

Dr. Valerie Lynn Schrader

Professor Tenure-Line

Communication Arts and Sciences

Title of your research project.

“Who Tells Your Story?": Narrative Theory, Public Memory, and the Hamilton Phenomenon

Description of research. Please provide a few sentences that explain the question and the methods employed in this research project.

The popularity of Lin-Manuel Miranda's hit musical Hamilton has been unprecedented. Hamilton tells the story of the first United States Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, a founding father who, until recently, was often forgotten in American public memory. Miranda's unique musical, which fuses an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century story with contemporary music and text, features actors of various races and genders in order to tell the story of "America then" by and for "America now". Through a close textual analysis of the musical's script, cast recording, and sheet music, Valerie Lynn Schrader uses narrative theory to explore how Hamilton creates public memory of one of the lesser known US founding fathers. She argues that, through the narrative paradigm, Hamilton creates what narrative theorist Walter Fisher refers to as "public moral argument",¹⁾ through which audience members can discern life lessons, or "equipment for living",²⁾ for their own lives. Finally, the article suggests that the rhetorical theory of Burkean identification may play a role in how public memory of Hamilton's story is formed and how audience members learn life lessons from the musical.

Did this project include Penn State students as researchers?

No

If yes to the above question, please state where it was published.

New Theatre Quarterly

What problem do you address with your research?

How Hamilton uses narrative theory to create public memory of the life of Alexander Hamilton and those around him.