated with 'bubblegum' pop[230], Ariana Grande and Britney Spears. Like Howard, each of these women has their own

[229] Lucy Worsley, "History's About to Get Overthrone," *SiX: Divorced, Beheaded, Broadway,* (New York: Platypus Productions, February 13, 2020).

[230] Pop music marketed at juvenile audiences and noted for its artificiality.

complicated public image and controversies, thanks to entering the entertainment industry as children and spending their formative years in the scrutiny of the public eye, Grande through the Nickelodeon show *Victorious,* and Spears as a member of the Mickey Mouse Club.[231] As is the case with the other Queenspirations, one's influence is more thematic while the other's is aesthetic, with Spears taking the former role.

Having risen to fame in the 1990s, Spears' identity as a pop star was based in marketing the juxtaposition between sexual desire and sexual purity, rather than musical talent; many of her most famous songs such as "…Baby One More Time" and "You Drive Me Crazy" involved thinly veiled euphemisms for sex conflicting with her public persona as a virginal good girl, rendering her an effective embodiment of the virgin/whore dichotomy.[232] This sexualization reached a peak in the 2004 music video for "Toxic," which took Spears' sexualized image to the point of parodic through depicting her as various objectified archetypes of women from an eager-to-please flight attendant to a black-clad femme fatale.[233]

From 2006 to 2008, Spears' personal life became increasingly chaotic, including a messy divorce that saw her lose custody of her children and a brief period of time committed to a psychiatric ward against her will.[234] She was place in a court-approved conservatorship in 2008, the entirety of her assets overseen by her father, James Spears, and attorney Andrew Wallet, the latter of whom resigned from his duties in March 2019; the fan coalition of the 'Free Britney' movement which calls for the end of the

[231] Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry,*117.

[232] Melanie Lowe, "Colliding Feminisms: Britney Spears, "Tweens," and the Politics of Reception." *Popular Music and Society* 26, no. 2 (2003), 123-140.

[233] Stan Hawkins and John Richardson "Remodeling Britney Spears: Matters of Intoxication and Mediation." *Popular Music and Society* 30, no. 5 (2007), 605–629.

[234] Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry,* 153.

conservatorship on grounds that Spears has experienced abuse and exploitation from her appointed guardians since its installment.[235] How much of this movement influenced Marlow and Moss' writing process is not specified within the text, but the same spirit of a young woman being sexualized and controlled by men is heavily present in Howard's characterization.

Howard's solo, "All You Wanna Do" also borrows heavily from Spears' public image, both in the musical motifs of her early work with a synthesized dance beat and with innuendo-laden lyrics that initially play up the young woman's sexuality, before shifting to reflect her public life through an onstage breakdown. The verses, in homage to the discography of both Spears and Howard's second Queenspiration, Ariana Grande, are subdued and require only a fraction of the singer's range to be used for the simplistically structured recitative. The final climax of the song invokes Grande further in the vocal riffs, belting, and top notes that display the extent of Howard's range and technique.

Grande's skills as a vocalist, first expressed through cover videos of songs by artists with similarly grandiose voices like Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey, have been the primary selling point of her work since entering the industry at the age of 19, in 2012.[236] Her early music carried a similar form of innocent sexuality to Spears but approached the subject from a position of greater authority, singing about having had sex rather than suppressing the desire for sex. The turning point of her career, instead of being a personal scandal, occurred on May 22, 2017 when a performance in Manchester,

[235] Laura Newberry, "Britney Spears hasn't fully controlled her life for years. Fans insist it's time to #FreeBritney." *Los Angeles Times* online, September 18 2019, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-09-17/britney-spears-conservatorship-free-britney

[236] Rob Haskell, "Ariana Grande on Grief and Growing Up." *Vogue* online, July 9, 2019, https://www.vogue.com/article/ariana-grande-cover-august-2019.

England was the target of a terrorist attack; her subsequent benefit concerts and outreach work shaped her maturation into the next phase of her career.[237] As with Spears, however, some critics marked Grande for the "uneasy mix of sybarite and schoolgirl" that dominated her wardrobe in her early career.[238] This mix, using pink as her color for the bubblegum pop connection, dominates the visual design of Howard as envisioned by Marlow and Moss.

Howard sports Grande's signature hairstyle, a high ponytail, held in place by a spiked band, while her costume similarly mimics the style of Grande's earlier period with a two-piece dress that exposes her stomach with an open-front miniskirt.[239] The difference between Grande and Howard is in autonomy— on Grande, the look is a choice made by the singer, but for Howard, it signals to a lack of control, and the blending of maturity and childishness is made deliberate to highlight the experiences of her life. The skirt in particular gains symbolism beyond its connection to Grande's style. Made of translucent pink plastic, the open front gives a clear view of her lower half, indicating the easy access to her body that her molesters enjoyed, while the translucence prevents her from true coverage, making it impossible for her to hide her body. She is also given an under-bust corset made of reflective pink fabric over her black top which accentuates her cleavage, and a 'K' choker to match her Boleyn's 'B' necklace, reminding the audience of their similar fates and supposed crimes.

Grande's presence also influences the aesthetics of Howard's casting, since, although both Grande and Spears are white, Grande's race has been the most consistent

[237] Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry,* 119.
[238] Haskell, "Ariana Grande on Grief and Growing Up."
[239] Katy Sprinkel, *Ariana Grande: Break Free,* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2019). EPUB.

point of debate and controversy throughout her career. While she has never denied her heritage as a white woman of Italian descent, Grande's aging out of her niche as a children's television actress and into her current form as an international pop star has come with an increasing use of skin-darkening spray tans which make her ethnicity more ambiguous to the general public.[240] This element of her persona was heavily criticized in the early months of 2019, following the release of the song "7 Rings" and its accompanying music video, when critics perceived Grande as crossing the line into outright appropriation of Black culture, including accusations of plagiarism from rappers Soulja Boy and Princess Nokia.[241] These elements of Black appropriation were not as prominent in popular discussion when Marlow and Moss were originally constructing the character, but the overall ambiguity of Grande's appearance still influences the casting.

The role, originated in the Cambridge cast by Marlow's younger sister, Annabel, has largely been played by white actresses, but the most widely known actress, Aimie Atkinson, who performed the role in the original tour, West End cast, and studio cast recording, is one with a similar sort of racial vagueness to Grande. Her resume lists her appearance as "Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, White," without clarifying whether this is her own ethnic background or simply which ethnicities she might pass for, an echo of Grande's own presented ambiguity.[242] The North American cast has featured two

[240] Haskell, "Ariana Grande on Grief and Growing Up."; Spencer Kornhaber, "How Ariana Grande Fell Off the Cultural-Appropriation Tightrope." *Atlantic* online, January 23, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/01/ariana-grandes-7-rings-really-cultural-appropriation/580978/

[241] Kornhaber, "How Ariana Grande Fell Off the Cultural-Appropriation Tightrope."

[242] "Aimie Atkinson." *Global Artists,* Accessed April 1, 2020, https://login.tagmin.com/addon/global.inc.php?cid=1480

actresses of differing ethnicities in the role of Howard, Samantha Pauly and Courtney Mack.[243]

Mack is white, but Pauly, though she feasibly can pass as white on stage, is a woman of color, citing Navajo and Puerto Rican heritage on her resumé.[244] This knowledge of her ethnic background adds a deeper level of tragedy to the metatext of her portrayal by correlating to the fetishization of women of color and the sexual violence that results from such objectification. The National Institute of Justice reported in 2016 that approximately 56 percent of Indigenous women within the United States have experienced a form of sexual violence in their lifetime, while Latina women, from a young age, are often subjected to a heteronormative mentality that pushes for traditional gender roles and implicitly sexualizes them, while privileging the desires of men.[245] Because of her ethnic heritage, Pauly's version of Howard and the sexual violence carries these specific connotations in addition to the broader statements included in the text.

Onstage

There is no middle ground to be found in the version of Katherine Howard constructed by *SIX,* as there was with Anne Boleyn. Marlow and Moss unequivocally take the modern position that, since Howard would not have been old enough to consent to sexual relations when she was first introduced to them, and that both Manox and Dereham held a level of power over her, neither relationship was consensual. The

[243] Mack took over the role from Pauly for the final weeks of performances in Chicago and the run at the American Repertory Theater, becoming one of the alternates following Pauly's return; Marlow and Moss, *SIX,* (Cambridge, 2019); Marlow and Moss, *SIX,* (New York, 2020).

[244] "Samantha Pauly Resume," Stewart Talent, February 13, 2020. https://www.stewarttalent.com/_media/talent/18061/samantha-pauly- resume-311119.pdf.

