

# The New Hamlet and the New Woman: A Shakespearean Mashup in 1902

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## Abstract

In exploring one extraordinary "Shakespearean" production that took place on the Smith family farm in Peoria in 1902, this essay suggests that our histories of Shakespeare might be enriched by scholarship that looks beyond academic criticism and professional theater history. *The New Hamlet*, credited to William Hawley Smith and The Smith Family Farmers, suggests that rather than being the site of strutting, bellowing hams, out-Heroding Herod, amateur and peripheral performance could be a testing ground and proleptic herald of interpretations too novel or drastic for the professional sector. For *The New Hamlet* — whose title signals the play's interest in the turn-of-the-century idea of the New Woman — offers a feminist critique not only of Shakespeare's most celebrated play, but also of the critical, theatrical, and social conventions that upheld its reputation. What is more, *The New Hamlet* offers that critique more than half a century before professional critics and theater practitioners would take up similar arguments.

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Even before Groucho Marx asked, in *A Night at the Opera* (1935), "Will it play in Peoria?" the central Illinois city was notorious in American theatrical culture as the quintessential site of mainstream, pedestrian taste. If it will play in Peoria, it was suggested, it will play anywhere, since residents of Peoria are alleged to lack the cosmopolitanism and worldliness of the denizens of larger cities. This essay may not restore the reputation of maligned Peorians, but in exploring one extraordinary "Shakespearean" production that took place on the Smith family farm in Peoria in 1902, it suggests that our histories of Shakespeare might be enriched by scholarship that looks beyond academic criticism and professional theater history.

*The New Hamlet*, credited to William Hawley Smith and The Smith Family Farmers, suggests that rather than being the site of strutting, bellowing hams, out-Heroding Herod, amateur and peripheral performance could be a testing ground and proleptic herald of interpretations too novel or drastic for the professional sector. For *The New Hamlet* — whose title signals the play's interest in the turn-of-the-century idea of the New Woman — offers a feminist critique not only of

Shakespeare's most celebrated play, but also of the critical, theatrical and social conventions that upheld its reputation. What is more, *The New Hamlet* offers that critique more than half a century before professional critics and theater practitioners would take up similar arguments.

### The Advantage of Amateurism

The case for taking seriously amateur Shakespearean performance has been made most emphatically by Michael Dobson, whose 2011 study argues that "at several important points in theatrical history the geographical scope and social inclusiveness of the amateur theatre have dwarfed those of the commercial and subsidized playhouses" (Dobson 2011, 1). In accounting for the surprising richness that Dobson begins to chronicle, we might turn to Edward Said's Reith Lectures, which celebrate amateurism in contrast to an expertise that must "be certified by the proper authorities; they instruct you in speaking the right language, citing the right authorities, holding down the right territory" (Said 1993, 7). Similarly, I want to consider how amateurism might confer a sense of liberty from the codes, conventions or protocols of theater or academic scholarship — freeing the amateur to tramp interpretive pathways across areas considered by professional standards as inappropriate or unproductive *terra prohibita*.

In offering a play that proposed to update *Hamlet* in 1902, the Smiths faced several significant obstructions. To begin, audiences of the time tended to assess Shakespearean performances based on how closely they hewed to traditions established by eminent stage actors such as Edwin Booth (1833-93) and Henry Irving (1838-1905). Consequently, variation in the professional theater was uncommon, and innovative interpretation was effectively discouraged outside of the burlesque tradition. Likewise, the scholarly procedures of professional literary criticism have always slowed innovation by obliging critics to review and engage past scholarship of their field. While this does not mean that scholarship cannot advance and generate new inquiries, the etiquette and protocols of literary criticism have often meant that when a question finds purchase, its grip can be extremely difficult to loosen. Thus, by the time the Smiths set out to work on *Hamlet*, critics were already obliged to take up the perennial questions of Hamlet's delay and Gertrude's adultery and/or incest.

But the Smiths did not present themselves as professional actors, critics, or playwrights. Instead, they circumvented convention and protocol by presenting themselves as farmers, an identity immediately signaled by the *The New Hamlet's* extraordinary binding. Produced initially for distribution to the 500 guests of a "garden party" performance set "under the haw tree" (Smith Family 1902, cover boards) at the Smith farm in Peoria, Illinois, the book is bound between wooden boards cut from no. 2 fencing. The title is printed on the board in the style of a livestock brand, along with a note specifying that the play was "composed by Shakespeare and the Smith Family"

and then "done into a book . . . by hand, at the barn, on the farm, by farmers" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, cover boards). In eschewing a more conventional cover of cloth on pasteboard (as well as an ornamental stamp or gilding), and insisting on the rustic identity of its creators, *The New Hamlet* immediately announces its distance from the professional theater and the commercial publishing industry.

Of course, there is more than a little implausibility in the notion of a family of Illinois farmers hosting five-hundred guests and presenting each with a hand-made book. After all, who was harvesting the corn? Certainly not William Hawley Smith, who had garnered national attention on a country-wide lecture tour after giving up positions as a school teacher and principal. Smith would go on to serve as a county school superintendent and author of numerous books on education, including *All the Children of All the People: A Study of the Attempt to Educate Everybody*, where he would argue that

Shakespeare's plays . . . are no longer popular upon the boards, not because we have no actors great enough to present them, but because the spirit of democracy has taken such a hold upon the minds of the people of to-day that they have lost interest in what happened to kings and queens, as such, in the days gone by . . . What he wrote was once great literature. Both as to form and in spirit he made a most perfect record of the experiences and ideals of the royalty he dealt with. The only trouble is that many of the experiences and ideals he depicted are no longer worthy of being perpetuated. (Smith 1912, 299)

William's wife, Ellen Galusha Smith, was also no mere farmer. Descended from a prominent New England family that moved to Illinois where her father was appointed one of the first trustees of the University of Illinois, Ellen authored a book on embroidery and was a charter member of the Peoria Woman's Club, which pushed for suffrage in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Smiths counted among their friends Walt Whitman, Grover Cleveland, Adlai Stevenson, Mark Twain, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. In other words, the Smiths were farmers like George W. and Laura Bush are ranchers.

Why then would the accomplished Smith family present themselves as simple farmers? In answering this question, I want to indicate how the guise of amateurism might enable a learned, oppositional stance to scholarly and theatrical traditions. For, as Said suggests, while the unbounded amateur never circumvents authority and power altogether, he or she can elect to address authority not "as a professional supplicant" but instead as "its unrewarded, amateurish conscience" (Said 1994, 83). Accordingly, *The New Hamlet* offers an instance where "amateur" performance grapples with Shakespeare in ways that are arguably more ambitious and forward

thinking than what was found among professional theater companies and even foretells the work of later literary critics. *The New Hamlet* insists on an alternative reading of Shakespeare's mothers, and particularly Queen Gertrude, that would buck both critical and performance traditions, anticipating by more than half a century the work of pioneering feminist scholars.