[245] André B. Rosay, "Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men," (Washington DC: National Institute of Justice, 2016); Lorena García, "The Sexual (Mis)Education of Latina Girls," in *Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself: Latina Girls and Sexual Identity* (New York City: New York University Press, 2012), 57-82.

interpretation posits further that these experiences conditioned her to perceive this form of attention as normal and positive, and "All You Wanna Do" is constructed around her slowly realizing the objectification and sexualization she endured throughout her brief life, and designed to slowly put the audience on edge as the song progresses deeper into the assemblage of men who used her.

Running almost seven minutes in length, "All You Wanna Do" marks a turning point for the musical in its willingness to directly confront the issues of patriarchy, being the most overtly alienating in the contradiction between text and performance. The song starts with jokes and witticisms, but as the verses and choruses progress, and her trauma becomes more apparent, the audience becomes increasingly unwilling to laugh, alienated by the events happening onstage. Howard's interactions with Manox and Dereham are presented in a carefree way, meant to show her naïveté at the beginning of her life while also making dirty jokes that prompt easy laughter. Despite this energetic tone, a underlying malevolence remains in the lyrics: Manox's verse includes lines like "he was twenty-three/And I was thirteen—going on thirty" and "went from major to minor" as reminders of Howard's status as a child, while Dereham's section includes the fact that "he won't take no" as an allusion to Katherine's later claim that their relationship was one based in rape.[246] Following the Dereham chorus, Howard deadpans "some guys just employ women to get them into their private chambers…it was a different time back then," a blatant reference to workplace sexual harassment that prompts groans along with laughter.[247]

[246] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).
[247] (Ibid.)

The verses centered around Henry and Culpeper lose both the clever wordplay and the positive attitude, in favor of rote recitation, lacking any lyrics to make Henry seem a sexually attractive prospect, while her relationship with Culpeper is revised into a friendship which she discovers too late to be just as predatory as the other relationships in her life. The jokes, such as the unenthusiastic "so, we got married…woo," are based in cringe comedy, bordering on gallows humor as her ultimate fate grows closer. The staging similarly commits entirely to the growing horror of Howard's situation, with the choreography utilizing the image of hands of her bandmates, acting in the role of her molesters and abusers, touching Howard to indicate her increasing awareness of what her situation really means. While she welcomes the touch of Manox and Dereham, represented by two hands on her shoulders, she makes a brief attempt at shrugging off the representation of Henry, who earns a third hand at her waist, and Culpeper's representation comes in the form of a hand on each of her limbs, effectively holding her in place as she becomes resigned to her fate. By the final line of the song, she is in tears and breathless, overwhelmed by the trauma of her experiences.

Outside of her musical performance, Howard's personality is one that thrives on contradicting the shallow bubblegum connotations of her appearance and her historical reputation as a frivolous, unintelligent wanton, though still to the point of comedy. Concessions to her immaturity is in smaller tics, like fiddling with the end of her ponytail, and occasionally letting the façade of her persona slip to reveal a greater awareness of the world around her. When introducing the competition, she uses "the Thomas Cromwell amongst the royal ministers between 1532 and 1540," as an analogy for 'most important,' in direct contrast to her fellow queens' more poetic statements, and

when everyone else pretends not to know who the wives of previous English kings named Henry were, Howard proudly pipes up with "Catherine de Valois" for Henry V before falling back into the farce and feigning ignorance.[248] Before starting "All You Wanna Do," she is also given a monologue in keeping with a comedy roast that serves the dual purpose of dismantling the arguments of the other queens and endearing herself to the audience through her personality.[249]

These moments serve to develop an identity for Howard beyond the superficiality of her appearance and sexuality, and deepens the tragedy of her life; no longer existing in the abstract as a slattern who should have known better, but as a charming, engaging young woman who was subject to the manipulations and abuses of those with greater power. The approach of Marlow and Moss constructs Howard's empowerment around recognizing her victimhood and showing the potential that was lost through the grooming and abuse that was inflicted upon her. In keeping with the theme, her happy ending for "Six," where she rejects Manox's advances, and moves on to study music and become a performer in her own right. The underlying escapism in this fantasy of being able to escape her objectification approaches her inability to recognize abuse not from a position of blaming her, but the world in which she existed, which failed to provide her with the resources that might have protected her. The reclaiming of her life and agency also serves as an answer to the implicit question of what is lost for a victim of sexual assault, showing Howard unencumbered and happy without the pretension of the competition.

The means by which Marlow and Moss address the issues of Howard's sexual trauma, are what elevate *SIX*'s incorporation of feminist principles from the broad strokes

[248] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).
[249] (Ibid.)

of ‘girl power’ which dominate the play’s reputation into a more complex assessment of the dominance exerted by patriarchal systems upon women. Though from a structural position, she is only part of a larger setup for Parr to make the final reveal of this thesis statement, the shifts Howard creates are necessary to facilitate that reveal. Without her, the progression from examining personal experience to systemic ones is weakened, and the message of the play is undermined.

Catherine Parr

Henry's choice for his final wife, Catherine Parr, was yet another case of overcorrecting for what Henry perceived as the flaws of her predecessor, namely maturity and respectability. Born around 1512 to Sir Thomas Parr and Maud Greene, Parr had been named for Catherine of Aragon, whom her mother had served as a lady-in-waiting. She was raised away from court after her father died in 1517, but was very well educated, developing a dedication to learning that would remain with her throughout her life. Her first marriage, to Edward Borough, took place in 1529, when she was seventeen, but was cut short when he died of an illness in 1532. She married again in 1533, this time to John Neville, Lord Latimer. Latimer, being twenty years her senior, passed away in March of 1543, after approximately ten years of marriage. Both marriages left Catherine a substantially wealthy widow, and her second match gave her the experience of running a large household and acting as a stepmother to her husband's children. Around the same time that Latimer was succumbing to illness, Catherine met and fell in love with Thomas Seymour, brother of the late Queen Jane, whom she hoped to marry after she was widowed.

Henry had other plans. Among the legal actions taken during Katherine Howard's imprisonment was the passage an act which made it a crime for any woman in whom the King showed interest to conceal her past relationships and sexual history from him. Parr's status as a woman honorably widowed and remarried allowed him to side-step the issue neatly, and he began sending her gifts in February of 1543, two weeks before Latimer passed away. Believing that, as supreme head of the Church of England, Henry's will must be God's will, Catherine wrote to Thomas Seymour, reluctantly ending their

association and accepting Henry's suit. On July 12, 1543, at the age of thirty-one, she became the sixth wife of Henry VIII.

Since Henry's will left instructions in the event that Catherine was found pregnant after his death, the two certainly consummated their marriage, but accounts of Catherine more often highlight her intelligence and position as an advocate of education and religious reforms, rather than pay attention to whatever personal relationship there might have been between her and Henry. She was appointed regent in 1544, overseeing battles with Scotland while Henry set out on a continental campaign to conquer the city of Boulogne. She was also largely responsible for the education of Henry's two younger children: Under the guidance of tutors chosen by Catherine, both the future Edward VI and Elizabeth I would grow into staunch Protestants, their dedication to this apparent in their respective reigns.

On a personal level, Catherine was able to publish multiple books, one of only eight women in the period to do so; *Prayers and Meditations* and *The Lamentation of a Sinner,* the latter of which hinted strongly at her reformist beliefs. This would come back to haunt her in the summer of 1546, when Henry's chancellor, Baron Thomas Writhoseley began escalating the persecution of those deemed heretical by the Church of England. Moves were made towards Catherine's arrest following an exchange she had with Henry where she contradicted him on points of scripture. Records of her accounts were seized as charges were drafted, and members of her house were taken for interrogation on the possibility of heresy. Catherine only managed to escape arrest because Henry's doctor, Thomas Wendy, and an anonymous member of Henry's council passed along a copy of the charges to her. Taking the initiative, Catherine threw herself at

her husband's mercy, flattering him and appealing to his ego by claiming that her contradictions were purely posed so that she could learn from him. She succeeded enough to earn his forgiveness but was given a reminder that she lived at her husband's pleasure when Writhoseley arrived the next day to arrest her, only to be driven out by Henry in a show of force.

After her brush with the possibility of execution, Catherine became much more cautious in how much she spoke out, playing a much more submissive role in her marriage as she moved away from religious and intellectual discourse. Throughout their time together, one of her chief duties to Henry was attending to him while he was in his sick bed, an increasingly frequent event, and one that her marriage to Latimer had prepared her for. On December 10, 1546, Henry's health took a greater turn for the worse, by Christmas, he had sent his wife and daughters away from London to celebrate at Greenwich without him. On January 28, 1547, he succumbed to whatever malady was afflicting him, and was interred on February 16, next to the body of Jane Seymour.

Until such time as the new King Edward VI was old enough to marry, Catherine Parr, as Queen Dowager, remained the highest-ranked woman in England, but her focus was on the chance to finally reconnect with her beloved Thomas Seymour. For his part, Seymour had been looking to marry for power with the ascension of his nephew, preferably to put him on equal ground with his elder brother, Edward Seymour, who had been named Lord Protector of the Realm. He had offered himself to Mary and Elizabeth first, only to be rejected by both princesses, and so settled for Catherine. The two married in secret sometime in the spring of 1547, with Edward giving his blessing to them in June, and Catherine becoming pregnant by the winter.

The happiness of Catherine's fourth marriage was marred somewhat in May of 1548, when she discovered her husband had developed the habit of making advances towards the teenaged Elizabeth, who had been living with them as a member of Catherine's household. Parr had originally believed these advances friendly horseplay, even participating in one incident where she held Elizabeth in place while Seymour cut open the girl's dress but drew the line at catching her husband embracing her stepdaughter in a sexual manner. Elizabeth was sent away from the household, most likely to protect her reputation, and Catherine reconciled with her husband.

Catherine died on September 5, 1548, only a few days after the difficult delivery of her only child, Mary Seymour. As with Jane Seymour, she fell victim to childbed fever. Following a fit of delirium-induced paranoid ravings that she was being mocked by all including her husband, she regained lucidity long enough to dictate her will before passing away. Her body was interred at St. Mary's Church, which adjoined Sudeley Castle, her husband's chief estate. Following this, Thomas attempted once again to woo Elizabeth, who made no acknowledgment of the proposal, then attempted to kidnap Edward in January 1549 as part of a plan to supplant his elder brother as Lord Protector. He was arrested for treason and executed in March of the same year. The infant Mary Seymour was passed into the care of Katherine, Duchess of Suffolk, but disappeared from the records of history after 1550, presumed to have died at that point, her parents' assets reverting to the crown.

Catherine Parr's moniker as the wife who survived Henry casts an overly optimistic image over her life. Her tenure as regent and her achievements in advancing education, particularly for women, and religious reforms are a testament to her capability

and her character, but they do not negate the difficulties she faced in being the wife of someone as volatile as Henry was. The existence of her near arrest alone serves as proof that surviving is the accurate term, and yet her tenure still lacks the narrative grandeur of her five predecessors. Beyond the survivor nickname, she has the reputation of being Henry's nursemaid, or, as Karen Lindsey chose to put it, his clerk, both positions without much glamour or romanticism behind them.[250] Both of these terms also carry with them a level of dismissal, reducing her to a supporting part in the final days of Henry's life and overlooking her as an individual.

Queenspirations

As an acknowledgment of Parr's reputation as an educated woman and a grounding influence in Henry's life, publicity materials list her primary queenspirations as being Alicia Keys and Emeli Sandé, biracial singer-songwriters who work primarily in the R&B genre, and whose stage personas are based in honesty and relatability. They are the two Queenspirations most overtly aligned with one another outside of the play; Sandé considers Keys to be one of her primary inspirations, the two women co-wrote the song "Hope" for Sandé's debut album, and have maintained a friendship since then.[251] Keys' longer career allows for a greater number of parallels to be drawn for her, but the ideological closeness she shares with Sandé results a unified image of soulful, uplifting intelligence as Parr's defining quality onstage.

Keys, who grew up in New York City, raised by her white mother, entered the music industry while she was still a teenager, but did not release her first album until the

[250] Lindsey, *Divorced, beheaded, survived.*

[251] Greg Kot, "Emeli Sande a neuroscientist with pop-star talent." *Chicago Tribune* online, May 17, 2012, https://www.chicagotribune.com/chi-emeli-sande-profile-uk-singer-emeli-sande-interviewed-20120516-column.html.

age of twenty, was allowed near-total creative freedom in making her music, allowing her to express her thoughts openly and create a particular style which pulled from her classical training as a pianist and the Black cultural influences of her childhood in Hell's Kitchen and Harlem.[252] She made a further name for herself as a philanthropist, participating in the foundation of two separate outreach programs, We Are Here and Keep a Child Alive, focused on equity initiatives and combating the impact of HIV on children respectively.[253] Sandé, raised in Scotland and Zambian on her father's side, originally studied neuroscience at university, but was always invested in becoming a musician, especially after seeing Keys perform live in concert at the age of sixteen.[254] Their shared affinity for learning further connects them with the historical Parr, while their dedication to using their music to express the truth of their feelings is what helps Parr move onto the stage.

As their own images are grounded in authenticity, the extent to which Sandé and Keys affect Parr's costume is comparatively subtle, giving her a greater personality outside of references to her Queenspirations. Parr's signature color, blue for the R&B genre which shapes her music, decorates a pair of full-length black pants with laced-up cutout sections, and a top which loosely resembles a man's doublet from the Tudor era, complete with puffed, slashed sleeves. Although just as shiny and ostentatious as her fellow Queens' outfits, it is the costume that reads as the most casual, furthering her aura of accessibility. Parr's casting is also thematically reflective of her Queenspirations: since the Cambridge student production cast Shimali de Silva in the role, the principal actress

[252] Touré, "Alicia Keys: The Next Queen of Soul ." *Rolling Stone* online, November 8, 2001, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/alicia-keys-the-next-queen-of-soul-83113/.
[253] Alicia Keys, "Alicia Keys*,"* accessed April 30, 2020, https://aliciakeys.com/bio/
[254] Greg Kot, "Emeli Sande a neuroscientist with pop-star talent."

for Parr has always been a lighter-skinned woman of color, usually a Black woman in keeping with Keys and Sandé's own appearance, including the North American production's choice, Anna Uzele.

Just as Seymour's consistent casting creates a narrative of her as the idealized white woman, Parr's non-white casting continuously places her at an intersection of disenfranchisement and privilege which imitates the lives of Sandé and Keys. As she exists in a white supremacist patriarchy, she has the unspoken potential to benefit from the privilege of colorism, putting her above darker-skinned Queens (typically Aragon and Cleves), rendered inherently lesser than lighter-skinned Queens (Boleyn, Seymour, and Howard), and yet less vocal in her anger than all of them. Uzele's approach to the character makes Parr cautious as she reveals her deeper intentions, making her the middle ground of the group who has supposedly been observing and learning from the others, just as Sandé learned from Keys and came to emulate her.

The sound of Parr's solo, "I Don't Need Your Love," benefits from the closeness of this alignment. Staged to seem like a spur of the moment divergence from the planned concert, it starts first with a simple piano chord progression that gradually incorporates the other four instruments in a subdued acoustic accompaniment which transitions from the original soulful melody to a more funk-heavy celebration of Parr's accomplishments.[255] The remixed version of the song, performed after Parr reveals the competition as a ruse, incorporates all six Queens into the performance, strikes a more balanced mix of the two which allows Parr the opportunity to riff freely, to the suitability of the performer.

[255] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).

Although bombast is certainly present in the song, particularly in the remix, the song is driven by authenticity: the first half lacks formalized choreography, with Parr seemingly improvising while the other queens pick up her motions while reacting and ad-libbing in support of her. The remix, while more stylized and performative thanks to the Queens showing their hand, plays out as a physical recreation of the emotional effect Keys had for Sandé, inspiring other female artists to speak their truth by "taking back the microphone" as Howard phrases it, while making Parr the figurehead of the play's feminist mission, if not the outright leader.[256] After five Queens whose inspirations derived so heavily from constructed imagery to sell their point, it is the honesty of Parr and her Queenspirations that brings the final change needed to reclaim the narrative from Henry and the patriarchal lens which for so long defined all six women.

Onstage

For her interactions within the group, Marlow and Moss draw primarily upon Parr's position as a mediator, using the historical precedent of her orchestrating the reconciliation between Henry and his daughters to make her the final uniting force for the band. Compared to her fellow Queens, she is generally quiet, staying out of the arguments until being called upon to perform, at which point, she attempts to stop the performance, objecting to the attempts of her bandmates to one-up each other's suffering for applause. The Broadway version of the play adds an introduction to an upbeat, funk-inspired song that she cuts off to this effect. Though the subject matter of this song might have been is left to the imagination of the audience, her original case from the beginning of the performance, "the winning contestant was the most protestant… Protestant,"

[256] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).

implies that the song would have covered her experiences as a reformer and religious scholar, including her near-arrest, had she performed as planned.[257]

She receives no shortage of criticism from her fellow Queens for attempting to "draw the line in arbitrary places" and calling them out for this behavior when they have already spent the majority of their performance, with her apparently willing involvement.[258] Parr acquiesces, beginning the seemingly improvised "I Don't Need Your Love" with a brief monologue that reflects on her first two marriages and her initial infatuation with Thomas Seymour— the first part of "I Don't Need Your Love" is in epistolary format, meant to represent the letter sent by Parr's historical counterpart—but focuses more heavily on the realities of Tudor womanhood, and the inherent lack of agency within a system which required women to have husbands in order to be financially supported and accepted within society. This argument later feeds into the driving point of her argument, that Henry's desires always superseded those of his wives, leaving them no choice but to accept his will and reducing them to supporting players in his life, and yet Henry's place in history would not be so cemented in history if it were not for the number of marriages he entered.