In nineteenth-century terms, the Smiths' play might be characterized as a melodramatic burlesque or travesty. Yet the contemporary term "mashup" might be a more helpful descriptor given the play's title page, which presents *The New Hamlet, intermixed and interwoven with a revised version of Romeo and Juliet*. A mashup combines and modifies existing works to create a derivative text, highlighting the shared contours, motifs and sometimes the shortcomings of its sources. *The New Hamlet* borrows characters and lines from two of Shakespeare's best known tragedies, while subjecting them to the square-dancing call of "cross over and change partners."<sup>1</sup> That is, after the prologue complains that Shakespeare's "doubly grewsome plays / Of Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet" are not suited "to times like ours to-day" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 11), Hamlet is partnered with Juliet, and Romeo is united with Ophelia such that all might live — as an epigraph attributed to "Wandering Willie" suggests — "happily ever afterwards" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 7).<sup>2</sup> This is not particularly heady stuff on the face of it, but it is interesting for its suggestion that Shakespeare's plays might be in some ways outmoded and that to "bring these lovers strictly up to date" requires the working of "[t]wo wise old mothers" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 12).

### Bringing Shakespeare "up to date"

Of course, Shakespeare's plays are hardly known for the stratagems of "wise old mothers." Indeed, in puzzling over, "Where are the mothers in Shakespeare's plays?" Mary Beth Rose famously noted that the few mothers who appear in Shakespeare's plays are either "resolutely limited to the private realm, inscribed entirely in terms of early love and nurture" or alternatively demonized as "dangerous" interlopers in public life (M. Rose 1991, 313).<sup>3</sup> Lady Montague fits obviously among those mothers who live and die solely for their children; she literally dies of grief upon Romeo's banishment from Verona. The case of Queen Gertrude is more complicated in as much as textual, performance, and critical traditions from the nineteenth century up to the 1980s all tended to shuttle Denmark's queen between the poles of nurturing mother and self-indulgent sensualist.

In neither Gertrude nor Lady Montague do we find a strong candidate for the roles imagined by the Smiths. Yet in rendering these two characters "wise old mothers," the Smiths were

neither ignoring critical and performance traditions, nor accepting their terms. Instead, *The New Hamlet's* insistence on bringing the plays "up to date" meant putting gender on the critical agenda by imagining alternative roles for women and insisting upon the need to change the questions one might ask of Shakespeare's plays. By focusing on mothers specifically, *The New Hamlet* followed the rhetorical strategies of the New Woman, leveraging motherhood's revered place in the cultural matrix into questions about literary types, social change, and women's public voices.<sup>4</sup>

The customary use of the definite article before the term "New Woman" can be misleading because, as Marianne Berger Woods points out, "[t]here is no single vision or image of the New Woman" (2009, 5). If scholars agree that the term gained currency in the mid-1890s, they have also shown that it "could signal multiple and contradictory positions" (Patterson 2008, 2), denoting for some the champions of progressive politics and harnessed by others to denunciations of female depravity. In her most stereotypical form, the American New Woman was

college educated and believed in women's right to work in professions traditionally reserved for men; she often sought a public role in occupations that would putatively improve society. Assertive and outspoken, the New Woman championed women's right to political selfhood through the vote, to economic autonomy, and to prioritize intellectual or artistic aspirations over domestic concerns. (Rich 2009, 1)

But beyond this primary understanding, the term conjured an incongruous range of identities, including "prohibitionist, clubwoman, college girl, American girl, socialist, capitalist, anarchist, pickpocket, bicyclist, barren spinster, mannish woman, outdoor girl, birth-control advocate, modern girl, eugenicist, flapper, blues woman, lesbian, and vamp" (Patterson 2008, 1). So when the Smiths gesture toward the term in their play's title, they engage discussions about Shakespeare's women and also about the contested idea of the New Woman.

These two topics had intersected previously in one Philadelphia "woman question" playwright's 1898 description of Shakespeare as the "prophet and herald of the 'new woman'" (Groff 1898, 242). Yet the Smiths' play suggests instead that Shakespeare's work contributed to a centuries-long tradition that the New Woman sought to dismantle. Their reimagined iterations of Queen Gertrude and Lady Montague exemplify the figure Molly Ladd-Taylor calls the "progressive maternalist" (1994, 7), reconciling sentimental maternalists' emphasis on women's duty to care for their families and feminists' insistence on women's self-fulfillment. Each enters the public realm of the play on the grounds that "women had a special capacity for nurture by virtue of being women" and consequently a "political obligation" to shape the nation's citizenry (Ladd-Taylor 1994, 75).

"Like a sheep in the sun": Gertrude among the Critics

For the half-century preceding *The New Hamlet*, critical response to Queen Gertrude was oriented around three domestic questions: (1) Did Gertrude commit adultery? (2) Was she in any way culpable for her husband's death? and (3) Did she remarry too soon?<sup>5</sup> Answers to these questions were concerned above all with determining if, how, and to what extent Gertrude betrayed her husband and son, and the critical consensus was that she was too shallow to be held fully responsible. Of course, it does not help that Gertrude speaks just 157 of the play's (Q2) 4,042 lines, a situation that has led Richard Levin to conclude that "Gertrude is the victim of a bad press, not only on the stage and screen and in the critical arena, but also within Shakespeare's text" (Levin 2008, 322).

In his 1848 *Lectures on Shakespeare*, the influential American editor and critic Henry Norman Hudson found Gertrude "a mixture of good and bad . . . dragged along in the terrible train of consequences which her own guilt had a hand in starting" (Hudson 1848, 131). In the same year that Hudson published his lectures, Edward Strachey, in the first monograph devoted entirely to *Hamlet*, described Gertrude as similarly passive. For Strachey, Gertrude was an exemplum of "those women but too common now and always, whose proper humanity has been but little awakened and developed." She is likened to a "polished, but vacant mirror" (Strachey 1848, 32), as virtuous only as the husband she reflects (Strachey 1848, 32).