After finishing her letter to Thomas Seymour, Parr turns her attention to her own accomplishments, listing her writings, her push for the education of women, and having her portrait painted by a woman,[259] before lapsing into mourning for the erasure of that identity to end the first half of "I Don't Need Your Love." After facilitating the reveal of

[257] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).
[258] (Ibid.)
[259] Antonia Fraser identifies this woman as Margaret Horenbout, the wife of Lucas Horenbout, one of a family of Flemish artisans employed by Henry's court since the tenure of Anne Boleyn; Fraser, *The Wives of Henry VIII,* 369.

the competition as a pretense to lead the audience to their predetermined conclusion, Parr sheds her hesitance for the remix, completely rejecting her position as one of six wives and reclaiming power, not only for herself, but for all the Queens. Following the completion of the remix and standing ovation, she declares twice to the audience that "we have a voice," completing the picture of empowerment which the entire play built towards and setting her fellow Queens up to introduce "Six" as the finale.[260]

The approach to Parr, although deriving heavily from the idea of authenticity, overlooks the events of her life following Henry's death, including her part in enabling Thomas Seymour's predatory behavior towards Elizabeth. The omission, while rendering the historical narrative of Parr's life incomplete, is thematically in keeping with her mission statement within the text. She takes influence from Jane Seymour's approach of using the tragedy of romantic heartbreak to connect with the audience, so that she can redirect the focus leaving behind the men in her life who would otherwise define her and celebrating her accomplishments as an individual. She takes the message further by reminding the audience that the aim of this performance is not just to ask how a story is told, but which interpretations are given value. Keeping Thomas Seymour as a nebulously defined lost love allows her to maintain her centrality, and more easily move forward into uniting the group against their shared point of connection, Henry.

Parr's position as a unifier is also present in her alternate future for "Six:" having heard of the other five women's divergent paths and admiring them greatly, she unites all of them for a group album, declaring that they are all she needs.[261] Her relationships with men, including Thomas Seymour, are completely overlooked, allowing her to stand fully

[260] Marlow and Moss, *SIX*, (New York, 2020).
[261] (Ibid.)

independent with her bandmates. It is an ending that fits her position as the informal spokesperson for the play's message about female solidarity, while speaking true to the elements of the historical Parr that Marlow and Moss chose to highlight: an intelligent, resourceful woman able to pursue her goals of elevating herself and others in a system which would see them silenced.

Before We Drop The Curtain

The aims of *SIX* as a piece of theatre are not in completion or accuracy to its historical source material, but in the belief of universal experiences of emotion, trauma, and power faced by women, regardless of their place in time or social standing. By their own admission, Marlow and Moss know their work is not an all-encompassing takedown of every system of oppression, or if it properly addresses their own feminist values as outlined in the Six-Point Plan, which they consider to be an encapsulation of their views from 2017.[262] Dated though their work may be, its value as a piece of feminist media remains present thanks to its ability to fulfill its goals of reevaluating the lens through which history is viewed, making that history relatable to a modern perspective, elevating female perspectives, and creating a space in which those perspectives can be shared.

Helen Shaw, writing for *Vulture*, observed that *Hamilton* resonates differently with its audiences thanks to being a work of art created in the era of the Obama administration; Its brimming idealism about the possibilities of revolutionary change and the American spirit which so engaged audiences in 2015 no longer resonates in a world where the rights of the non-white actors who embody these ideals are under siege from Obama's successor.[263] *SIX* is equally political in its messaging as *Hamilton* is, but it benefits from its political aspirations being tied to a movement which has existed for over a century and, as they prove through performance, is still grappling with its enemy. The continued necessity of a movement that fights for the empowerment of women allows *SIX* to exist in a more consistently timeless state, despite the specificity of its musical

[262] Marlow and Moss, "Authors' Notes,".
[263] Shaw, "The Book of Mormon and Hamilton…".

genre, and makes it theoretically immune to the same disillusionment which Shaw described for *Hamilton.*

Its popularity on the Internet, both through the Megasix videos and music streaming services, are what make *SIX* the first modern progressive musical with the most credible claim to being considered a phenomenon on the same level as *Hamilton.* The pandemic shutdown makes it difficult to assess how much of *SIX's* impact might have lasted beyond its scheduled March 12, 2020 premiere, and into the 2019-2020 awards season for Broadway. It is still too soon to determine how theatre as an industry will have been changed when it is at last considered safe to reopen, but *SIX* does hold some advantages over other musicals who have seen their viability threatened thanks to the shutdown. Its principal cast of six, band of four, lack of set changes, single major costume change all adds up to comparatively low running costs. There is also the matter of its profitability and popularity, as the first full week of Broadway previews grossed one million dollars, and subsequent weeks before the shutdown remained close to one-hundred percent capacity.[264] An attempt to bring the play to drive in venues was introduced in the United Kingdom, only to be shuttered by Covid-19 restrictions, but the underlying simplicity is what made the proposed tour possible.[265] *SIX'*s unique design grants it the ability to adapt and transcend its original medium of an indoor, proscenium-staged theatre, and translate into new venues without losing its inherent theatricality.

[264] "Six the Musical | Production Gross," *Playbill* online, 2020. https://playbill.com/production/gross?production=0000016c-4dc0-dda1-abef-edf4826d0000.

[265] Douglas Mayo, "Six the musical goes to The Drive In – Tour Cancelled due to COVID outbreaks," *British Theatre,* July 15, 2020, https://britishtheatre.com/six-the-musical-goes-to-the-drive-in/.

The Future of the Modern Progressive Musical

It is impossible to guarantee anything about the future of *SIX*, or any other production, at this point. What can be measured is what was taking place before the pandemic reached the point that a shutdown was necessary. As a genre, the modern progressive musical was still adding further works to its catalog before the shutdown, often works which involved the same themes of empowerment for the oppressed which dominated previous members of the genre, particularly in explorations of gender and sexuality.

In November of 2019, London's Shaftesbury Theatre saw the debut of the jukebox musical *& Juliet,* which tells a revisionist version of *Romeo and Juliet* with the song catalog of Max Martin, the composer behind the hit songs of many popular artists for the last thirty years. The musical travels a somewhat similar path to *Head Over Heels,* centering its message around gender and sexual identity, and uses a framing device of Shakespeare and his wife, Anne Hathaway, fighting over the ending of the play in order to depict Juliet alive and on a journey of self-discovery with her friends. The production was nominated for nine Olivier Awards before the pandemic shutdown, and included connections to both *SIX* and *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* through the presence of cast member Grace Mouat and costumer Paloma Young respectively.[266]

Dave Malloy and Rachel Chavkin reunited at the American Repertory Theater for a limited run of *Moby Dick: A Musical Reckoning,* along with several other members of the cast and crew from various iterations of *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* and *Hadestown,* notably actor Manik Choksi as Ishmael, and Mimi Lien and

[266] "Cast & Creative," *&Juliet*, February 11, 2019. https://www.andjulietthemusical.co.uk/cast-and-creative/.

Bradley King as designers.[267] The adaptation of Herman Melville's eponymous novel boasts a three-and-a-half-hour running time that attempts to not only encompass the book's plot, but the entirety of its contents, including Melville's numerous tangents about whales and whaling. The production also made attempts to address nearly every form of systemic injustice, with a particular focus on environmental justice. Whether the production will see a transfer to Broadway has yet to be announced.

Most recently was a planned April 30 premiere at the James M. Nederlander Theatre in Chicago for a Britney Spears jukebox musical *Once Upon A One More Time,* which was to center around the princesses of fairy-tales reading Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and becoming inspired to seek new stories for themselves.[268] The production never saw its premiere thanks to the pandemic, but future performances remain possible, provided the theatres are allowed to reopen.

Just as it would be inaccurate to say that *Hamilton* directly inspired the modern progressive musicals which would follow in its footsteps, *SIX* does not deserve sole credit for this turning point in the ideology of the genre. It stands apart for its methodology of stepping outside the story it tells and addressing it from a modern viewpoint, the first of its kind to present its messaging as the primary focus of the narrative being performed, as opposed to secondary theming. This progression of subtext and metatext becoming text speaks to the greater acceptance of the modern progressive musical as an art form that can carry messages of activism openly without alienating audiences.

---

[267] *Moby Dick: A Musical Reckoning*, written by Dave Malloy, dir. Rachel Chavkin, American Repertory Theater, Cambridge, MA, December 28, 2019.