By the last quarter of the century, Gertrude's alleged passivity was likely to be seen as a mark of her moral indolence. Thus, for Edward Dowden Gertrude was "a lover of ease . . . incapable of genuine passion . . . self indulgent, sensuous, [and] as remote from true woman's virtue as Claudius is from the virtues of royal manhood" (Dowden 1876, 137). This is the tradition that would culminate in A. C. Bradley's famous condemnation of Gertrude as "very dull and very shallow":

She loved to be happy, like a sheep in the sun; and, to do her justice, it pleased her to see others happy, like more sheep in the sun. She never saw that drunkenness is disgusting till Hamlet told her so; and, though she knew that he considered her marriage 'o'er-hasty' (ii. ii. 57), she was untroubled by any shame at the feelings which had led to it. It was pleasant to sit upon her throne and see smiling faces round her, and foolish and unkind in Hamlet to persist in grieving for his father instead of marrying Ophelia and making everything comfortable. (Bradley 1904, 167)

Performance and textual practices up to the point of the Smiths' production would reflect and uphold the period's critical assessments of Queen Gertrude. Actresses playing Gertrude were most interested in "the scandalous liaison between Gertrude and Claudius" and emphasized her

voluptuousness and sexuality (Hapgood 1999, 53). To make matters worse, from the middle of the eighteenth through the first quarter of the twentieth century, Gertrude's already slight part was significantly cut in both promptbooks and printed editions of the play.<sup>6</sup> As Ellen O'Brien has demonstrated, "the most devastating cut occurred in the closet scene itself, eliminating both Hamlet's appeal to the Queen not to reveal that his madness is feigned and her vow to do so" (O'Brien 1992, 31). Alterations such as this meant that Gertrude was never seen to move closer to Hamlet and away from Claudius, and consequently appeared to be "an unresponsive, mindless figure, momentarily distraught by Hamlet's closet scene harangue, but ultimately unaffected by it" (O'Brien 1992, 34). Thus, even as Hamlet — particularly as incarnated by stage luminaries such as Booth and Irving — became a figure of increasing depth and delicacy, Gertrude grew increasingly "weak, sensuous, and affectionate."<sup>7</sup> Even in those rare productions where Ophelia might be imagined "a woman of strong passions and fine intelligence who succumbs to a terrible catastrophe,"<sup>8</sup> actresses playing Gertrude tended to underscore only the Queen's mindless sensuality.

The notion of a vacuous Gertrude maintained its hold on academic scholarship long after the Smiths' performance of *The New Hamlet*. When Carolyn Heilbrun wrote in 1957 on "The Character of Hamlet's Mother," she set the agenda for later feminist work on representations of women in Shakespearean drama, but even as she did so she concerned herself primarily with defending Gertrude against the charge that she was a dim sensualist. While addressing the same three questions about Gertrude's adultery and "o'er hasty marriage," Heilbrun offered a point-by-point response to several of the most celebrated Shakespeareans of the century, including Bradley, Harley Granville-Barker, and J. Dover Wilson. More particularly, Heilbrun objected to the received view of the Queen as "well-meaning but shallow . . . incapable of any sustained rational process, superficial and flighty" (Heilbrun 1957, 201). Her Gertrude was instead a "strong-minded, intelligent, succinct [and] sensible woman," flawed only in as much as she is "passion's slave" (202, 206). Heilbrun was particularly adamant that the play offers no convincing evidence of Gertrude's adultery.

Likewise, when Rebecca Smith's essay, "A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude," appeared in the landmark collection *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (1980), it focused on Gertrude's few lines to argue against traditional depictions of Gertrude as either "a soft, obedient, dependent, unimaginative woman" or a "temptress and destroyer — self-indulgent and soulless" (R. Smith 1980, 194, 207). If presented according to her own words and deeds, Smith argued, Gertrude instead appears as "another

stereotypical character: nurturing, loving, careful mother and wife" (R. Smith 1980, 207). If this reading could not transform Gertrude into a figure for feminist emulation, it was offered as evidence that Gertrude also could not be held responsible for her son's suffering.

Ten years later, O'Brien's work on the textual and performance traditions would follow similar lines, indicating how nineteenth-century excisions obliterated a more thoughtful, sensitive and maternal Gertrude, whose allegiance to Hamlet trumps her affection for Claudius. In sum, when feminist critics in the second half of the twentieth century responded to what they saw as two centuries of mishandling Gertrude, scholarly protocols often lead them back to the same old questions about adultery, culpability, and maternal obligation. Consequently, their defenses of Gertrude essentially succeeded to dislodge her from the role of self-indulgent sensualist only to reinstate her as a self-sacrificing mother, or precursor to the Victorian-era angel in the house.<sup>9</sup>

Two important exceptions to this practice may be found in the work of Jacqueline Rose and Lisa Jardine, each of whom takes as her starting point T. S. Eliot's famous pronouncement of *Hamlet's* artistic failure as a result of the play's lack of an adequate objective correlative for its title character's melancholy. Rose argues that "[w]hat requires explanation . . . is not that Gertrude is an inadequate object for the emotions generated in the play, but the fact that she is expected to support them" (J. Rose 1985, 103). If *Hamlet* evades satisfying interpretation, Rose suggests, it is because subjectivity itself is incoherent and cannot be distilled down to a simple narrative. The problem then is not aesthetic failure (on the contrary, it may be *Hamlet's* instantiation of the incoherence of subjectivity that draws our continued interest) but rather that femininity is blamed for the incoherence of modern subjectivity. Put another way, where earlier critics accepted certain parameters for analysis in their attempts to defend Gertrude, Rose drew attention to the patriarchal bias in the questions being asked about Gertrude. The problem is not Gertrude's inadequacy, she demonstrated, so much as the inadequacy of patriarchal notions of femininity.

Like Rose, Jardine is interested in shifting the focus from Gertrude specifically to the cultures in which she is textually embedded, read, and interpreted. Thus, for Jardine, the issue is not merely whether Gertrude has "behaved monstrously and unnaturally towards her first husband *and* her son" but the fact that "her guilt — in direct contrast to Claudius's — is culturally constructed so as to represent her as responsible without allowing her agency" (Jardine 1995, 268). In other words, to whatever extent we find Gertrude guilty of the charges laid against her, we must recognize as well the conditions of her oppression in a community that requires her fidelity to a deceased husband and "deprives her of any but the proxy influence her remarriage gives her, over her son's future" (Jardine 1995, 269).

### "Keep your underclothing on a while": The New Gertrude

Both Rose's and Jardine's work have since been regularly anthologized and cited as milestones in *Hamlet* criticism. But the questions raised by Rose and Jardine about the limited approaches to Gertrude might not seem quite so revolutionary if our critical histories took account of amateur, or voluntary sector, productions. Written for a non-academic audience in 1902, *The New Hamlet* of course features none of the sophisticated theoretical apparatus of Rose's or Jardine's work. However, read in relation to the criticism of its day, the play similarly insists upon a failure in the critical status quo by drawing attention to the ways in which an unfathomable Hamlet was unnecessarily contingent upon an insubstantial Gertrude. In other words, *The New Hamlet* shares T. S. Eliot's sense that Shakespeare's Gertrude is inadequate, not because she makes the play an aesthetic failure but rather because she fails to represent the capacity of women to enact change. Thus, *The New Hamlet* insists that the problem is not simply how Gertrude had been conceived, but more broadly the ways in which femininity had been conceived. Consequently, at the core of *The New Hamlet* is a new Gertrude.

From the outset, *The New Hamlet* announces its refusal to get hung up on the same old questions about Gertrude's fidelity or to answer them with close readings stressing textual fidelity. After all, it was fidelity to the text that limited so many critics to discussions of spousal or maternal fidelity in the first place. Instead, *The New Hamlet* signals its plan to ask new questions from its opening lines, where Hamlet muses, "To do, or not to do, that is the question" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 13).

In substituting the pragmatic for the ontological, the Smiths prepare the way for a Gertrude who refuses to let melodrama pass for melancholia, and a play that is largely unconcerned with faithfulness to the Shakespearean text. This is not to say that the questions of incest and infidelity are ignored. But when Hamlet raises the issue of incest in the very first scene of the play, with his pointed reminder, "You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 16), an unflappable Gertrude brushes aside the implicit accusation with the reply, "Just keep your underclothing on a while, / . . . I am your mother, and you are my son, / The king, your father's dead" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 16). In moving the closet scene confrontation to the opening moments of their play, the Smiths at once acknowledge and snuff out the questions dogging discussions of Gertrude.

In refusing to furnish a deferential Gertrude, *The New Hamlet* demonstrates the extent to which the profound interiority of Shakespeare's prince is fostered within the confines of patriarchal ideology. Hamlet is not simply the prototype of modern subjectivity; he is a

function of an overarching gender system that encourages men to explore their own complex subjectivities and women to nurture masculine self-discovery. When denied a pliable Gertrude, Hamlet's introspection looks more like adolescent self-indulgence that should be put in check. Consequently, when the prince warns, "Mother, sit down, and I will wring your heart," Gertrude is not overcome, but instead retorts, "Hamlet, keep still, or I will box your ears" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 17).

This queen's response to her "callow" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 17) son reflects a shift in American households, documented by social historians Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, from paternal to maternal authority (Mintz and Kellogg 1988, 117). But more importantly, Gertrude's uncowed response amounts to a refusal of the culturally constructed choice between indulgent sensualism and unobtrusive martyrdom. Choosing a third path, this Gertrude insists, upon hearing Hamlet's command to compare the pictures of his father and uncle, that they "proceed to business" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 17).

In proceeding to business, *The New Hamlet's* Gertrude also proceeds to take her role beyond the strictures that confined her in academic discourse, in the professional theater, and more broadly in turn-of-the-century American culture. At a time when only six percent of married women worked outside of the home, "business," remained a predominantly masculine bailiwick whose negative effects were to be offset by women (mothers in particular) tasked with providing moral uplift at home (Mintz and Kellogg 1988, 129). Nevertheless in the decade prior to the *The New Hamlet*, women's participation in the paid labor force had doubled (Mintz and Kellogg 1988, 111). So, if *The New Hamlet* summarily asserts Gertrude's innocence, it does so in order that it can proceed to emphasize that the measure of a woman is not her fidelity but her activity in the world. Thus where Shakespeare's Gertrude will passively "wish" that Ophelia's beauty is the cause of Hamlet's behavior and "hope [her] virtues / Will bring him to his wonted way again" (Shakespeare 1997, *Hamlet* 3.1.42-43), the new Gertrude takes initiative.

Disentwined from isolated domesticity, the new Gertrude has "traveled far," read deeply, and extracted lessons from American politics. Recognizing that Hamlet and Ophelia are "like walking drug stores," she instructs her son to find instead a wife "whose vim / Shall counteract your muggy natured gall" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 25). Even as she debates her son, Gertrude repeatedly draws authority and credibility from precepts, expectations, and conventions about protective maternity ("I married with you, uncle . . . to save you" [Smith and Smith Family 1902, 21]), a rhetorical strategy that encourages her son to rethink the gendered status quo. Consequently, whereas Shakespeare's Hamlet responds to his mother's plea to remain in Denmark with a qualified, "I shall in my best obey you, Madam," *The New Hamlet* responds to his mother's insistence that

he depart by conceding, "'Tis your right to command; my duty to obey" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 26).

Gertrude's authority derives not only from rewritten lines, but also from reassigned lines. For example, after warning Hamlet, "'Tis a tough job to be a king!" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 18), Gertrude proceeds to speak thirteen lines cut from *Richard II's* best known speech on kingship, warning that "within the hollow crown / That rounds the mortal temples of a king/Death keeps his court" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 19-20). Even lines belonging to Hamlet are reallocated to or rewritten for Gertrude so that, for example, it is Gertrude who speaks of a "sea of troubles" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 22); and it is Gertrude who recognizes that "[t]he times are out of joint," that "'Twere cursed spite / Should any green hand try to set them right" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 21), and that "there's a divinity / That shapes our ends" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 61). All told, Gertrude speaks 164 lines (86%) to Hamlet's seventeen in this revised closet scene; in comparison, she speaks forty-two lines (23%) to Hamlet's 144 in the 1623 Folio. The effect is not only to blur the lines between men and women, kings and queens, but also to suggest that women may be self-determining and philosophically practiced, or "wise old mothers."

Even as a politically savvy Gertrude protects Hamlet from a future for which he is unprepared, she refuses to coddle her son or indulge his moodiness. More forceful than her despondent son, this self-assured Gertrude embraces the turn-of-the-century rejection of Victorian child-rearing practices as she lays bare the naiveté in Hamlet's dejection.<sup>10</sup> Deprived of female deference, Hamlet's melancholy is not a sign of depth, but rather of defeatism and inexperience. Convinced that he and Ophelia are "dupes of fate" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 14), Hamlet fails to see that the ghost is nothing more than a ruse concocted by Horatio and Marcellus to elevate the man who might appoint them to more prominent positions. In contrast, the Queen who elsewhere was condemned for her vacuous sensuality is here circumspect, perceptive, and pragmatic, instructing her son in the political gamesmanship that allowed turn-of-the-century Republicans to consistently triumph over their Democratic political rivals. The rich topicality in Gertrude's speech — her references to assassinated presidents, American foreign policy, supreme court rulings, literary magazines, and financial scandals — is not simply a means of fusing Shakespeare to contemporary American life; it points to Gertrude's learned engagement with a public sphere for which Hamlet's "green hand" is unprepared.

The problem with Hamlet, as the Smiths present him, is not that he thinks too much, but rather that he does not think enough of women. When he confronts Gertrude in Shakespeare's language and she responds in a lithe and robust, American vernacular, Hamlet sounds mechanical, like a boy

reciting scripted lines. And this is precisely the Smiths' point: Like the play that shares his name, Hamlet is too apt to thoughtlessly follow a patriarchal script that indulges male introspection while imagining women solely as domestic helpmeets. Thus, when Gertrude points out the way in which her marriage to Claudius steers Hamlet away from political wreckage, Hamlet is astonished while Gertrude is exasperated:

*Hamlet.* Oh, mother, you are wise; I never thought —

*Queen.* Of course you never thought! (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 21)

The Queen's frustration points to a long history of forgiving Hamlet's misogyny and the resilience of a culture that limits and undervalues women's wisdom and place in the world.