[268] Dan Meyer, "Britney Spears Musical Once Upon a One More Time Assembles Cast With Briga Heelan, Justin Guarini, Emily Skinner, More," *Playbill* online, March 4, 2020, https://www.playbill.com/article/britney-spears-musical-once- upon-a-one-more-time-assembles-cast-with-briga-heelan-justin-guarini-emily- skinner-more.

Those modern progressive musicals which were still running when the shutdown was put in place, have faced a reckoning with what this activism means, in light of the Black Lives Matter protests which occurred following the death of George Floyd, among many other Black victims of racial profiling and police brutality.[269] Among other Broadway productions, *Hamilton, Head over Heels, Hadestown*, and *SIX* all issued statements in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, many of them providing links to fundraisers and literature for fans of the shows to support the cause and educate themselves on systemic racism.[270] These messages also exposed the root of the modern progressive musical's weaknesses as a genre, and where there is room for growth in who makes these works of theatre.

The modern progressive musical is predominantly the domain of white artists, the majority of whom are also male. Lin-Manuel Miranda remains the only composer in this field to come from a non-white background, and the women involved in the genre through the creative process, currently represented by Rachel Chavkin, Anaïs Mitchell, and Lucy Moss, are all white Anglophones. The subjects chosen to be adapted to modern progressive musicals, moreover, continue to represent a preference for white narratives, both fictional and historical, and the casting of actors of color is consequently an act of allyship that reveals the limitations of the genre in its present state. The current crop of

[269] Hannah Hageman, "George Floyd Reverberates Globally: Thousands Protest In Germany, U.K., New Zealand," *NPR* online, May 31, 2020,https://www.npr.org/2020/05/31/866428272/george-floyd-reverberates-globally- thousands-protest-in-germany-u-k-canada.

[270] Hamilton on Broadway (HamiltonMusical), "We stand on the side of justice…" Twitter, text with video, May 30, 2020, https://twitter.com/HamiltonMusical/status/1266941365277114368?s=20; Head Over Heels (HOHMusical), "happy #pride…" Twitter, text with image and link, June 1, 2020, https://twitter.com/HOHmusical/status/1267517351076999168?s=20; Hadestown (hadestown), "We ALL can show the way the world can be…" Twitter, text with image and link, May 30, 2020, https://twitter.com/hadestown/status/1266901708841631744; Six on Broadway (SixBroadway), "Please read and visit the link below for ways you can help now…" Twitter, text with image and link, May 31, 2020, https://twitter.com/SixBroadway/status/1267177848642637824?s=20.

productions which constitute the modern progressive musical also deal with one of the larger limitations of musical theatre as a whole: whether in being heavily reliant upon intricate choreography, or designed with stairs, these stagings prioritize the casting of able-bodied actors, excluding performers with disabilities from taking part in works which are meant to champion diversity.

The most effective way of addressing this disparity is in recognizing artists from these excluded demographics and elevating their work. In this regard, *SIX,* despite sharing many of the flaws held its fellow modern progressive musicals, serves as a template for future productions. What blind spots the play has exist in the metatext of its performance, brought out by a point in time when the public awareness of feminism as a movement is expanding, elevating a wider range of voices. The text of *SIX* is simplistic enough that it can feasibly adapt to new understandings of the movement and new artistic interpretations, while its ideological foundations remain constant in their support of the piece's ability to engage audiences.

Its origins as a piece of amateur student theatre and subsequent success speak to the viability of productions not directly created for the professional circuit, and the potential of writers outside the ecosystem of formalized theatrical education. Its use of popular music conventions and social media for distribution make the material widely accessible for consumption, subverting the conceptions of musical theatre as an elitist form of entertainment. In Lucy Moss' presence as both a co-writer and co-director, it is a piece shaped by the female perspective that it seeks to represent, and, most crucially, it is able to explore that perspective concisely thanks to the clearly articulated goals of the Six-Point Plan.

The bridge of "Six" is a reprise of the melody from "Ex-Wives," and transitions into the final chorus with the remark that "nothing is for sure, nothing is for certain, all that we know is that we used to be six wives," and few words more succinctly encapsulate the relationship *SIX* holds for the potential and the future of modern progressive musicals. At their core, these are works of theatre that investing in stories of the past, narratives taken for granted and held as truth, and using the transformative capability of the medium to reinvent them in a way that reflects the needs of the present. Those things which used to be considered unquestionable still have a place within discussions about these stories, but *SIX* proves that the deeper significance of such stories comes from reevaluating the way they are told, how much value is placed in those perspectives, and what perspectives are lost as a result. By producing a depiction of a history as familiar that of the six Queens which reinvents its subject so thoroughly, *SIX* prompts consideration of what might be accomplished if the same methodology were to be applied to the dearth of stories and perspectives which remain unexplored.

REFERENCES

"Cast & Creative," *&Juliet*, February 11, 2019. https://www.andjulietthemusical.co.uk/cast-and-creative/.

Ackerman, Naomi. "Six the musical composer steps in to save the show after cast member falls ill," *Evening Standard* online, London. July 29, 2019. https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/toby-marlow-six-musical-composer-understudy-a4200126.html.

Allen, Lily, "Fuck You," by Lily Allen and Greg Kurstin. Recorded 2008. Track 8 on *It's Not Me, It's You.* Parlophone, compact disc.

Andersson, Benny, Björn Ulvaeus, Stig Anderson, and Catherine Johnson. *Mamma Mia.* Dir. Phyllida Lloyd. Performed by Christy Altomare, Traci Victoria, Thomasina E. Gross, Felicia Finley, Lauren Cohn, Judy McLane, Zak Resnick, et al. Winter Garden Theatre, New York, NY, January 20, 2013

"Aimie Atkinson." *Global Artists.* Accessed April 1, 2020. https://login.tagmin.com/addon/global.inc.php?cid=1480.

Aurthur, Kate, and Natalie Portman. "Natalie Portman Is The Woke Actor We Need Right Now." *BuzzFeed News*, February 20, 2018. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/kateaurthur/natalie-portman-is-woke.

"'Hamilton' Casting Call | Baseline Theatrical - Theater Auditions." *Backstage* online. July 10, 2016. https://www.backstage.com/casting/hamilton-122279.

Benton, Denée. *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. By Stephen Colbert. CBS, December 12, 2016.

—. (deneebenton), "towards the end of drama school…", Instagram, photograph and caption, January 17, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/BswDD9aA-y2/.

Boone, Rebecca. "Britney and the Back-lash." *Off Our Backs* 32, no. 1 (2002): 48-49.

Bordo, Susan. *The Creation of Anne Boleyn: A New Look at England's Most Notorious Queen.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. EPUB.

Brantley, Ben. 2018. "Review: Ye Olde Go-Go's Songs Hit the Renaissance in 'Head Over Heels'." *New York Times*, July 26: C1.

Brantley, Ben, and New York Times Communications (NYTimesPR). "Here is Ben Brantley's response to the conversation surrounding his review of "Head Over

Heels"..." Twitter, photograph and text with link, July 27, 2018, https://twitter.com/NYTimesPR/status/1022864714525749248.

Brooker, Peter. "Key words in Brecht's theory and practice of theatre." In *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, edited by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks, 209-224. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Brown, Joe. "Nontraditional Casting Not Just a Character Issue." *The Washington Post* online, November 23, 1987. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1987/11/23/nontraditional-casting-not-just-a-character-issue/674f076e-3b04-4ffc-8bc9-f597465e5757/.

Browne, David. "The Hell With Broadway: The Story of Anais Mitchell's 'Hadestown'." *Rolling Stone* online. June 1, 2019. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/broadway-hadestown-best-musical-tony-anais-mitchell-842447/.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York: Routledge, 1990. Ebook.

Carlson, Marvin. *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001.

Cepeda, María Elena. "Shakira as the Idealized Transnational Citizen: Media Perspectives on Colombianidad in Transition." In *Musical ImagiNation: U. S-Colombian Identity and the Latin Music Boom*, 61-86. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Chadwick, Justin. *The Other Boleyn Girl.* (2008; Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 2008), DVD.

Chernow, Ron. 2004. *Alexander Hamilton.* New York: Penguin Books. EPUB.

Cohen, Cathy J. "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997): 437-465.

Livingston, Jennie, dir. *Paris is Burning.* 1990; Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate, 2005. DVD.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum,* vol 1989, no. 1 (1989): article 8.

Crompton, Sarah. "With SIX, Playwrights Lucy Moss and Toby Marlow Dramatize the Tudor Dynasty—One Power Ballad at a Time." *Vogue* online, January 16, 2020. https://www.vogue.com/article/six-playwrights-lucy-moss-toby-marlow.