It should be perfectly clear at this point that *The New Hamlet* offered neither a scholarly commentary on Shakespeare's play in the form of Bradleian character criticism, nor an interpretation of the Gertrude part as it might be played by an actress. At a time when progressive groups were advocating for women's increased presence in civic life, the Smiths recognized that countering a vision of Gertrude whose scope had grown increasingly narrow in criticism and performance would require breaking substantially with mainstream, professional approaches to *Hamlet*. Consequently, they dispensed with any attempt to offer a reading or production of Shakespeare's play and recalibrated the methods of the burlesque theater to a studious critique of antifeminism.

Burlesque performances incorporating characters or speeches from more than one Shakespearean text can be traced back to the Restoration. However short, comic burlesques became particularly popular in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Interludes bringing together Hamlet, Macbeth, Shylock, Othello, Romeo, Juliet, and Richard III appealed in particular to audiences whose cultural capital was confirmed by their laughter at in-jokes, as well as those seeking to distinguish themselves from ethnic groups with whom they shared a certain economic status.

Much of the humor in these performances comes from the supposed incompatibility of certain social types with particular acts or idioms. What this means is that the burlesque often policed social boundaries, suggesting for example, the incompatibility of Irish- or African-Americans with Shakespeare and hence highbrow culture (MacDonald 1994, *passim*). Interestingly, *The New Hamlet*'s "intermixture" of *Hamlet* with *Romeo and Juliet* retains the humor of earlier burlesques but uses it instead as a mechanism to unsettle social boundaries. In this respect, *The New Hamlet* looks forward to early twenty-first century music mashups more than it looks back to nineteenth-century burlesques.

Mashup, circa 1902

In its most common form, the mashup interlaces digitally two texts drawn from different genres, as in music producer Brian Burton (aka Danger Mouse)'s notorious *Grey Album* (2004), which knits together the experimental pop of The Beatles' *White Album* and Jay Z's hip-hop classic, *The Black Album*. The title of Danger Mouse's mashup is misleading in as much as it suggests a middle ground somewhere between its two sources. It is more accurate to say that by obscuring the seams between its source texts, a mashup confounds generic boundaries, reminding us of the quarantining effects of generic classification. Thus, in his review of *The Grey Album*, Phillip Gunderson draws on the work of Giles Deleuze to suggest that the mashup "forms transversal relations between genres that have been arborescently structured by the recording industry" (Gunderson 2004, np). Crucial, then, is the mashup's typical locus of production. Working most frequently outside of a corporate production studio, on a personal computer with relatively inexpensive, commercially-available software, the mashup artist is not bound to conventional ideas about marketing and profits. Consequently, he/she is free to liberate a work "from an excessively restrictive horizon" of associations, contexts and expectations (Gunderson 2004, np).

In emphasizing its non-cosmopolitan, amateur origins, *The New Hamlet* resembles the mashup that circumvents conventions and expectations. And like a conventional mashup that draws each of its pieces beyond the confines of its generic origins, *The New Hamlet* draws *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* beyond the strictures of patriarchal tragedy, liberating both plays' mothers in particular from restrictive roles and allowing them "to make comedies out of tragedies" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 6).

To consider properly the effects of a mashup in 1902, we have to imagine a theatrical culture prior to the experimentation of Pirandello, Brecht, and Stoppard. Even those theatergoers who were familiar with pre-twentieth century metadrama (e.g., *Hamlet*) would have lacked our ease with and fluency in the juxtapositions, sampling and shifts of cut-and-paste culture. So, where the impact of mashups today is actually muted by a decade's (arguably a half century's) experience and familiarity, the effects of interwoven texts — particularly when those texts are revered — on an audience in 1902 would probably be considerably more intense. But whereas the generic contradiction (hiphop vs. pop; folk music vs. house music; or nineteenth-century fiction vs. the zombie narrative) in typical mashups confounds established ideas about categorical difference, the Smiths' play is, ironically, an incestuous union, mashing together works drawn from the same genre (tragedy) and author (Shakespeare). So, the result is not a blurring of generic lines, but precisely the opposite.

By intermixing two tragedies, *The New Hamlet* clarifies the ways in which the ossified conventions of genre limit the scope of our thinking, and particularly our thinking about women.

In other words, the play is less concerned with entwining the genealogical lines of two plays than it is committed to demonstrating how, in its imperative to deepen male subjectivity, Shakespearean tragedy collaterally subordinates women. So, in its comic interweaving of *Hamlet* with *Romeo and Juliet* — like negative integers multiplied to yield a positive sum — *The New Hamlet* also asks us to consider what would happen if the women of Shakespeare's tragedies were consistently empowered in the manner of his tragic heroes? What if, instead of being reticent props for the development of articulate and searching men, they were themselves perceptive, vocal, and respected?

### "Come off that perch at once": The New Lady Montague

Unlike the play's Shakespearean inspirations, in which hundreds of lines can pass without an utterance from a female character, there is not a single scene in *The New Hamlet* lacking women. Indeed, women are the engines of all the play's action, and only one scene of the play (the last) includes more than a single male speaker. As a list of scenes with their speakers indicates, the intertwining structure of *The New Hamlet* foregrounds its women.

- 1.1 Ophelia, Gertrude and Hamlet
- 1.2 Juliet, Lady Montague, and Romeo
- 2.1 Lady Montague and Hamlet
- 2.2 Gertrude and Romeo
- 3.1 Juliet and Hamlet
- 3.2 Ophelia and Romeo
- 4.1 Juliet and Hamlet
- 4.2 Ophelia and Romeo
- 5.1 Romeo, Ophelia, and Gertrude
- 5.2 Ophelia, Gertrude, Lady Montague, Juliet, Romeo, and Hamlet

The explicit mashup of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* begins when Gertrude sends Hamlet away to Verona, shuttling him across play-worlds and into dialogue with her old "schoolmate" (24), Lady Montague:

*Lady M.* Welcome, Lord Hamlet, to our humble house

I trust your lordship finds himself in health.

*Hamlet.* I am, dear lady, but indifferent well;

And yet I greet your ladyship with love.

*Lady M.* I feel your grief, and know whence comes your woe,

Being so near your father's funeral.

*Hamlet.* Pray do not mock me, Madam Montague!

You should speak of my mother's wedding.

*Lady M.* Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.

*Ham.* Thrift, thrift, dear madam. The funeral bak'd meats  
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.

Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven —

*Lady M.* These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

Be not cast down whene'er afflictions come;

Remember that the death of sires is common.