Cullwell-Block, Logan. “Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812 Now Available for Professional Licensing.” *Playbill* online. February 12, 2020. https://www.playbill.com/article/natasha-pierre-the-great-comet-of-1812-now-available-for-professional-licensing.

Hunt, Peter H., dir. *1776.* (1972; Burbank, CA; Columbia Pictures, 2002). Digital.

David, Keren. “We wrote a musical during our finals...now it's on in the West End.” *The Jewish Chronicle* online. September 6, 2018. Accessed December 14, 2019. https://www.thejc.com/culture/theatre/six-the-musical-steps-from-fringe-to-the-west-end-1.469323.

Davies, Kat. “Megasix London 28 July including composer Toby Marlow.” YouTube. July 28, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czsfslKOPIs.

De Shields, André, Eva Noblezada, Jewelle Blackman, Yvette Gonzalez-Nacer, Kay Trinidad, Reeve Carney, Afra Hines, et al., vocalists. *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording*). Comp. Anaïs Mitchell. 2019. Sing It Again. Digital release.

Destiny’s Child. *Survivor*. Comps. Beyoncé Knowles, Anthony Dent and Mathew Knowles. 2000. Sony. Track 2 on *Survivor*, 2001. Compact disc.

Destiny's Child. *Independent Women.* Comps. Beyoncé Knowles, Samuel Barnes, Jean-Claude Olivier and Cory Rooney. 2000. Sony. Track 1 on *Survivor*, 2001. Compact disc.

Dolan, Jill. “Performance, Utopia, and the “Utopian Performative”.” *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 3 (2001): 455-479.

DuRoss, Michelle. “Somewhere in Between: Alexander Hamilton and Slavery.” *Early America Review* 9, no. 4 (2010): 1-8.

Eilish, Billie. “Billie Eilish - bad guy (Live From Saturday Night Live).” YouTube. September 29. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn1Uwsg3eRQ.

Eyer, Austin. “Get Down - Six the Musical.” YouTube. March 24, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wT6s0l8BHFM.

Ferreday, Debra.“‘Only the Bad Gyal could do this’: Rihanna, rape-revenge narratives and the cultural politics of white feminism.” *Feminist Theory* 18, no. 3 (2017), 263–280.

France, David, dir. *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson.* (2017; Los Gatos, CA: Netflix, 1997). Digital streaming, https://www.netflix.com/title/80189623.

Fraser, Antonia, *The Wives of Henry VIII.* New York: Random House, 1992.

Frehsée, Nicole. "Meet Adele, the U.K.'s Newest Soul Star." *Rolling Stone*, January 22, 2009: 26.

Frith, Hannah, Jayne Raisborough, and Orly Klein. "C'mon girlfriend: Sisterhood, sexuality and the space of the benign in makeover TV." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 5 (2010), 471–89.

Gans, Andrew. "Edmonton's Citadel Theatre Will Stage Broadway-Aimed Hadestown Musical." *Playbill* online. Febraury 7, 2017. https://www.playbill.com/article/edmontons-citadel-theatre-will-stage-broadway-aimed-hadestown-musical.

García, Lorena. "The Sexual (Mis)Education of Latina Girls." In *Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself: Latina Girls and Sexual Identity*, 57-82. New York City: New York University Press, 2012.

Gordon, David, Toby Marlow, and Lucy Moss. "Listen Up, Queens! Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss Tell Us the Story of Their Hit Musical Six" *TheaterMania* online. May 30, 2019. https://www.theatermania.com/chicago-theater/news/interview-six-lucy-moss-toby-marlow_88893.html

"Grammy Awards 2016: See the Full Winners List." *Billboard* online. February 15, 2016. https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/grammys/6875260/grammy-awards-2016-full-winners-list.

"Hadestown." *Playbill* online. March 22, 2019. Accessed March 25, 2020. https://playbill.com/production/hadestown-walter-kerr-theatre-2018-2019.

Hadestown. 2020. *We ALL can show the way the world can be. In the words of Orpheus, "with each other we are stronger than we know." See below for ways you can help. #BlackLivesMatter #StandWithUs #Allies #ICantBreathe #WeHaveHadEnough.* May 30. Accessed May 30, 2020. https://twitter.com/hadestown/status/1266901708841631744.

Hageman, Hannah. "George Floyd Reverberates Globally: Thousands Protest In Germany, U.K., New Zealand." *NPR* online. May 31, 2020. https://www.npr.org/2020/05/31/866428272/george-floyd-reverberates-globally-thousands-protest-in-germany-u-k-canada.

Hallenbeck, Brent. "'Hadestown' 2016: Anais Mitchell's 'Hadestown' reborn off-Broadway." *Burlington Free Press* online. Published May 24, 2016. Last modified April 16, 2019. https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/2019/04/16/anais-mitchells-hadestown-reborn-off-broadway/84198858/

"Hamilton Cast." *Playbill* online. Accessed December 10, 2019. http://www.playbill.com/personlistpage/person-list?production=00000150-aea8-d936-a7fd-eefc733e0005&type=op#oc.

"Hamilton Co-Creators | 2018 Kennedy Center "Trailblazer" Honorees." *Kennedy Center.* December 18, 2018. https://www.kennedy-center.org/video/digital-stage/theater/2018/hamilton-co-creators--2018-kennedy-center-trailblazer-honorees/.

Hamilton on Broadway (HamiltonMusical), "We stand on the side of justice…" Twitter, text with video, May 30, 2020. https://twitter.com/HamiltonMusical/status/1266941365277114368?s=20.

Haskell, Rob. "Ariana Grande on Grief and Growing Up." *Vogue* online, July 9, 2019. https://www.vogue.com/article/ariana-grande-cover-august-2019.

Hawkins, Stan, and John Richardson. "Remodeling Britney Spears: Matters of Intoxication and Mediation." *Popular Music and Society* 30, no. 5 (2007): 605–629.

Head Over Heels (HOHMusical), "happy #pride…" Twitter, text with image and link. June 1, 2020. https://twitter.com/HOHmusical/status/1267517351076999168?s=20.

—. "We are saddened our time on Broadway has come to an end, but the beat lives on! Head Over Heels is now available for licensing…" Twitter, text with image and link. January 14, 2019. https://twitter.com/HOHmusical/status/1084928299757944838?s=20.

"Head Over Heels," *Broadway Licensing*, January 14, 2019. https://broadwaylicensing.com/shows/broadway/head- over-heels/#casting January 14.

Henry, Frances, Winston Matthis, and Carol Tator. "Miss Saigon." In *Challenging Racism in the Arts : Case Studies of Controversy and Conflict*, 141-158. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

Hewis, Ben. "Six the Musical announces further dates for UK tour." May 14, 2019. *WhatsOnStage* online. https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/six-musical-uk-tour-dates-venues_49071.html.

Jackson, Christopher, Barack Obama, and Bebe Winans, vocalists. "One Last Time – 44 Remix." Comp. Lin-Manuel Miranda. December 2018. Atlantic, Digital single.

Jarrott, Charles, dir. *Anne of a Thousand Days.* 1969; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2007. DVD.

Jessen, Monique. “Musical Charting the Lives of Henry VIII's Six Wives Heads to the U.S. — with a Twist!” *People* online, April 12, 2019.

Jevens, Darel. 2019. "Hit musical ‘Six’ sets return visit at Broadway Playhouse in 2020.” *Chicago Sun Times*, August 4.

Jones, Chris. 2019. “Now at Chicago Shakes, ‘Six’ gives these Tudor wives a voice and could be a huge hit.” *Chicago Tribune*, May 23.

Jones, Christopher. *Rise Up! : Broadway and American Society from Angels in America to Hamilton.* London: Methuen Drama, 2019.

Keys, Alicia. “*Alicia Keys”* Alicia Keys – The Official Website. Accessed April 30, 2020. https://aliciakeys.com/bio/.

Kiang, Lisa, Virginia W. Huynh, Charissa S. L. Cheah, Yijie Wang, and Hirokazu Yoshikawa. “Moving beyond the model minority.” *Asian American Journal of Psychology* 8, no. 1 (2017), 1-6.

Knowles, Beyoncé, and Nicki Minaj. *Flawless Remix (feat. Nicki Minaj).* Comps. Beyoncé Knowles, Onika Maraj, Terius Nash, Chauncey Hollis and Raymond DeAndre Martin. 2014. Track 16 on *BEYONCÉ [Platinum Edition].* Columbia, compact disc.

Knowles-Carter, Beyoncé, Jonas Åkerlund, Dikayl Rimmasch, Kahlil Joseph, Todd Tourso, Melina Matsoukas and Mark Romanek, dir. *Beyoncé: Lemonade.* (2016; New York, NY: Home Box Office, 2016), digital streaming.