Your father had a father, and he died;

His father, and his father's father so.

Be not rebellious at the ways of Fate.

We'll cheer you up in this bright land of ours.

We have a noble band of young men here,

Mercutio, Benvolio and the rest;

And fair young maids as well! (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 38-39)

Like the play's Gertrude, its Lady Montague is astute and quick-witted. She immediately measures the depth (or shallowness) of Hamlet's melancholic assertion that he is "but indifferent well" and distracts him with the prospect of Verona's "fair young maids" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 38). But what is most noteworthy in this initial moment of intermixture is that while most of Hamlet's lines come directly from *Hamlet*, Lady Montague does not speak lines assigned to her by Shakespeare, or even lines from *Romeo and Juliet*. Instead, she appropriates and reshapes lines assigned in Hamlet to Horatio, Gertrude, and Claudius. And where Shakespeare's threesome is unable to redirect an unrelenting Hamlet from destructive remembrance, the Smith's Lady Montague steers this transposed version of *Hamlet's* act 1, scene 2 toward fellowship and romantic love, or the stuff of festive comedy.

Clearly, this is not Shakespeare's Lady Montague, who speaks only twice in *Romeo and Juliet*. Nor, for that matter, is this the play that critics have frequently seen as depicting like-minded, young lovers countering a rhetoric of society (Hunter 1986, 120). Indeed, the Smiths' play seeks to unsettle the legacy of *Romeo and Juliet* no less than it does *Hamlet*, recognizing that the ideas attached to Shakespeare's "star-cross'd lovers" are no less damaging to women than *Hamlet's* limited interest in Gertrude.

Much more recently, the notion that Romeo and Juliet together oppose conventional ideas within their culture has been challenged by William McKim, who protests that "writers have paid insufficient attention to the differences between the ways the two protagonists imagine themselves as being in love and the tragic significance of those differences." More particularly, McKim indicates that Romeo's celebrated lyricism in fact aestheticizes a "'death-marked' imagination" that Juliet does not share (McKim 2009, 80). The play's tragedy consists then in Juliet's inability to turn Romeo (and the rest of Verona) from a competitive rhetoric that vindicates self-enhancement even at violent costs.

Scholarly protocols prevent McKim from doing any more than registering a critical lapse. But in approaching Shakespeare's work, nearly a century earlier, as amateurs unbound by the conventions of scholarship or the theater, the Smiths do more than expose and lament a failure to perceive Romeo's faults; they enlist Lady Montague in correcting them. Like her Danish counterpart, this Lady Montague makes apparent the shortcomings of her own son, treating with skepticism the very qualities for which Romeo is often praised while protesting strongly any limits on her own role. She perceives that the Petrarchan lyricism that sweeps up Romeo and Juliet also sweeps them toward tragedy. Hence she instructs her son to "come off that perch at once, / And let me see your feet on solid ground" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 32). For her part, if Juliet does initially share in Romeo's poetic idiom, she learns to approach the ideas embedded in literary tradition with skepticism while negotiating her relationship with Hamlet.

In her first appearance, Lady Montague is returning from a meeting of her "Woman's Club" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 30). This piece of information passes quickly but establishes an important set of associations around Lady Montague. American women's clubs — including Ellen Smith's in Peoria — arose in in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Their members, frequently referred to as "the new women," numbered upwards of two million at the time of *The New Hamlet*.<sup>12</sup> Often through their clubs, the "new women" pursued reform projects and/or lobbied for civic and national legislation in the areas of education, environmental protection, labor conditions, public health, and women's suffrage. Although these projects were not always designed to change social conditions that oppressed women specifically, their successes pointed toward the inadequacy of patriarchal notions of femininity that circumscribed women within domestic space.

Lady Montague is, in fact, returning home from her Woman's Club on the same night that Romeo is coming back from his furtive leap over the Capulet garden walls. Their ensuing exchange asks viewers to consider precisely how the gendering of social roles licenses Romeo's capricious passion while constraining his more industrious mother. On one hand, Romeo's breaching of

boundaries is induced by and celebrated within a courtly love tradition. He walks alone in the night, claiming to be piloted by love, and swearing in hyperbolic terms of his passion for Juliet. On the other hand, Lady Montague's solitary nocturnal venture is inconceivable to her son. Indeed, Romeo is so unprepared for the sight of his mother that he mistakes her for a phantom and utters Hamlet's lines upon first seeing the ghost of his father: "I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape" / "And bid me hold my peace!" Romeo's appropriation of Hamlet's apocalyptic imagery suggests the degree to which Lady Montague's evening ramble might disturb convention. Moreover, when Lady Montague responds, "I am thy mother, boy, so don't be scared" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 30), she assumes the place and authority of the paternal voice.

Yet, unlike the ghostly father that demands violence, Lady Montague seeks to redirect her son's misguided affections, drawing him away from the fate reserved for him by Shakespeare's play and unchecked masculine privilege. Thus, when Romeo demands to know why "at this dread hour of the night you should / Be here. Why not at home, and safe in bed?" Lady Montague retorts, "And why not you at home, and safe in bed? / The quip is pertinent, and works both ways" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 30). Lady Montague rejects the dualism that would restrict her to the domestic space while her son leaps walls in pursuit of his desires.

Like their Gertrude, the Smiths' Lady Montague takes an active role in the affairs of her son, recognizing that he and Juliet bring out the mooning romantic in each other and would be better off separated. She dismisses at once the "ancient grudge" of Shakespeare's play, insisting, "I care not she's a Capulet" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 32) only that she's "a spoony, foolish little thing" and that Romeo, who has "never earned a penny in [his] life" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 33), is unprepared to be a husband. And just as Gertrude borrows lines from Shakespearean men, Lady Montague adopts Mercutio's skepticism toward courtly love, mocking her son's gushing and Juliet's "girlish" idea to "cut / Him up in little stars" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 32).

Both Lady Montague and Gertrude are canny tacticians whose actions far exceed those of their Shakespearean originals. But in addition to rejecting Shakespearean circumscription, both move beyond the conventions attached to popular melodramatic heroines of the day. Heroines of melodrama might, as Rosemarie Bank argues, "play an active role in solving the problems that beset them" but who were invariably bound to behave according to strict moral principles and define for others what is right and wrong (Bank 1987, 241). By contrast, Gertrude and Lady Montague embrace strategic deception even when it is ethically dubious. Gertrude counsels her son to allow Claudius to fail in a turbulent era so that he can more easily appear the redeemer upon later ascending the throne. Likewise, Lady Montague, offers shady advice to guide her own son's "errant steps" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 33).

Although her husband is "bankrupt" from his failed speculation in railroad stocks, Lady Montague is crafty enough to instruct Romeo to play the other side: "Be a promoter, Romeo, son of mine! / Exploit some scheme that's based on watered stock" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 35). And just as Hamlet follows his mother's advice, Romeo dutifully abandons Juliet and Verona to go to Denmark at his mother's behest. For her part, Gertrude is able to see right through Romeo's stock scheme and redirect his energies toward a marriage with Ophelia: "He takes me for a dunce . . . Wait till he sees, / What I'll sell him without his agonies! / I'll wed him to Ophelia!" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 44).

### "Perchance you've not seen much of women, sir": The New Juliet

That the two mothers' concern for their sons leads them to maneuver Juliet and Ophelia into relationships does not mean that the Smiths sacrifice young women to the needs of male protagonists and their mothers. Their Ophelia and Juliet also resist the conventions that subordinate them in Shakespeare's plays. When Juliet speaks the first lines of act 1, scene 2, her alteration of an iconic speech is no less significant than Hamlet's "To do, or not to do" of the previous scene. Even before the mothers take action, Juliet is already considering what other men might suit her as she begins, "O, Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou, Romeo? / Or why not Edward Bok, or Elbert Hubbard . . .?" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 26).

Juliet's alternatives here are telling. Edward Bok was the editor of *Ladies' Home Journal*, where he published the works of progressive authors such as the suffragette and settlement house pioneer, Jane Addams. Bok's own book *Successward*, published in 1895, advised young men that "women are morally better and spiritually nobler than men" and "without [a woman's] counsel [man] has become a cipher in the world" (Bok 1895, 139, 156).<sup>13</sup>

Juliet's second option, Elbert Hubbard, was the founder of the Roycroft Community in East Aurora, New York. Roycroft was a magnet for freethinkers, reformers and suffragists, as well as a center for the American Arts and Crafts movement typified in *The New Hamlet's* fence-board binding. The "return to handicraft" aesthetic of the fence-board binding might thus be recognized as a nod to the progressive politics associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, and particularly the movement's interest in improving working conditions for women. Hubbard's wife, Alice Moore, a noted suffragette who penned *Woman's Work* (1908), *Life Lessons* (1909), and *The Basis of Marriage* (1910), praised her husband as one who "sees, too, that just as long as there is one woman denied any right that man claims for himself, there is no free man" (Roycroft Campus Corporation 2016). In *Woman's Work*, she offered an argument even more pertinent to *The New Hamlet*: "I should like to see woman break conventionalities, rebel against unnatural bondage, prompted by

her reason and intellect and never again through her excess of feeling. We have been irrational so long from too much emotion that is considered a quality feminine. Sentimentalism has become the Bastille of woman's mind" (Hubbard 1908, 39).

Though in Romeo's company Juliet may be "a spoony, foolish little thing" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 33), she is intellectually and socially emancipated when Lady Montague releases her from her Shakespearean bond(age). In her first words to Hamlet, Juliet refuses to be cossetted, insisting "I fear no harm; I'm strong, you know" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 45). The two are merely walking along a stone path, so when Hamlet suggests that Juliet's bravery is extraordinary, she indicates the deficiency of his ideas about femininity: "Perchance you've not seen much of women, sir" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 45).

As the scene progresses, Hamlet repeatedly underestimates women, and Juliet repeatedly lampoons his ignorance. Thus, when Hamlet worries that "These senseless stones, / Would trip a foot, a dainty foot, like thine," Juliet responds pointedly, "Perhaps they were / Not reared 'mongst women, and know not their ways!" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 46). The problem, Juliet suggests, is not women's weakness so much as it is the weak opinion that men hold of them.

### "And women too": The New Ophelia

The play is not content, however, to condemn men alone. In the case of Ophelia, *The New Hamlet* suggests that women's deference may be no less problematic than and even contributory to men's misappraisals. Consequently, its maternal plot to redirect events from the tragic outcomes toward which men steer them is no less transformative for Ophelia. In the play's opening scene, Ophelia is resigned to "dance as they ordain" and to "go sew some more, though my back aches" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 15). She cannot see that she can shape a fate for herself beyond a traditional realm of domestic femininity. At this point, Ophelia resembles her Shakespearean original, whom feminist critics find disquieting not only because she is trapped in a supporting role but also because, as Elaine Showalter argues, to "liberate Ophelia from the text, or to make her its tragic center, is to re-appropriate her for our own ends" (Showalter 1985, 79). Of course, liberatory appropriation is precisely the point and the privilege of the mashup. So where Shakespeare's Gertrude will say of Ophelia, "her speech is nothing," mere "unshaped use," (*Hamlet* 4.5.7-8), the Smiths' Gertrude instead points out to Hamlet that "she's too like to you" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 25) — and sets out to change the cultural assumptions that doom both.

Initially, the play seeks to establish Ophelia as Hamlet's equal. So, after Hamlet proclaims in his opening speech, "I give it up! The game's too tough for me" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 13), Ophelia insists, "I'm sure, as well as you. / I hate it all; 'tis a shame and show, / And all goes wrong,

whichever way we go" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 14). This is an immediate and important contrast to Shakespeare's Ophelia, whose tragedy, Showalter argues, "is subordinated in the play" and who "unlike Hamlet . . . does not struggle with moral choices or alternatives" (Showalter 1985, 78). But *The New Hamlet* is not satisfied with equating Ophelia to a Hamlet that it seeks to demystify. When Gertrude moves Ophelia out of Hamlet's shadow, the younger woman's passivity gives way to pragmatism, self-confidence and a desire to fashion her own happiness.

*The New Hamlet* acknowledges that its treatment of Ophelia marks a radical departure from stage tradition by drawing attention to the inadequacies of stage tradition. As Romeo professes his love to Ophelia's back, he explains,

I've seen and heard them say it, on the stage,  
And there it's always said to the back hair.  
That is the proper thing, and of all men  
That ever lived, I'd do the proper thing. (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 49-50)

The Smiths here mock conventions of staging, but also — and more importantly — the impulse to follow stage conventions. Since its project requires emancipation from the expectations of academic criticism and Bardolatrous theater, the play turns to metatheater to distance itself from convention. For her part, Ophelia points out the absurdity of Romeo's request that she "love in turn:" "How can I turn and still keep to thee my back hair?" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 50).