Kornhaber, Spencer. “How Ariana Grande Fell Off the Cultural-Appropriation Tightrope.” *Atlantic* online, January 23, 2019. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/01/ariana-grandes-7-rings-really-cultural-appropriation/580978/

Kot, Greg. “Emeli Sande a neuroscientist with pop-star talent.” *Chicago Tribune* online, May 17, 2012. https://www.chicagotribune.com/chi-emeli-sande-profile-uk-singer-emeli-sande-interviewed-20120516-column.html.

Kumar, Naveen. “Queeroes 2019: André De Shields and Jeremy O. Harris on the Divinity of Otherness.” *THEM.* June 25, 2019. https://www.them.us/story/queeroes-2019-jeremy-o-harris-andre-de-shields.

“Lauren Drew.” *Global Artists.* October 24, 2019. https://www.globalartists.co.uk/artists/details/lauren-drew/.

Lavigne, Avril. “Avril Lavigne - Girlfriend (Official Music Video).” October 2, 2009. Accessed April 18, 2020. https://youtu.be/Bg59q4puhmg.

Lavigne, Avril. *Girlfriend.* Comps. Avril Lavigne and Lukasz Gottwald. 2006. Track 1 on *The Best Damn Thing.* RCA, compact disc.

Lee, Ashley, and Jennifer Konerman. "'Hamilton' Broadway Cast Addresses Mike Pence in Audience: "Work on Behalf of All of Us"." *Hollywood Reporter* online, November 18, 2016. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hamilton-broadway-cast-addresses-mike-pence-audience-work-behalf-all-us-949075

Lefkowitz, Andy. "Acclaimed Musical Hadestown to Play Broadway in 2019; London Run Announced."*Broadway.Com.* April 19, 2018. https://www.broadway.com/buzz/191866/acclaimed-musical-hadestown-to-play-broadway-in-2019-london-run-announced/.

— "Six to Make Australian Debut at Sydney Opera House in 2020." *Broadway.Com.* August 5, 2019. https://www.broadway.com/buzz/196582/six-to-make-australian-debut-at-sydney-opera-house-in-2020/.

Levenson, Steven, Benj Pasek, and Justin Paul. *Dear Evan Hansen: Through the Window.* New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2017.

Libbey, Peter. 2019. "2019 Tony Award Winners: Full List." *New York Times*, June 9: C2.

Lieb, Kristin J. *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry.* 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Lindsay, Benjamin. "By Calling for Women on Broadway, Rachel Chavkin Isn't Asking for a Favor, She's Offering One." *Vanity Fair* online. June 10, 2019. https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2019/06/women-on-broadway-rachel-chavkin-tonys.

Lindsey, Karen. *Divorced, beheaded, survived : a feminist reinterpretation of the wives of Henry VIII.* Boston: Da Capo Press, 1995.

Leveaux, David and and Alex Rudzinski. *Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert.* (2018, New York, NY; NBC Television, 2018). Broadcast.

Lordi, Emily J. "Surviving the Hustle: Beyoncé's Performance of Work." *Black Camera* 9, no. 1 (2017): 131-145.

Lowe, Melanie. "Colliding Feminisms: Britney Spears, "Tweens," and the Politics of Reception." *Popular Music and Society* 26, no. 2 (2003), 123-140.

Lowthorpe, Philippa, dir. *The Other Boleyn Girl.* (2003; London, England: British Broadcasting Corporation, 2003), DVD.

Lynskey, Dorian. 2016. “Lily Allen: the pop rebel who refuses to stay silent.” *The Guardian*, October 15.

Malloy, Dave. *Moby Dick: A Musical Reckoning.* Directed by Rachel Chavkin. Performed by Dawn L. Troupe, Manik Choksi, Kim Blanck, Starr Busby, Andrew Cristi, Ashkon Davaran, Morgan Siobhan Green, et al. American Repertory Theater, Cambridge, MA, December 28, 2019.

—. “The Abduction Lyrics.” *Genius.Com.* Accessed March 13, 2020. https://genius.com/10095929.

Malloy, Dave, Steven Suskin, and Oskar Eustis. *Natasha, Pierre, And the Great Comet of 1812: The Journey of a New Musical to Broadway* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2016).

Marchiony, Samantha. “Queer Arcadia: Racial, Gender, and Sexual Politics in Head Over Heels.” In the author’s possession, May 13, 2019.

—. “The Problem with Pythio: Progressive Metatextuality versus Regressive Characterization.” In the author’s possession, March 7, 2020.

—. “The Revolution is Color “Blind”: A Case Study of Casting Practice in Hamilton.” In the author’s possession, December 16, 2019.

Marlow, Toby, and Lucy Moss. “A conversation with the creators.” *American Repertory Theater presents SIX.* Cambridge: American Repertory Theater, September 7, 2019.

—. “SIX.” Norwich, United Kingdom, July 11, 2018. Script.

—. *SIX.* Dir. Lucy Moss and Jamie Armitage. Performed by Adrianna Hicks, Andrea Macasaet, Abby Mueller, Brittney Mack, Courtney Mack and Anna Uzele, American Repertory Theater, Cambridge, MA, September 7, 2019.

Marlow, Toby, and Lucy Moss. *SIX.* Dir. Jamie Armitage and Lucy Moss. Performed by Adrianna Hicks, Andrea Macasaet, Abby Mueller, Brittney Mack, Samantha Pauly and Anna Uzele. Brooks Atkinson Theatre, New York, NY, February 21, 2020.

—. 2020. “SIX on Broadway - Authors' Notes.” *SIX: Divorced, Beheaded, Broadway.* (New York: Platypus Productions, 2020).

Mayo, Douglas. “Six the musical goes to The Drive In – Tour Cancelled due to COVID outbreaks.” BritishTheatre.Com. July 15, 2020. https://britishtheatre.com/six-the-musical-goes-to-the-drive-in/.

McMillan, Uri. 2014. “Nicki-aesthetics: the camp performance of Nicki Minaj.” *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 24 (2014), 79–87.

McPhee, Ryan. “Watch Queens and Royal Subjects From Around the World in a Virtual Six Performance.” *Playbill* online. April 24, 2020. https://www.playbill.com/article/watch-queens-and-royal-subjects-from-around-the-world-in-a-virtual-six-performance.

Meyer, Dan. “Britney Spears Musical Once Upon a One More Time Assembles Cast With Briga Heelan, Justin Guarini, Emily Skinner, More.” *Playbill* online. March 4, 2020. https://www.playbill.com/article/britney-spears-musical-once-upon-a-one-more-time-assembles-cast-with-briga-heelan-justin-guarini-emily-skinner-more.

Milligan, Bonnie, and Karl Saint Lucy. “Bonnie Milligan Leads Lesbian and Plus-Sized Representation on Broadway as Pamela in ‘Head Over Heels.’” *INTO*. August 17, 2018. https://www.intomore.com/culture/bonnie-milligan-leads-lesbian-and-plus-sized-representation-on-broadway-as-pamela-in-head-over-heels.

Miranda, Lin-Manuel. *Cabinet Battle 3 - Demo*. Comp. Lin-Manuel Miranda. 2016. Track 19 on *The Hamilton Mixtape.* Atlantic, digital release.

—. *Hamilton.* Dir. Thomas Kail. Performed by Ryan Vasquez, Krystal Joy Brown, Daniel Breaker, Mandy Gonzalez, Bryan Terrell Clark, James Monroe Iglehart, Deon'te Goodman, et al., Richard Rogers Theatre, New York, NY, December 26, 2019.

—. 2009. “Lin-Manuel Miranda Performs at the White House Poetry Jam.” Washington DC: The White House, May 12.

Miranda, Lin-Manuel, and Jeremy McCarter. *Hamilton: The Revolution.* New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016

Murfin, Ira S. “SIX Pre-Amble: Battle of the Sixes.” *Chicago Shakespeare Theater on Navy Pier.* June 23, 2019. https://www.chicagoshakes.com/plays_and_events/six/six_preamble.

Newberry, Laura. “Britney Spears hasn’t fully controlled her life for years. Fans insist it’s time to #FreeBritney.” *Los Angeles Times* online, September 18, 2019. https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-09-17/britney-spears-conservatorship-free-britney

Nordstrom, Leigh. 2020. *Pop Princesses Meet Tudor Queens Onstage for ‘Six’. Women’s Wear Daily* online, March 12, 2020. https://wwd.com/eye/lifestyle/six-broadway-costumes-tudor-fashion-1203536473/.

Nordyke, Kimberly. “Tony Awards 2016: Complete List.” *Hollywood Reporter* online. June 12, 2016. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lists/tony-awards-2016-complete-list-901959/item/best-play-tony-awards-nominations-889966.