Though the play will subsequently move Ophelia, like Juliet, into a marriage that accommodates comedic conventions, she will in the process grow progressively confident, vocal, and instrumental. When Romeo pledges to "throw every dollar to the whistling winds" to prove his love, a more sensible Ophelia asks, "What need have winds of dollars or of dimes? / But men can use them, aye, and women too" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 52). Later, it is Ophelia who confirms Claudius' guilt, overhearing the confession ("Oh, my offence is rank . . .") that Hamlet somehow misses. Likewise it is Ophelia who points out to her husband, Romeo, that

[I]f we can the rightful king restore,  
What minister but you shall to the fore?  
You shall, of right, be placed at his right hand,  
And I'll be second lady in the land. (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 58)

By the play's fourth act, Shakespeare's "document in madness," the figure that Showalter describes as the "female subtext of [Shakespeare's] tragedy" has taken over from Gertrude and Lady Montague the role of author and catalyst in the Smiths' comedy (Showalter 1985, 79). Her key role

in restoring Hamlet to the throne even gives her the confidence to challenge (as Gertrude did in the play's first scene) the new king's self-righteousness, contrasting him to Romeo, "A man who knows not fear, nor has the blues, / And ne'er speaks to me of a nunnery!" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 67). Above and beyond the challenge to Hamlet's individual misogyny, Ophelia's assertion highlights the inadequacy of a tradition that contracts the possibilities between celibacy and suicide.

"The proudest summit woman e'er can gain"

In 1902, *The New Hamlet's* mashup offered a radical intervention into the twin histories of Shakespeare scholarship and Shakespeare on stage. Stepping outside of the jurisdiction of academic criticism or professional theater, the play eluded the codes, protocols, and network of interests that repeatedly drew interpretations of *Hamlet* in particular back to a narrow band of questions related to women's fidelity. In thus broadening the spectrum of interpretation to illuminate the patriarchal bias in approaches to Shakespeare's works, the play anticipated professional critics by more than half a century. In particular, the play insists on changing the questions asked of Shakespeare's plays, imagining alternative roles for women, and stressing the social conditions that contribute to women's oppression. The play ultimately suggests that, given the opportunity to intervene, women might redirect events from the tragic outcomes toward which men steer them.

At the same time, the Smiths' proleptic rejection of scholarly and theatrical convention is limited in ways that reflect its own cultural moment. We witness Hamlet in the Smiths' play crediting his own rise to "two blest women who have made my life / No schoolmates now, but mothers, strong and wise" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 65), and he kneels before Gertrude proclaiming that "more sacred than a crown [is] / The diadem a noble mother wears" (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 64). Yet, even as he speaks these words, Hamlet is himself assured of the royal crown.

The play never allows the elevation of women to menace the primacy of men. It urges only that women be admitted into the public sphere in order to more effectively refine and support the ambitions of their husbands and sons. Indeed, in its repeated turn to motherhood and mothering the play invokes a discourse authorizing a particularly narrow and traditional sliver of feminine experience. As Amber Kinser explains, "when people think, and rhetors speak, of motherhood, they call forth widely shared cultural codes that operate in tension with each other, expanding women's political voice and igniting social change but also reifying gendered norms that contract and attenuate women's agency and possibility" (Buchanan 2013, xiii).

The tension between the resistant and the regressive is most apparent in the play's final scene. Gertrude and Lady Montague speak the play's final lines, but it is also the play's women who are

made to reinforce gender stereotypes and diminish their own accomplishments and complexity: First, Juliet pronounces that

The proudest summit woman e'er can gain  
Is where she stands, in that glad hour when she  
Can to the world proclaim her husband, father —  
Aye, father of a son, who'll bear his name.

Then later in the scene the previously authoritative Gertrude recedes to self-effacing maternity, shifting credit for Hamlet's rise to "the man who won thy case, Sir Romeo" (64). The same tension between the regressive and the resistant is apparent in Hamlet's final lines, urging the audience to

always let this in your memory lurk: —  
The ways of two wise mothers and their work.

See what they've done, what wrongs they have made right. (Smith and Smith Family 1902, 54)

Women's intellect and labors are credited here with brightening despair and rendering tragedy into comedy, but those women are identified solely as mothers. Put another way, the play flirts with ideas of women's agency, complexity and opportunities, but abridges those possibilities in the end.

### Conclusion

Does the backsliding quality of Hamlet's speech expunge all of the play's progressive challenge? I don't believe so. What lurks in our memory is not the contraction of Gertrude's moxie or the dwindling of Juliet into a mother. It is the mash-up that we remember, where the surprising collision of two titanic tragedies — a century before the emergence of the mash-up genre — unleashes comic possibilities dormant or suppressed within Shakespeare's plays. And where tragedy generically draws attention to our failures to see liberatory possibilities, the comedy erupting from the Smiths' play trains our vision to see past the obstacles distancing us from happiness. *The New Hamlet* makes apparent the patriarchal bias in our hermeneutic praxis, encouraging us to laugh at the shortcomings of characters we have been taught to revere and to witness possibility in characters whose scope of opportunity has been restricted by protocol and tradition.

### Notes

1. This description is attributed to Dr. Everett Hale in an advertisement for the book appearing in *School and Home Education*, vol. 22 (1903): 325.

2. A Wandering Willie appears in Sir Walter Scott's 1824 novel, *Redgauntlet*, but he has nothing to say about either *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet*. The epigraph appears to be fabricated by the Smiths whose "Wandering Willie" may be cited to supplant fixed ideas about William Shakespeare.
3. Janet Adelman argues, likewise, that when Shakespeare turns from comedy to tragedy, it is the figure of the sexualized mother such as Gertrude that "disabl[es] holiday" (1992, 14).
4. On rhetorics of motherhood, see Buchanan 2013.
5. The continuing hold of these questions and narrow scope of interest in Gertrude is evident in the titles of three more recent essays on *Hamlet*: Jardine's "'No Offence I' th' World:' Unlawful marriage in Hamlet" (1995), Blincoe's "Is Gertrude an adulteress?" (1997), and Levin's "Gertrude's Elusive Libido and Shakespeare's Unreliable Narrators" (2008).
6. Spevack (1973) indicates that Gertrude speaks only 157 of the plays 4,042 lines, or 3.8%.
7. From an account of Georgina Pouncefort's 1874 performance of the part alongside Henry Irving, quoted in Hapgood, 1999, 54.
8. In a 1904 *New York Herald Review*, cited in Hapgood 1999, 50.
9. Maxwell responds to Heilbrun by insisting that Gertrude's only glimmer of agency comes in her final line and suicide. Prior to that, he claims, she is "[t]oo weak to determine any procedure for herself, she must rely upon others for guidance in every action" (1964, 241). In an argument related to mine, Ouditt (1996) indicates how early feminist work like Rebecca Smith's sought to restore what it saw as Shakespeare's Gertrude.
10. On the more detached, "scientific mothering" that discouraged turn-of-the-century mothers from spoiling their children or catering to their whims, see Mintz and Kellogg 1988, 121-22.
11. On nineteenth century burlesques, see Wells 1991; Levine 1988; Vaughan and Vaughan 2012.
12. Within and beyond the women's clubs, Scheil demonstrates that in the same period "more than five hundred Shakespeare clubs, composed mainly of women, formed across America to read Shakespeare" (2013, 1).
13. Bok's book offers particular praise for mothers.

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