“Norwegian Cruise Line Enhances Award-Winning Entertainment Program with Six: The Musical.” *Norwegian Cruise Line.* August 6, 2019. https://www.ncl.com/press-releases/norwegian-cruise-line-enhances-award-winning-entertainment-program-six-musical.

Obama White House “Hamilton at the White House,” YouTube, March 14, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_edbv-LPX9c.

Pao, Angela C. *No Safe Spaces: Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.

Paulson, Michael. 2020. “Broadway, Symbol of New York Resilience, Shuts Down Amid Virus Threat.” *New York Times*, 13 March: A1.

—. 2020. “How a Half-Dozen Tudor Queens Became Pop Stars on Broadway.” *New York Times*, March 1, 2020: AR22.

—. 2017. “How ‘Great Comet’ Burned Out.” *New York Times*, August 29, 2017: C1.

—. 2017. “Patinkin Bows Out of ‘Comet’.” *New York Times*, July 29, 2017: C1.

Ravitz, Justin. “Chris Brown Confirms Rihanna Breakup: “I Can’t Focus on Wife-ing” Her.” *US Weekly* online, May 6, 2013. https://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/chris-brown-confirms-rihanna-breakup-i-cant-focus-on-wife-ing-her-201365

Reed, Ishmael. ““Hamilton: the Musical:” Black Actors Dress Up like Slave Traders…and It’s Not Halloween.” *CounterPunch* (Petrolia: CounterPunch, August 21, 2015). https://www.counterpunch.org/2015/08/21/hamilton-the-musical-black-actors-dress-up-like-slave-tradersand-its-not-halloween/

Rich, Adrienne. “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980): 631-660.

Rooks, Noliwe M. “The Myth of Bootstrapping.” *TIME* online. September 7, 2012. https://ideas.time.com/2012/09/07/the-myth-of-bootstrapping/.

Rosay, André B. *Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men.* Washington DC: National Institute of Justice, 2016.

"Samantha Pauly Resume." Stewart Talent. February 13, 2020. https://www.stewarttalent.com/_media/talent/18061/samantha-pauly-resume-311119.pdf.

Schönberg, Claude-Michel, Alain Boublil, and Herbert Kretzmer. *Les Misérables.* Dir. Laurence Connor and James Powell. Performed by Ramin Karimloo, Will Swenson, Erika Henningsen, Rachel Izen, Gavin Lee, Brennyn Lark, Samantha Hill, Wallace Smith, Chris McCarrell, Athan Sporek et. al., Imperial Theatre, New York, NY, March 25, 2015.

Schönberg, Claude-Michel, Richard Maltby, Jr., and Alain Boublil. *Miss Saigon.* Dir. Laurence Connor. Performed by Jon Jon Briones, Lianah Sta. Ana, Dorcas Leung, Nicholas Christopher, Alistair Brammer, Devin Ilaw and Katie Rose Clarke, et. al., Broadway Theatre, New York, NY, January 10, 2018.

Schwartz, Pepper. "Miley Cyrus is sexual -- get over it." *CNN* online. August 27, 2013. https://www.cnn.com/2013/08/26/opinion/schwartz-miley-cyrus/index.html.

Shakespeare, William, and David Bevington. "The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth." In *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 913-953. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980.

Shaw, Helen. 2020. "The Book of Mormon and Hamilton Already Feel Like They're From Another Time." *Vulture*. December 16, 2019. https://www.vulture.com/2019/12/re-reviewing-the-book-of-mormon-and-hamilton-in-2019.html.

"Shekinah McFarlane." *Six the Musical*. October 24, 2019. https://www.sixthemusical.com/uk-tour/company/shekinah-mcfarlane.

"SIX Hits 100,000,000 Spotify and Apple Music Streams; Second Only to HAMILTON in Musical Theatre Genre." *BroadwayWorld* online. February 21, 2020. https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/SIX-Hits-100000000-Spotify-and-Apple-Music-Streams-Second-Only-to-HAMILTON-in-Musical-Theatre-Genre-20200221.

Six on Broadway (SixBroadway). "Please read and visit the link below for ways you can help now…" Twitter, text with image and link. May 31, 2020, https://twitter.com/SixBroadway/status/1267177848642637824?s=20.

SIX on Broadway. 2020. *Divorced. Beheaded. Live From Facebook HQ.* March 11. Accessed March 11, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/SIXBroadway/videos/852738735225865/.

"SIX The Musical." *Pearson Casting.* February, 2020. https://www.pearsoncasting.com/six.

"Six the Musical | Production Gross." *Playbill* online. March 8, 2020. https://playbill.com/production/gross?production=0000016c-4dc0-dda1-abef-edf4826d0000.

Snapes, Laura. 2019. "Still complicated: Avril Lavigne: 'I've had to fight people on this journey'." *Guardian* online, January 14, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jan/14/still-complicated-avril-lavigne-ive-had-to-fight-people-on-this-journey

"Sophie Golden." *Global Artists.* August 9, 2019. https://www.spotlight.com/0294-8978-9200.

Spice Girls. *Wannabe.* Comps. Matt Rowe, Richard Stannard, Melanie C, Emma Bunton, Mel B, Geri Halliwell and Victoria Beckham.1996. Track 1 on *Spice.* Virgin, compact disc.

Sprinkel, Katy. *Ariana Grande: Break Free.* Chicago: Triumph Books, 2019. EPUB.

Stewart, Michael, and Jerry Herman. *Hello, Dolly.* New York City: Concord Theatricals, 1964.

Stryker, Susan, and Victor Silverman, dir. *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria.* (2005; San Francisco, CA: Kanopy Streaming, 2016), digital streaming. https://www.kanopy.com/product/screaming-queens.

"The 2016 Pulitzer Prize Winner in Drama: *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda." *The Pulitzer Prizes* (Columbia University). April 18, 2016. https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/lin-manuel-miranda.

"The 2020 Drama League Award." *Drama League.* April 30, 2020. http://dramaleague.org/events/awards/nominees20.

Thomson, Peter. "Brecht's Lives." In *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, edited by Peter Thomson and Sacks Glendyr, 22-39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

"Tilda Wickham." InterTalent Rights Group. Accessed March 12, 2020. https://intertalentgroup.com/profiles/matilda-wickham.

Tomei, Jenna, and Robert J. Cramer. "Legal Policies in Conflict: The Gay Panic Defense and Hate Crime Legislation." *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice* 16, no. 4 (2016): 217-235.

"Tony Awards 2017: Complete Winners List." *Variety* online. June 11, 2017. https://variety.com/2017/legit/awards/tony-awards-2017-winners-list-1202461975/

Touré. “Alicia Keys: The Next Queen of Soul.” *Rolling Stone* online, November 8, 2001. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/alicia-keys-the-next-queen-of-soul-83113/.

Trifone, Lisa. “Review: Six at Chicago Shakes Boasts a Show-Stopping Cast.” *Third Coast Review* online, May 29, 2019. https://thirdcoastreview.com/2019/05/29/theater-review-six-chicago-shakes/.in

Truong, Peggy. 2018. “Nicki Minaj Just Delivered a ‘Queen’ Medley While Decked Out in ~Gold~ at the 2018 VMAs.” *Cosmopolitan* online. August 21, 2018. https://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/music/a22690500/nicki-minaj-performance-vma-2018/

Verini, Bob. 2019. “From Massachusetts: The Joy of Six.” *New York Stage Review* online. August 25 2019. http://nystagereview.com/2019/08/25/from-massachusetts-the-joy-of-six/.

“Vito Russo Test.” *Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation* online. August 20, 2013. https://www.glaad.org/sri/2014/vitorusso.

Warsame, Keinan Abdi, Claudia Alexandra Feliciano, Riz Ahmed, and René Juan Pérez Joglar, vocalists. *Immigrants (We Get the Job Done).* Comp. Lin-Manuel Miranda. 2016. Track 11 on *The Hamilton Mixtape.* Atlantic, digital release.

Watsky, and Shockwave, vocalists. *An Open Letter (feat. Shockwave) [Interlude].* Comp. Lin-Manuel Miranda. 2016. Track 5 on *The Hamilton Mixtape.* Atlantic, digital release.

Weiss, Glenn, dir. *70th Tony Awards*. 2016; New York, NY: CBS Television, 2016. Broadcast.

Whitty, Jeff, and James Magruder. *Head Over Heels.* Dir. Michael Mayer. Performed by Peppermint, Jeremy Kushnier, Bonnie Milligan, Taylor Iman Jones, Andrew Durand, Rachel York, Alexandra Socha and Tim Alan Robbins. Hudson Theatre, New York, NY, January 5, 2019.

Worsley, Lucy. 2020. “History's About to Get Overthrone.” *SiX: Divorced, Beheaded, Broadway.* (New York: Platypus Productions, 2020).